

Black South African men's adjustment to divorce: a divorce-stress-adjustment model.

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DEDICATION

To my late father, Elisha:

Thanks daddy for believing in me. This is for you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study would not have been possible without the many helping hands and caring hearts.

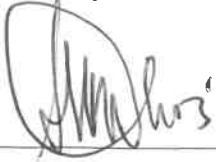
My sincere gratitude is extended to:

- My participants – the black South African men: thank you for entrusting me with your life stories. This study has taken me on a journey into a world of wonder and gratitude. Through this study, I have gained a deeper respect for your contribution to humanity; and I wish to honour you for that. My appreciation also extends to your former spouses, your families and your friends.
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DECLARATION

I, Kudakwashe Christopher Muchena (210106646), hereby declare that this thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy is my own work; and that it has not previously been submitted for assessment or completion of any postgraduate qualification to another University or for another qualification.



Kudakwashe Christopher Muchena



Date

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
DECLARATION	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
ABSTRACT	xvii
CHAPTER 1	1
INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. Chapter Overview.....	1
1.2. Background	1
1.2. Contextual Framework	2
1.2.1. The family in South Africa.....	3
1.3. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework.....	4
1.3.1. Divorce	4
1.3.1.1. Personal factors.....	9
1.3.1.2. Contextual factors	10
1.3.1.3. Children and adjustment to divorce	11
1.3.1.4. Spousal infidelity	13
1.3.1.5. Initiator status.	13
1.3.1.6. Spiritual well-being.....	14
1.3.1.7. Cultural factors	15
1.3.1.8. Methodological issues in divorce research.....	16

1.3.2. Symbolic Interactionism.....	17
1.3.2.1. Symbolic interaction and divorce	20
1.3.3. Erikson’s Theory of Psychosocial Development.....	21
1.3.3.2. Stages of development	23
1.3.3.2.1. Trust versus mistrust	23
1.3.3.2.2. Autonomy versus shame and doubt	23
1.3.3.2.3. Initiative versus guilt	23
1.3.3.2.4. Industry versus inferiority.....	24
1.3.3.2.5. Identity versus role confusion.....	24
1.3.3.2.6. Intimacy versus isolation	24
1.3.3.2.7. Generativity versus stagnation	25
1.3.3.2.8. Integrity versus despair.....	26
1.4. Research Problem.....	29
1.4.1. Research aims	30
1.4.2. Research questions	30
1.5. Research Methodology	31
1.5.1. Research design.	31
1.6. Structure of the Thesis	32
CHAPTER 2	34
DIVORCE	34
2.1. Chapter Overview.....	34

2.2. Background to Family, Marriage and Divorce in South Africa.....	34
2.2.1. Apartheid and the South African family.	35
2.2.2. Fatherhood and identity.....	38
2.3. Mediating Factors of Divorce	39
2.3.1. Conflictual marriage.....	41
2.3.2. Embracing change.....	41
2.3.3. Attitude towards the divorce.....	42
2.3.4. Insecure individuals	42
2.4. Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Perspective	43
2.4.1. Personal factors.....	47
2.4.1.1. Beliefs and attitudes	47
2.4.1.2 Attribution	48
2.4.1.3. Personal resources.....	49
2.4.1.4. Initiator status.	50
2.4.1.5. Effects of infidelity	52
2.4.1.6. Spiritual wellbeing	53
2.4.1.7. Forgiveness	54
2.4.2. Relational factors	56
2.4.2.1. Attachment style	56
2.4.2.2. Style of attachment to former spouse.....	57
2.4.2.3. New relationships.....	58

2.4.2.3.1. Enhancers.....	58
2.4.2.3.2. Good enough.....	59
2.4.2.3.3. Seekers.....	59
2.4.2.3.4. Swingers	59
2.4.2.3.5. Competent loners	59
2.4.2.3.6. Defeated.....	60
2.4.2.4. Children’s custody	60
2.4.3. Social support	62
2.4.4. Cultural factors	63
2.4.5. Outcomes of the divorce-stress-adjustment perspective	64
2.5. Family Stress and Buffer Perspective.....	65
2.6. The Selection Perspective	67
2.7. Determinants of Divorce Outcomes	67
2.7.1 Social Causation or Social Selection?.....	68
2.7.2. Crisis versus Chronic Strain	70
2.7.3. Gender differences	71
2.7.4. Children’s socioeconomic status after divorce	74
2.7.5. Race, divorce and mental health	75
2.7.5.1. Stage and duration.....	78
2.7.5.2. Variation by gender.....	79
2.7.6. Finding meaning in divorce	81

2.8. Chapter summary	83
CHAPTER 3	84
SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM	84
3.1. Chapter overview.	84
3.2. Background of symbolic interactionism.	84
3.2.1. Historical perspective	86
3.2.1.1. John Dewey (1859-1952).	87
3.2.1.2. Charles Horton Cooley (1864-1929).....	88
3.2.1.3. George Herbert Mead (1863-1931).....	89
3.2.2. Contemporary perspectives.	93
3.2.2.1. The situational approach.....	93
3.2.2.2. The structural approach	96
3.3. The Nature and Basic Assumptions of Symbolic Interactionism	98
3.3.1. The nature of human group life	102
3.3.2. The nature of social interaction	103
3.3.3. The nature of objects.....	106
3.3.4. The human being as an acting organism	107
3.3.5. The nature of human action	110
3.3.6. Interlinkage of action	111
3.4. Conceptualisation of Symbolic Interactionism	112
3.4.1. The principle of interactive determination	114

3.4.2. The principle of symbolisation	115
3.4.3. The principle of human agency	116
3.5. Methodological Orientation of Symbolic Interactionism	117
3.5.1. Acting on the basis of meaning.....	120
3.5.2. Group life as a process	121
3.5.3. The construction of social acts	123
3.5.4. Molar parts of human society	123
3.6. Evaluation of Symbolic Interactionism	125
3.7. Conclusion	127
CHAPTER 4.....	129
ERIKSON'S PSYCHOSOCIAL THEORY.....	129
4.1. Chapter Overview.....	129
4.2. Introduction to the Psychosocial Theory.	129
4.3. The development of personality.	130
4.3.1. The principle of development.....	130
4.3.2. The developmental crises	131
4.3.3. Modes.	132
4.3.4. Rituals.....	135
4.4. Stages of Development	136
4.4.1. Trust versus mistrust	136
4.4.2. Autonomy versus shame and doubt	138

4.4.3. Initiative versus guilt.....	139
4.4.4. Industry versus inferiority.	141
4.4.5. Identity versus role confusion.....	143
4.4.6. Intimacy versus isolation.....	146
4.4.7. Generativity versus stagnation.....	147
4.4.8. Integrity versus despair.	149
4.5. Lifespan Identity Development.....	151
4.5.1. Identification in childhood	152
4.5.2. Identity formation in adolescence.	153
4.5.2.1. Identity achieved	155
4.5.2.2. Moratorium.....	156
4.5.2.3. Foreclosure.	157
4.5.2.4. Diffusion.....	158
4.5.2.5. Identity and the social context	159
4.5.2.6. Identity and gender.....	160
4.5.2.7. Identity and ethnicity.....	160
4.5.3. Identity development in adulthood.	161
4.5.3.1. Identity reconstruction.....	163
4.5.3.2. Identity and adult psychosocial stage resolution	165
4.6. Generativity and Adult Development.....	166
4.7. Evaluation of Erikson’s Psychosocial Theory	168

4.8. Conclusion	170
CHAPTER 5	171
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	171
5.1. Chapter overview	171
5.2. Research design.....	171
5.2.1. Qualitative methods in psychology.....	171
5.2.1.1. Phenomenological psychology	172
5.2.1.1.1. Intentionality	174
5.2.1.1.2. Phenomenological reduction.....	175
5.2.1.1.3. Imaginative variation.....	176
5.2.1.1.4. Essence	176
5.2.1.2. Types of phenomenological psychology approaches.....	177
5.2.1.2.1 Descriptive phenomenology.	177
5.2.1.2.2. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach.....	178
5.2.2. Phenomenology research methods.....	179
5.2.2.1. Interpretative phenomenological analysis.	180
5.2.2.2. Reflexivity	182
5.3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria	184
5.4. Selection of Participants	184
5.5. Research procedure	186
5.6. Data Collection.....	188

5.7. Data Analysis	189
5.7.1. Development of the divorce-stress-adjustment model	194
5.8. Ethical Considerations	194
5.8.1. Consent	195
5.8.2. Confidentiality and anonymity	195
5.8.3. Discomfort and harm.....	196
5.8.4. Deception.....	196
5.8.5. Invasion of privacy.....	197
5.9. Conclusion	197
CHAPTER 6.....	198
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION.....	198
6.1. Chapter overview	198
6.2. Biographical Data of Participants.....	198
6.3. Findings and Discussion	201
6.3.1. Pre-divorce experience	204
6.3.1.1. Family attachment.....	204
6.3.1.2. Marital strain.....	205
6.3.2. Experiencing divorce	209
6.3.2.1. Feelings of stress.....	211
6.3.2.2. Feelings of pain.....	214
6.3.3. Adjustment process	220

6.3.3.1. Supportive networks.....	222
6.3.3.2. New relationship/marriage	224
6.3.4. Post-divorce experience	228
6.3.4.1. Learning from the divorce	231
6.3.4.2. Personal growth	233
6.3.4.3. Professional networks.	234
6.3.4.4. Developing a new personality	235
6.4. Psychosocial Theory and Divorce	239
6.5. Masculinity and Divorce.....	242
6.6. Conclusion	243
CHAPTER 7	245
THE DIVORCE STRESS ADJUSTMENT MODEL	245
7.1. Chapter Overview.....	245
7.2. South African Context and Divorce	245
7.3. Structure of the Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Model.....	247
7.4. Learning through Divorce.....	252
7.5. Implication of the Model	254
7.5.1. Divorce adjustment on the community response.	255
7.5.2. Clinical and counselling.	255
CHAPTER 8	257
CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	257

8.1. Chapter overview	257
8.2. Conclusion	257
8.3. Limitations of the Study	258
8.4. Recommendations for Future Research.....	260
8.5. Conclusion	260
Reference.....	261
APPENDIX A. Participant information and consent form	294
APPENDIX B. Biographical questionnaire	300
APPENDIX C. Semi-structured interview guide	301

ABSTRACT

The decision to divorce marks a turning point for each individual involved. It can be viewed as more than just a legal process. From a psychological perspective, it does not matter who initiated the divorce, it always comes with emotional ramifications for all those involved. Statistically there is a high rate of divorce in South Africa and there have been significant shifts in trends over time. However, black South African men's experience of, action in, and adjustment to divorce has been relatively neglected in the divorce research, yet it is important for understanding contemporary social arrangements and processes, as well as for broadening the understanding of black South African men's lives. How black South African men describe their situations and respond to marital dissolution may point to their positions in the gender-structured community and to how they interpret the nature of social practice, marriages, divorce and their position in society. The present study aimed at exploring black South African men's experience of, and adjustment to, divorce. More specifically, the study developed a divorce-stress-adjustment model for divorced black South African men. The theoretical framework underpinning this study was that of Symbolic Interactionism that was complemented and enhanced by Erikson's Psychosocial Theory, focusing specifically on identity development in adulthood. This was a qualitative study using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as both the research design and data analytic theory and process. The eight participants were volunteers who were recruited purposively. In accordance with IPA guidelines, data for the study was collected using biographical questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The emerging themes were grouped into four superordinate themes, that is, pre-divorce experiences, experiencing divorce, adjustment process and post-divorce experience. Each superordinate theme had corresponding subordinate themes and subthemes. The themes were then used to develop the divorce-stress-

adjustment model indicating that the experience of divorce is an interconnected process. Weed's recommendations for interpretative synthesis of interview data were used.

Key words; Adjustment, Black South African Men, Divorce, Erikson, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Symbolic Interactionism

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Chapter Overview

This chapter provides a brief background to the study by identifying the gaps in literature and defining the research problem. It discusses the contextual lens of the study and outlines its conceptual and theoretical framework. This is followed by the research problem and justification, the research questions, as well as the research aims and the introduction of the research methodology utilised. The chapter concludes by providing a brief outline of the chapters of the thesis.

1.2. Background

Divorce has been rated as one of the most stressful experiences, second only to death, with a large general impact on the life situation of those who experience it (Amato, 2010; Gähler, 2006; Steiner, Durand, Groves & Rozzell, 2015). Bearing this in mind, many studies on divorce begin with the assumption that it is a stressful life transition to which individuals must adjust (Amato, 2000; Amato, 2010; Hawkins & Fackrell, 2009; Webb et al., 2010). The divorce stress adjustment perspective has been a dominant discourse within divorce literature. It views divorce not as a distinct event, but as a process that begins while the couple still live together and ends long after the legal process has been concluded (Amato, 2000). This marital dissolution process typically initiates a number of events that individuals experience as stressful, which vary in intensity and duration from individual to individual, depending on the presence of a variety of moderating or protective factors (Amato, 2010). According to Amato and Previti (2003), successful adjustment occurs if the individual experiences fewer

divorce-related outcomes, is able to function effectively in the new family, or school, or work, and is able to develop an identity and lifestyle that is not tied to the previous marriage.

1.2. Contextual Framework

Studies dealing with experience to, action in, and adjustment to divorce have focused mainly on women, under the assumption that women experience more difficulties than men in resuming their routine life after divorce (Amato, 2010; Locker et al., 2010). Recent research findings have revealed that men also have considerable difficulty adjusting to divorce and many develop physical and psychological health symptoms (Kulik & Kasa, 2014; Steiner et al., 2015). As a result of divorce, men usually experience a transition from the status of a full-time father to the status of a custodial father (Kulik & Kasa, 2014). After this change, divorced fathers lose part of their former parental and familial identity and their self-esteem is damaged (Amato, 2010; Kulik & Kasa, 2014).

South Africa is a multicultural society with a population of 49 million people and eleven official ethnic groups. The majority (79,2%) are black (Xhosa, 23,4%; Zulu, 29,9%; Sepedi, 12%) (Statistics South Africa, 2012). Most families – particularly black South Africans – are poor and struggle to cope with daily living requirements. There are a variety of traditional practices and historical events, especially the racially-based issues inherited from apartheid, which have structured modern South African society. These include the discriminatory and disruptive effects of apartheid laws, such as restrictions on movement, inferior education, limited employment opportunities and enforced compulsory shifting of families (Family and Marriage Society SA, 2009). Consequently, the structure and function of families in South Africa is unique. The number of registered marriages among black South Africans is generally low compared to the rest of Africa, although in many societies, marriage is seen as an important institution for societal stability (Famsa, 2009).

The proportion of black South Africans who were married was reported to be considerably lower at 240 per 100 000 people, than that of other population groups of all ages. The divorce rate during the same period was 83 per 100 000 people (Famsa, 2009). Despite these low figures, divorce is now being experienced by more black families than before. Data from Statistics South Africa indicate that in 2011, 22 936 divorces from civil marriages were granted (Stats SA, 2012). It should be noted, however, that this figure understates the actual number of divorces in South Africa, given that many divorces go unregistered (Stats SA, 2012).

1.2.1. The family in South Africa. The structure of the family in South Africa and the challenges it faces must be viewed against the background of the country's history of colonialism, apartheid and socio-economic systems that shaped its history. Understanding this history helps one to appreciate the diverse nature of South African families, which are the product thereof. Many of South Africa's present social problems can be viewed as having emanated from the living and settlement arrangements that were part of the industrialisation process in the country (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009; Famsa, 2009). Social ills, like various forms of abuse, divorce, HIV and AIDS, prostitution and gender-based violence, are examples of the effects of social and physical dislocation created by industrialisation. Colonialism and apartheid resulted in the degradation of the roles and responsibilities of the South African family (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009).

Studies in the social sciences have reached two almost indisputable conclusions: that stable marital structures provide profound benefits for men, women and children, while the breakdown of stable, marital structures imposes significant social costs upon individuals and society (Amato & Previti, 2003; Bevvino & Sharkin, 2003; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Marriage should be seen as more than just a union of two individuals. It should be seen as a

social institution that is culturally patterned and integrated into basic social institutions (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002).

In South Africa one out of every three marriages ends in divorce (Famsa, 2009). In most of these cases the marital dissolution not only affects the adults who make the decision, but children as well. The children's age at the time of divorce affects their emotional and psychological responses. The younger the children the more confused and traumatised they are by the divorce (Amato, 2010; Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009). Stable families have a positive effect on the quality of the children's emotional and psychological wellbeing.

Gaffal (2010) reported that the increase in the divorce rate in Western countries may be connected to firstly, the flexible divorce laws; secondly, the availability of legal aid and financial support from the state; thirdly, the removal of stigma surrounding divorce and lastly, the changing expectations of marriage. From a South African perspective, major factors found to be contributing significantly to the rising divorce rate include changing work patterns, diminished occupational opportunities, unemployment, gender-based violence, alcohol and drug abuse, poverty and extramarital relationships (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009). The conclusion that can be reached is that the nature and structure of South Africa's traditional nuclear family is changing and tending towards the liberal structure prevalent in Western countries (Gaffal, 2010).

1.3. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

1.3.1. Divorce. The decision to divorce is a complex process that can be viewed from various theoretical perspectives. Sociologists have focused primarily on structural and life course predictors of divorce, such as social class, race and age at first marriage (Amato & Previti, 2003). In contrast, psychologists have focused on the dimensions of marital interaction, such as conflict management (Amato, 2000), or personality characteristics, such as antisocial behaviour or chronic negative effects (Hawkins & Fackrell, 2009; Webb et al.,

2010). Amato (2010) observed that there are limitations to these approaches in that neither considers the individual's perspective about why the marriage ended or the individual's experience of, action in and adjustment to the divorce. When explaining what caused the divorce, individuals appear to provide relatively little credibility to widely studied factors such as age at first marriage or conflict resolution skills (Amato, 2010), which have been the focus of both sociological and psychological approaches (Webb et al., 2010).

In trying to understand the specific reasons individuals give for divorce, it is also important to explore whether these reasons are related to post-divorce adjustment. Research has consistently observed that divorced individuals experience increased levels of depression, lower levels of life satisfaction, and more health problems than married individuals (Hawkins & Fackrell, 2009). It is not clear, however, whether individuals' perceived reasons for divorce are related to post-divorce adjustment. Although little research has addressed this issue, Webb et al., (2010) found that individuals who cited extramarital relationships as the reason for divorce, reported high levels of subjective distress following the divorce.

Hawkins and Fackrell (2009) observed that divorced individuals have poor physical and mental health and experience more social isolation than married individuals. According to Amato and Previti (2003), a few years after divorce, most fathers do not have regular contact with their children. For some divorced individuals, new romantic relationships may help rebuild self-esteem and happiness, but for others, new romantic relationships end up producing greater feelings of loneliness, unhappiness and lower self-esteem. Amato (2010) observed that many individuals struggle to manage their emotional ties to their former spouses. They continue to be dependent on them for emotional support and practical matters. They remain deeply attached even though the legal process has been concluded (Lin & Raghbir, 2005). Continuing strong attachment to the former spouse makes it harder for

individuals to adjust to divorce (Webb et al., 2010). This suggests that to adjust to divorce, individuals should have the ability to embrace change.

Many divorced individuals struggle to take those initial steps towards successful adjustment in the early years following divorce. This may be because it is easy for newly divorced individuals, particularly those with few personal resources, to be preoccupied with the immediate stresses of life following divorce (Lin & Raghurir, 2005). Research on divorce has reported that individuals with more personal resources, such as higher income or education levels, tend to adjust better than those without. This is because having resources such as these provide more positive opportunities, making it easier to embrace the change that comes with marital dissolution (Amato, 2000; Amato & Previti, 2003; Fischer, 2007).

Divorced individuals find it overwhelming to get through the day's problems, and furthermore, find it difficult to perform big-picture thinking and embrace long-term change. They are worn down by day-to-day efforts just to get by, which makes them become fragile (Webb et al., 2010). They usually descend into a sense of failure, purposelessness or depression and sometimes make things worse by abusing alcohol or drugs. For some, divorce seems to initiate a process in which they end up losing everything – jobs, children, homes and self-esteem. Hawkins and Fackrell (2009) found that many adjustment difficulties have largely subsided 2-3 years after the divorce. This does not necessarily mean that divorced individuals end up rebuilding happy lives after a few years. Even when they eventually manage to rebuild a functional new life, some find little joy or satisfaction in that new life (Amato, 2010).

Amato and Previti (2003) reported that timid individuals are typically willing to stay in a marriage even if they are not satisfied with the marriage. Understandably, these timid individuals tend to have a harder time adjusting to life after divorce. Resourced individuals tend to have a more positive post-divorce adjustment process and report only mild, rather

than high distress, as a result of their divorce and they see it as less threatening. These individuals also view themselves as being able to cope with divorce. Webb et al., (2010) reported that these individuals have effective problem-solving strategies, such as better negotiating and reasoning skills. As a result these individuals experience less physical and psychological health related challenges post-divorce (Amato & Previti, 2003). Resourced individuals reported feeling more comfortable with themselves and others and experience fewer problems with their ex-spouses. In addition, these individuals generally use more positive parenting skills after the divorce (Amato, 2010), which may contribute significantly to helping children adjust positively to life after divorce.

The way men and women experience divorce varies according to the amount of social activity that they engage in and how they approach the transition into single life. Research has shown that divorced men usually have a more lasting attachment to their former spouses than divorced women (Halford & Sweeper, 2013; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). As a way to compensate for losing their spouse, male social activities tend to increase rapidly and dramatically following divorce (Amato, 2000). On the other hand, divorced women seek support groups to help in their single-life adjustment. Friends help the newly divorced woman gain a new perspective on the divorce. Women like to talk about their problems while men are more likely to 'tough it out' than 'talk it out.' Men often have fewer close friends to rely on for support after divorce, despite losing more than women (Amato, 2010; Gähler, 2006). In addition to them losing their spouse, they usually lose custody of their children, adding to their depression.

According to Amato and Previti (2003), women tend to monitor their relationships more closely than men, become aware of relationship problems sooner, and are more likely to initiate discussions of relationship problems with partners. In contrast, men are more likely than women to withdraw from discussions of relationship problems. This could perhaps

explain why women are more likely than men to initiate divorce (Amato, 2000). Given that marital estrangement and divorce are gendered experiences, it is not surprising that researchers have documented differences between men's and women's experience of divorce (Amato & Previti, 2003; Bevvino & Sharkin, 2003; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Kalmijn & Poortman, 2006).

Research based on the divorce-stress-adjustment perspective has provided useful insight into thinking of divorce as a process. Individuals enter into marriage with the hope that the experience will be mutually supportive, rewarding and lifelong, making divorce a painful experience (Amato, 2000; Baum, 2004). Separated parties spend considerable time attempting to negotiate the relationship, seeking advice from friends and family or simply in denial. Consequently, the first negative effects occur years before the final separation (Gähler, 2006; Halford & Sweeper, 2013). Legal divorce does not necessarily bring an end to the stress associated with the end of an unhappy marriage, instead, new events and processes (mediators) emerge that have potential effects on the individual's emotions, behaviour and health (Amato, 2000 & 2010). These can be in the form of losing one's contact with children or conflict over child support. These mediating factors represent the mechanisms through which divorce affects individuals' psychological well-being (Gähler, 2006; Halford & Sweeper, 2013).

Mediating factors are followed by moderators. These moderators introduce variability into the way divorce and mediating factors are linked to personal outcomes (Amato, 2010). Moderators as protective factors act like shock absorbers, as they weaken the links between divorce-related events and how the individual experiences divorce and hence the extent to which divorce is followed by negative emotional, behavioural and health outcomes (Amato, 2000; Baum, 2004). These resources can reside within the individual, (self-efficacy, coping skills and social skills), in interpersonal relationships (social support), or in structural roles

and settings (employment, community services, supportive government policies) (Gaffal, 2010; Gähler, 2006; Halford & Sweeper, 2013). Incorporated into the divorce stress adjustment perspective is the period it takes an individual to adjust. This period defines if it is either short term (crisis model) or a long term (chronic strain model) (Amato, 2000; Baum, 2004; Gähler, 2006; Halford & Sweeper, 2013).

1.3.1.1. Personal factors. There are several personal characteristics that affect the individual's experience of, and adjustment to divorce, such as demographic characteristics (that is age, educational level, employment status and socio-economic status). Research has found that older individuals have more difficulty adjusting due to their limited post-divorce options (for example, employment and remarriage) (Amato, 2010; Hawkins & Fackrell, 2009; Lin & Raghbir, 2005; Webb et al., 2010). On the contrary, Bevvino and Sharkin (2003) reported better adjustment among older divorced individuals as they had fewer co-parenting issues and conflicts due to children being older. Higher education, higher socio-economic status and being employed are consistently associated with positive post-divorce adjustment among individuals. It can be concluded that employment for both men and women contributes positively to adjustment as more sources of social support are available and less economic hardship is experienced (Bevvino & Sharkin, 2003; Gaffal, 2010; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002).

Post-divorce adjustment is also influenced by the individuals' levels of pre-separation and psychological functioning (Bevvino & Sharkin, 2003; Gaffal, 2010; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Individuals who have better coping skills and higher levels of both emotional stability and psychological functioning in pre-separation adjust well to divorce. As was stated earlier, individuals who have a higher sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem also experience higher levels of wellbeing following divorce (Bevvino & Sharkin, 2003).

Whether the individual initiated the divorce or not is another factor that contributes to post-divorce adjustment. Married individuals typically do not concurrently leave the marriage emotionally and may therefore experience different trajectories in their adjustment. The individual who initiates the divorce often mourns the loss of the marriage well before the legal divorce takes place, while the non-initiator might experience surprise when the request for a divorce surfaces and only begin to consider the end of the marriage once the initiator has already begun adjusting (Bevino & Sharkin, 2003; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002).

How individuals view divorce can influence their post-divorce adjustment process. Research has shown that those individuals with more non-traditional beliefs about marriage and who look at divorce more favourably display better adjustment than those who hold more traditional views, which is dominant in most black South African communities (Famsa, 2009; Gaffal, 2010). Those with traditional views believe that divorce is unacceptable (Bevino & Sharkin, 2003).

The degree of attachment to the former spouse can also contribute to post-divorce adjustment. Studies have indicated that cooperative post-divorce relationships are both possible and healthy for the couple, particularly where co-parenting is involved (Greene et al., 2003). In the event that one or both individuals remain preoccupied with their former spouse (with feelings of either love or hate), post-divorce adjustment is hampered. It is interesting to note that Amato (2000) reported that unhealthy (preoccupied) post-divorce attachment was more important to post-divorce adjustment than the amount of hostility in the post-divorce relationship.

1.3.1.2. Contextual factors. Although personal attributes have a strong influence on post-divorce adjustment, the context can also impact post-divorce adjustment. These contextual factors include the amount of social support both perceived and received by divorced individuals. Those who are less socially involved and more socially isolated

following divorce generally have a more difficult time adjusting (Greene et al., 2003). The benefit of social involvement stems from the link between social involvement and attachment to the former spouse (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009). If an individual has high levels of social involvement, it is generally associated with reduced attachment to the previous spouse, and as noted above, less attachment facilitates healthy post-divorce adjustment. Amato (2010) suggested that some social support comes with a price. The price can be in the form of feelings of guilt, dependence on others, or criticism from the giver of support, particularly if the support comes from relatives.

The most influential form of social support is in the form of a new relationship. Research has consistently indicated that a romantic relationship, either a dating relationship or remarriage, is associated with better post-divorce adjustment for both men and women (Amato, 2010; Greene et al., 2003).

1.3.1.3. Children and adjustment to divorce. Divorce related stress could be as a result of the investment one has put into a relationship (Halford & Sweeper, 2013). Individuals invest in committed relationships in a variety of ways; from shared property and mutual friends to having children. With time the level of investment increases. Getting married is a social and religious ritual that is widely used by individuals to symbolise their investment and commitment to a relationship (Coontz, 2005a). Thus, the duration of the relationship and getting married might be seen as indices of relationship investment (Halford & Sweeper, 2013).

The presence of children represents a high level of investment in a relationship and if the couple divorces, children necessitate an on-going contact between the divorced individuals. The pre-divorce contact exacerbates post-divorce adjustment problems (Rhoades et al., 2011), particularly resolving attachment to the ex-spouse. Men often have reduced contact with their children after divorce, which might result in co-parenting conflict (Sbarra

& Emery, 2008). Co-parenting conflict was found to be a chronic problem at least for the first two years of a divorce as compared to psychological distress, attachment to the ex-spouse and loneliness, which were reported to be transient in nature by the stress-diathesis model (Halford & Sweeper, 2013).

The pre-divorce financial situation of highly educated couples also influences the post-divorce adjustment for couples and children (Amato, 2010). The more capital on hand the less impact the divorce will have on the adjustment of the divorcing individuals and children. However, if the paternal resources are more than the maternal resources, it means children will have less access to these resources (Steiner, Durand, Groves & Rozzell, 2015). Higher levels of the couple's education were found to be positively associated with the amount of post-divorce contact between the parents and between the non-custodial fathers and children after divorce (Fischer, 2007). Better contact with the children is assumed to benefit both the father and the children in different ways; the child will have better access to the cultural and social resources of the father. The father will be more willing to share financial resources than non-custodial fathers who do not see their children. This makes parenting more efficient as parents have a coordinated agreement (Fischer, 2007; Steiner et al., 2015).

Research on how children impact on the level of adjustment to divorce appears to be comparable for either gender (Amato, 2010; Steiner et al., 2015), although Baum (2004) reported that using various measures of physical and mental health, divorce is less favourable for men. He holds that men mourn the loss of their marriage differently from women and yet they are less likely to seek professional help. Men do not just mourn the loss of their marriage, they also mourn the losses pertaining to the absence of their children and family. Consistent with these findings, other studies have reported that divorce-related stress for men with children is higher than for those men who were not yet fathers (Kalmijn & Poortman,

2006). Besides the loss of easy access to their children, research indicates that other contributors, including spousal infidelity, initiator status and spiritual well-being have an effect on the individual's adjustment to divorce (Steiner et al., 2015).

1.3.1.4. Spousal infidelity. Spousal infidelity causes intense emotional pain to the victim. It is one of the most devastating experiences that can be inflicted on a marriage (Steiner et al., 2015). Infidelity can lead to mental health issues that negatively affect the betrayed partner. When the perpetrator discloses their infidelity or when the victim finds out about the other's extramarital affair, the individual is overcome with emotions, such as anger and rage, sadness, fear, rejection, betrayal, jealousy, loneliness, depression, resentment and confusion. Infidelity can be a traumatic experience as it is viewed as a betrayal of trust (Ortman, 2005). Some victims of infidelity are more vulnerable than others, depending on their personality (Blow & Harnett, 2005). The offending partner is less likely to experience depression as compared to the victim (Steiner et al., 2015). Research has found that spousal infidelity can affect individuals' adjustment to divorce differently based on which spouse initiated the divorce (Blow & Harnett, 2005).

1.3.1.5. Initiator status. The choice of initiating divorce can have a dramatic effect on the lives of both partners. The decision to end a marriage can result in various emotional ramifications. As the initiator of the divorce, the individual might experience less distress and self-doubt (Blow & Harnett, 2005; Locker et al., 2010) and experience some control over the dissolution (Steiner et al., 2015). The initiator of the marital dissolution might be more emotionally stable. This could improve the initiator's adjustment to divorce. Although the offending partner might have the emotional advantage in the divorce process, they might feel guilty and regretful over the decision to divorce (Locker et al., 2010).

The non-initiator might exhibit a sense of rejection and regret and might have a difficult time adjusting to the divorce. The non-initiator might feel powerless and resentful

over this unwanted, life changing event, as they have no control over the dissolution of their marriage (Steiner et al., 2015). According to Locker et al., (2010), the initiator adjusts faster than the non-initiator of the divorce. Regardless of who initiated the divorce, one needs to heal to move forward and develop a positive attitude about the future.

Gender has an effect on the divorce stress adjustment and who initiated the divorce. Research has consistently indicated that women initiate divorce more often than men (Halford & Sweeper, 2013). This might explain why cross-sectional studies have found that men report more attachment to the former spouse (Halford & Sweeper, 2013), and psychological distress (Lucas, 2005) than women after divorce. In other words, men do not like to divorce. Some studies have shown that divorce leads to sustained problems resulting from persistent separation-related stressors (Halford & Sweeper, 2013), while other researchers assert that divorce is a socially normative transition that typically leads to only mild, transient distress (Locker et al., 2010; Pinsof, 2002).

Divorce in itself is a multifaceted process, encompassing numerous dimensions. A divorce can be assumed to affect the two individuals in different ways. It can be the starting point for a 'new and better' life for the initiator or it can be a trigger for a serious life crisis for the victim. Either way, divorce is a stressful experience for both parties. Studies provide evidence of the ambivalence and insecurity felt by both sides (Amato, 2010; Gähler, 2006)

1.3.1.6. *Spiritual well-being.* Steiner et al., (2015) reported that positive adjustment could take years before a victim of infidelity can heal and forgive the offender. Forgiveness is viewed as the first step towards a healing path. Forgiveness involves letting go of negative thoughts, feelings and behaviour towards the former spouse, which will result in showing a more positive attitude towards the ex-spouse (Ortman, 2005). Research has indicated that forgiveness can lead to better mental health, including reduced anxiety and decreased depression (Blow & Harnett, 2005). Other studies have reported that forgiveness and

religious well-being have a positive relationship (Locker et al., 2010; Steiner et al., 2015). Being part of a religious group promotes forgiveness and can bring healing and restoration to both the offending partner and the offender.

Positive spiritual coping also performs a major role in promoting post-traumatic growth (Krumrei, Mahoney & Pargament, 2011; Ortman, 2005). Depending on how the individual views divorce in the context of their religious beliefs, positive spiritual coping can help the individual to overcome the negative effects of divorce. On the other hand, negative religious coping could prevent one from adjusting positively to divorce, and as a result the individual may experience mental health problems (Krumrei et al., 2011). Steiner et al., (2015) found that individuals with spiritual convictions do not only have more resources for coping, but they are generally happier and healthier than those for whom such conviction is less important. It is therefore important to understand and examine spirituality, as this could affect how individuals adjust to their divorce. Literature asserts that one's spiritual response to divorce is positively related to one's psychological adjustment (Locker et al., 2010).

1.3.1.7. Cultural factors. The various cultural factors of divorce can be influential upon post-divorce adjustment. Gaffal (2010) reported that most countries in Western Europe (except Ireland, which did not allow marital dissolution until 2000), have moved from fault-based, penal divorce laws to non-fault divorce laws, making marital dissolution easier to conclude. These changes have resulted in complications in divorce outcomes, most notably financial settlements. According to Gaffal (2010), since the 1960s, property settlements have become egalitarian and awards of alimony have dramatically decreased, with the aim being to promote self-sufficiency for both divorcing individuals. In France for example, spousal support is rarely granted; but in the rare cases in which such support is ordered, only a lump-sum payment is made at the time of the divorce. This results in continuing contact (and presumably, continuing conflict), between former spouses being minimised. Sweden has

adopted a more extreme view of post-divorce self-sufficiency, virtually eliminating spousal support altogether and declaring pensions to be individual property and therefore not divisible in the divorce settlement (Gaffal, 2010).

In Australia, cross-cultural property settlements have become more egalitarian and are largely determined by the future needs of the children. The future needs of individuals are typically not considered and settlements also ignore any non-financial contributions of either party (for example, stay-at-home mothers), when dividing marital assets (Gaffal, 2010).

From an African perspective, Tanzania has a similar neglect of nonfinancial investments during marriages, where legal decisions through the 1980s have largely agreed that domestic contributions should not be considered in the division of marital property (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009).

Post-divorce adjustment can be influenced by the amount of stigma associated with divorce, the opportunities available (socially and economically) for divorced individuals, and differing legal contexts in that particular country (Gaffal, 2010). In South Africa, post-divorce adjustment is influenced by the social stigma as support network opportunities are generally limited. Divorced black South African men have difficulty finding other divorced men with whom to develop a support network and are unwilling to seek professional help. They are generally hesitant to seek friendships with women out of fear that their efforts at friendship might be misconstrued (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009). On the other hand, divorced women who reside in many African countries where divorce is less acceptable are more stigmatised, and generally fare worse than women residing in countries where divorce is more acceptable and less stigmatised (Bevino & Sharkin, 2003; Gaffal, 2010; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002).

1.3.1.8. Methodological issues in divorce research. To date, a number of studies on the divorce experience (Amato, 2000; Bevino & Sharkin, 2003; Gaffal, 2010; Hetherington

& Kelly, 2002), adjustment and impact on individuals has assumed a deficit model, that is, divorce is bad and impacts negatively on men, women and children. This perspective is reflected in the research questions asked and the outcomes investigated, with results and interpretations indicating negative outcomes. On the contrary, cross-cultural studies have investigated the potential positive effects of divorce and reported that divorce can increase self-confidence, self-efficacy, well-being and relief from a bad marriage for some. Amato (2010) concluded that there is a wide range of experiences among divorced individuals and the trajectory of their post-divorce adjustment process. This means that research should aim to explore the fullest range of variables implicated in divorce and their effects on divorce for men, women and children (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002).

A simple comparison between divorced and non-divorced individuals should be undertaken with caution. Just as divorce is best conceptualised as a process, the experience of, and adjustment to divorce is also a process, and studies show that the length of time since the divorce does affect the level of adjustment (Bevino & Sharkin, 2003; Gaffal, 2010; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). However, many studies fail to examine time, ignoring the difference in the adjustment process of divorced individuals. The present study intends to investigate the multiple factors that help or hinder adjustment to divorce from a Symbolic Interactionism and Psychosocial theoretical perspective and consider the difference in the trajectory of the adjustment process among divorcing individuals (Bevino & Sharkin, 2003; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002).

1.3.2. Symbolic Interactionism. The theoretical assumptions underpinning this study were those of interpretive sociology. More precisely, symbolic interaction from which the methodology and the grounded theory method of data analysis are derived (Pascale, 2011). The symbolic interaction perspective was complemented and enhanced by Erikson's (1963) psychosocial theory on life-span identity development. Symbolic interaction theory was

developed in the fields of social psychology and sociology. The theory is a broad set of premises about how an individual self is defined and how society is defined (Blumer, 1986).

Premises posited by social interaction, and to some extent shared or assumed by interpretative phenomenon analysis, include the self, which is social. Language has a significant role in the emergence of the self and the social group life and a common set of symbols and understanding is at the core of group life (Blumer, 1986; Pascale, 2011). Human beings are reflexive (Blumer, 1986). The nature of human action is emergent, dynamic and processional. Meaning and actions are socially constructed and action is an outcome of the meanings ascribed to situations. Meanings are both experientially derived and culturally biased. To understand individuals' lived experiences, actions and situations require obtaining access to their definitions and understandings (Smith & Bugni, 2006).

The theory of symbolic interaction is linked with three basic principles. Firstly, individuals act toward things based on the meanings that the things hold for them (Pascale, 2011). The first tenet forms the basis of symbolic interaction, but not a defining feature. Secondly, meanings are generated through human interaction (Helle, 2005). This implies that meaning in symbolic interaction is collective. Thus, it is not individually determined nor is it intrinsic to objects. According to Reynolds and Herman-Kinney (2003), it is the source of meaning that is important to symbolic interaction and one that separates it from analytic realism. In symbolic interaction, objects and events are never just backdrops for interaction. Pascale (2011) proposed that individuals imagine not only the likely position of other individuals but also objects and places with which they interact. This means that inanimate objects can be understood to have a kind of agency in that they have profound and integral effects on human responses and interactions. This makes the field of material culture alive socially.

Thirdly, meaning is customised during interaction through interpretive processes (Helle, 2005). To make meaning out of something involves an interpretive process during which an individual communicates with himself; in the process of self-indication, the individual may come to suspend, regroup, or transform meanings. As an interpretive framework, symbolic interaction is dependent on the procedural techniques of analytic induction. It relies on inductive logic and empirical evidence in localised contexts (Pascale, 2011).

According to Smith and Bugni (2006), the basis of all social interaction is the process of representing oneself to oneself – of thinking about oneself as the individual thinks about other objects of consciousness. Blumer (1986) proposed three types of objects: firstly, social objects (for example, parents, teachers, builders); secondly, abstract objects (concepts such as love or hatred); thirdly, physical objects (for example, cars, gardens, parks and chairs). Accordingly, the physical environments are never just backdrops for social interaction; they are an important part of the interaction because individuals assign both symbolic value and forms of agency to them (Blumer, 1986). Social interaction requires the ability of individuals to think about themselves as they do about others. Individuals fit lines of action together by first imagining how those with whom they are interacting might perceive them and adjusting their behaviour accordingly. Thus, individuals communicate symbolically and imaginatively with others and also with themselves, as they experiment with potential lines of action in their minds (Blumer, 1986; Helle, 2005).

Self-indications enable individuals to create meaningful, purposive action to adjust to circumstances that emerge and to imagine how others would react. In addition, the process of self-indication involves the concept of multiple selves (Blumer, 1986). Blumer believed that identity is context dependent, and should therefore be thought of as identity-in-use, as

identities change over time, both in terms of substance and meaning and are far from being fixed or permanent.

In the self-indication sense, symbolic interaction can be said to involve a double hermeneutic (Pascale, 2011). The first involves the relationships and interpretations among participants. The second involves the researcher's relationship to, and interpretation of, the social context or interaction. It should be noted that the researcher is not just an observer but an active participant who actively (re)constructs the process of meaning in order to understand and interpret the object (Smith & Bugni, 2006). In addition, the researcher actively constructs their findings for others to interpret. This could be said to constitute another double hermeneutic. The first concerning the researcher's process of writing and the second concerning the reader's interpretation of the text (Pascale, 2011).

1.3.2.1. Symbolic interaction and divorce. The symbolic interaction perspective can be used to explain social phenomena such as divorce. This perspective posits that individuals act according to how they interpret the meanings of the world. For instance, language is symbolic, words do not summon forth meaning on their own but symbolise meaning inferred by the people who use them (Helle, 2005). An individual's interpretation of the world depends upon their reading of the symbols and details of everyday life (Pascale, 2011).

In the same way that all things are, relationships are based on symbolic interaction as individuals communicate using a shared system of symbolic interaction – language, and all cultural and social interactions are symbolic in nature. Marriage, like all human interactions, is facilitated by the symbolic interaction that takes place between individuals. Traditionally, individuals who are said to have a 'strong' marriage, are individuals who interpret symbols in a similar way. In other words, individuals in a stable marriage interpret symbols of the world in a compatible way (Smith & Bugni, 2006).

Research has shown that divorced individuals refer to miscommunication as a reason for separation. Based on the symbolic interaction perspective, miscommunication is the natural result of differences in the interpretation of symbols (Pascale, 2011). During miscommunication, each individual attaches their own personal and cultural meanings to symbols and social phenomena – in this case marriage, and therefore each individual has different expectations and interpretations of the world. As an example, an individual raised in a religious family might read marriage as a sacred institution. However, an individual raised in a secular family might read marriage as a cultural tradition. The symbol (marriage) becomes a source of conflict between individuals who read it differently, which could result in divorce (Gaffal, 2010).

Actions such as post-divorce adjustment, according to the symbolic interactionist perspective, are motivated by the individual's subjective interpretation of symbols (Pascale, 2011). Married individuals are sometimes surprised to realise how incompatible their actions and behaviours are. But if they read the world differently it is only natural that they respond in different ways. The symbolic interaction perspective accounts for the rising number of divorces as they indicate an increasingly diverse world. Historically, individuals marry within the same religious, cultural or socio-economic group. However, individuals who marry across culture, religion, ethnicity and socio-economic lines are likely to interpret the world differently thereby thinking, acting and behaving differently, as their psychosocial development is inspired by conflicting interpretations of the symbols in the world (Smith & Bugni, 2006). According to the theory of psychosocial development, identity development has an influence on the type of partner one chooses to marry (Erikson, 1963).

1.3.3. Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development

1.3.3.1. Introduction to the theory. The interpretation of symbols and the effects thereof on marriage and post-divorce adjustment is influenced by the psychosocial

development of the individual. Erikson's (1963) psychosocial development theory provides a detailed account of the life-span developmental process. Erik Erikson, who lived from 1902 to 1994, provided an alternative psychodynamic view in his theory. The theory emphasises the individual's social interaction and how both society and cultural expectations shape the individual. According to Erikson, psychosocial development involves change in one's interactions with, and understanding of one another as well as in the individual's knowledge and understanding of themselves as members of the society (Erikson, 1963). Erikson's contribution continues to receive positive reviews for recognising the influence of culture on development (Hoare, 2002). He was the first to illustrate how the social world exists within the psychological makeup of each individual. Erikson (1959) believed that the individual cannot be understood apart from his social context. "Individual and society are intricately woven, dynamically related in continual change" (Erikson, 1959, p. 114).

Erikson's theory suggests developmental changes throughout one's life in eight distinct stages. Erikson holds that each stage presents a crisis that the individual must resolve. An individual must address the crisis of each stage sufficiently to deal with the challenges of the next stage of development (de St. Aubin, McAdams & Kim, 2004). Erikson (1968) summarised his theory as follows:

I shall present human growth from the point of view of the conflicts, inner and outer, which the vital personality weathers, re-emerging from each crisis with increased sense of inner unity, with an increase of good judgement, and an increase in the capacity 'to do well' according to his own standards and to the standards of those who are significant to him (Erikson, 1968, pp. 91-92).

The assumption is that each psychological stage has both positive and negative outcomes. The resolution of earlier stages is said to be directly related to the resolution of later stages (Fleming, 2008). How an individual successfully resolves each crisis results in

the individual being more psychologically healthy. Each stage has both successful and unsuccessful outcomes (Fleming, 2008).

1.3.3.2. Stages of development

1.3.3.2.1. Trust versus mistrust. This stage occurs in the first year of life. For the child to develop trust, a warm, nurturing care-giving environment is required. The successful outcome is a feeling of comfort and minimal fear. On the other hand, mistrust develops when the child's needs are not met or ignored. If the child has too many experiences where his needs are not met, he will fail to develop trust and will develop insecurity, a feeling of worthlessness and a belief that the world is inconsistent and unpredictable, resulting in sensory distortion or withdrawal (Sokol, 2009).

1.3.3.2.2. Autonomy versus shame and doubt. This stage occurs in late infancy and the toddler years. Once the first stage has been successfully overcome the child begins to discover that their behaviour is their own. They affirm their autonomy and realise their will. If the child is restrained too much or is unsuccessful in the autonomy experience, they engage in what Erikson referred to as a sense of shame and doubt leading to impulsivity or compulsion (Sokol, 2009).

1.3.3.2.3. Initiative versus guilt. This third stage corresponds with the early childhood years. As the child experiences a widening social world, he is challenged more than during the early stages. To manage the new challenges, the child needs to engage in active, purposeful behaviour. It is at this stage that adults expect the child to become more responsible and require him to assume some responsibilities for taking care of his body and belongings. As the child develops, a sense of responsibility increases initiatives. If the child is irresponsible, acts appropriately, or is made to feel too anxious, he develops the uncomfortable feeling of guilt, making him either ruthless or inhibited (Fleming, 2008).

1.3.3.2.4. *Industry versus inferiority*. This stage corresponds with the child's primary school years, from age six to puberty or early adolescence. A child's initiative brings him into contact with a wealth of new experiences. As the child moves into the primary school years, he directs his energy towards mastering knowledge and intellectual skills. The child becomes more enthusiastic about learning and engages in tasks. If the child has too many unsuccessful experiences and fails to acquire knowledge and skills, he will develop a sense of inferiority, unproductiveness and incompetence, resulting in either a narrow virtuosity or inertia (Erikson, 1963).

1.3.3.2.5. *Identity versus role confusion*. This stage corresponds with the adolescence years. The adolescent attempts to discover who he is, what he is about and where he is going in life. The child is confronted with many new roles and adult statuses (such as vocational and romantic choices). The adolescent needs to explore different paths to attain a healthy identity. If the adolescent does not adequately explore different roles and does not fashion a positive future path, he can remain confused about his identity, making him either a fanatic or developing into repudiation (Erikson, 1968).

1.3.3.2.6. *Intimacy versus isolation*. This stage corresponds with the early adult years, from the early twenties to the late thirties. The developmental task of this stage is to form close positive relationship with the opposite sex. Erikson described intimacy as finding oneself but losing oneself in another person. The danger of this stage is that if one fails to form an intimate relationship with a romantic partner, one becomes socially isolated, leading to either promiscuity or exclusivity (Erikson, 1968).

According to Erikson, intimacy or closeness and mutual sharing with another is the basic strength of this stage, isolation, on the other hand, is its core pathology (Erikson, 1968). Erikson believed that intimacy between two individuals as a couple is only possible once each has developed a strong sense of identity separately – this makes identity development a

critical component of lifespan human development. Statistics have shown that many couples marry at a very young age, thereby making it impossible for them to have matured independently. Although it is possible in rare cases, the dilemma is that it is difficult for two individuals to grow and mature together unless they have first matured separately. It is not surprising that research has concluded that divorce is a common outcome for couples who marry while young and immature. This is because a young couple has often still not advanced in maturity from adolescence (Fleming, 2008). Studies have been consistent in reporting that although some individuals may have achieved a level of maturity by the early twenties, many others do not arrive at this level until well into their thirties – and still others never attain full maturity (Sokol, 2009). In today's complex world, attaining maturity and relative independence takes a considerable amount of time.

1.3.3.2.7. Generativity versus stagnation. This stage corresponds with the middle adulthood years, from the early forties to the late fifties. Generativity means transmitting something positive to the next generation. According to Erikson, generativity involves roles such as parenting and teaching, through which adults assist the next generation in developing useful lives. Failure to achieve generativity could result in what Erikson referred to as stagnation or feeling stuck. The stuck feeling is because the individual feels he has passed nothing on to the next generation, which may be in the form of overextension or reactivity (Erikson, 1968).

According to Erikson, generativity embraces a sense of caring for the future; caring for the next generation. He recognised that fulfilment in life requires the ability to care for and about others. Failure to achieve generativity will result in stagnation or loss of self in self-absorption. Erikson also realised that, although generativity is a dominant theme in the middle years (thirties, forties and fifties), this kind of caring concern for future generations has its seeds in the identity formation years and continues throughout the remainder of the

lifespan. A sense of connectedness of one generation with another is implied in the concept and generativity is, in the broadest sense, a symbolic connection to immortality through acts and works that will survive the individual (Sokol, 2009).

1.3.3.2.8. Integrity versus despair. This eighth and final psychosocial stage corresponds with the late adulthood years, from the early sixties until death. In old age, individuals review their lives and reflect on what they have achieved. If the retrospective evaluations are positive, they develop a sense of integrity and view their life as positively integrated and worth living. In contrast, if individuals fail to achieve integrity in old age, they despair as their backward reviews are mainly negative, which takes the form of presumption or disdain (Erikson, 1968).

Erikson suggested that identity development continues throughout the lifespan, making it a highly important concept in research that has received considerable support. In general, the theory also has its limitations. It has been criticised for focusing more on men's than women's development. This focus on men makes it more appropriate for the proposed study. The theory is also criticised as being vague in some respects, which makes it difficult for researchers to test rigorously. As is the case with psychodynamic theories in general, it is difficult to make definitive predictions about a given individual's behaviour using the theory. In summary, the psychodynamic perspective provides good descriptions of past behaviour, but imprecise predictions of future behaviour (de St. Aubin et al., 2004).

The adolescent constructs an identity and the young adult finds intimacy in a long term committed relationship through marriage. The man in the middle adulthood years seeks to make a positive contribution to the next generation through parenting, teaching, mentoring, leadership and creating and caring for various interests that are aimed at leaving a positive legacy of the self for the future. The midlife individual focuses time, energy and psychological resources on raising children, building communities and organisations,

teaching skills, passing on traditions and working for positive change (de St. Aubin et al., 2004). On the other hand, those individuals who are unable to rise to the challenges of generativity, including divorcees, may experience what Erikson referred to as stagnation or self-preoccupation. Their struggle is focused on maintaining themselves, which may be so demanding that they cannot find the resources to care for those who will eventually survive them (Erikson, 1959; McAdams, 2006a).

1.3.3.3. Lifespan identity development. Identity development is not just a key facet in Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, but it also influences how individuals interpret symbols, thereby becoming an important factor for the present study. Symbols such as marriage or divorce are interpreted according to the level of identity development of the individual. The first identity, formed during late adolescence, is constructed consciously and unconsciously from the part-identification of childhood as they are experienced by the individual in his socialisation contexts and imagined future (McAdams, 2006a). As there is no organised childhood identity to deconstruct, this initial identity formation process is largely a matter of construction; of decision making and eventual synthesis of chosen parts (Marcia, 2002). After the first identity, succeeding identities involve successive disequilibrium of existing identity structures, beginning with the initial identity formed during late adolescence (Kroger, 2007).

According to Kroger (2007), each later stage of Erikson's theory involves a re-formation of identity as one responds to the demands and rewards of each stage of development. The favourable identities involve partnership; friendship in young adulthood, with its demands for intimacy; mentorship in middle age, with its generative requirements; and eldership in older age, with its opportunities for integrity. As the individual enters each of these psychosocial stages, an identity reconstruction can be expected (Erikson, 1963). The aforementioned changes in psychosocial position are not restricted in scope to an individual's

immediate family. Hence, being a partner or a friend, a mentor or parent, or an elder, is a metaphor referring to the quality of the individual's self-awareness and psychosocial stance in the world as one moves through the ages of young adulthood, middle and old age (Berk, 2007; Marcia, 2002).

In most individuals' lives there are disequilibrating events in addition to the normal, expected events. These could be life events such as divorce, falling in love, job loss, job promotion, positive and negative reversals in fortune, retirement, spiritual crises and the loss of loved ones. As with attempts to define stress, one has to look at what is disequilibrating for the particular individual. Not all divorces, job promotions and so forth are disequilibrating for all individuals (Berk, 2007; Kroger, 2007; Marcia, 2002). This means that a person-by-person approach is most desirable. In the case of an individual exhibiting foreclosure – finding a sense of self, it means that the individual has developed a personality structure the purpose of which is to prevent disequilibrium. When foreclosed individuals do experience disequilibrium in adulthood, it is likely to be a shattering experience for them. Identity diffused individuals are resistant to disequilibrium as they lack a solid identity structure to begin with (Kroger, 2007).

In the event that an individual experiences brief periods of diffusion when the current identity structure is being disequilibrated, this individual may feel confused and scattered, act impulsively, look for support in inappropriate places, become 'irresponsible,' 'unreliable' and 'unpredictable'. This may be sufficiently distressing that the individual enters counselling or psychotherapy (Berk, 2007; Marcia, 2002). This is regression with a purpose: to permit the previous structure to fall apart so that a new structure can emerge. The so-called midlife crisis should not to be taken lightly or just be dismissed. It is an important developmental stage, necessary to be taken in the process of identity reconstruction (Berk, 2007). In addition to experiencing a period of diffusion, the individual may also return to previous identity

contents, even to periods of apparently pre-emptive commitment to them (Marcia, 2002). In other words, the individual may regress briefly through a foreclosure phase. Again, this is part of the regressive process. Ultimately, if the disequibrated identity fell well within the identity-achieved status, the individual would be expected to enter an actively searching moratorium period. During this period, the individual would begin to explore alternatives and to make tentative commitments, eventuating in a new identity-achieved identity structure (Berk, 2007; Kroger, 2007; Marcia, 2002).

1.4. Research Problem

Although both physical and psychological health problems may predate divorce irrespective of race, findings have revealed a particular, significant decline in physical and psychological health status after divorce among African men (Kulik & Kasa, 2014). These findings reported that divorced African men exhibit more behaviour-related mortality such as suicide and motor vehicle accidents (Gähler, 2006), and higher rates of alcohol abuse, diabetes, heart disease and mental illness than married male counterparts (Kulik & Kasa, 2014).

In the black South African community, the extended family was traditionally a source of support for individuals. As a result of industrialization, changes in the roles of women in society and the advent of democracy, the status of the extended family weakened and the nuclear family became the only source of support. Substantial changes have also taken place regarding the status of black men in the family. Historically, men were the main providers; they were the ones who assumed public positions and who established a bridge between home and the community. After industrialisation however, many black men experienced difficulty finding employment. As a result, the wife often became the main provider for black families, even if she occupied a low-level job (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009; Famsa, 2009). Thus, divorced black men who may be unemployed may experience a double struggle, as

they need to adjust to their status as a divorcee as well as to the status of unemployment in a society where the culture is fundamentally different from that of previous years (Famsa, 2009).

Research has indicated that divorce is associated with a number of social problems, for example, divorcees have smaller social networks and are more likely to lack social support. They more often experience negative events and have higher levels of psychological stress than married individuals (Amato, 2010; Gähler, 2006). Given the rate, magnitude and impact of divorce on black South African men and the dearth of research attention, suggests that the divorce phenomenon continues to be an area worth exploring. Conceptualising the effects of divorce as transient, to which individuals adjust, or as chronic with long lasting effects remain attractive areas of research (Amato, 2010), regardless of which gender the research focuses on, as both can be affected negatively by this life stressor.

1.4.1. Research aims

In attempting to understand the impact of divorce on black South African men, the study focused on the following specific aims:

- To explore black South African men's experience of, and adjustment to, divorce;
- To explore the factors that influence black South African men to experience divorce the way they do;
- To develop a Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Model.

1.4.2. Research questions

The aim of the study was to answer the following general questions;

- What are black South African men's experiences of, and adjustment to, divorce?
- What are the factors that influence black South African men's post-divorce adjustment?
- Do black South African men need assistance to adjust positively to divorce?

1.5. Research Methodology

The researcher attempted to understand individuals in terms of their own definition of their world from an Interpretative Research Paradigm (Brocki & Wearden, 2004). The focus was on an insider rather than an outsider perspective. The researcher attempted to understand black South African men's experiences of, and adjustment to, divorce from the subjective perspective of the individuals involved. The complexities, richness and diversity of their lives can only be captured by describing the realities of their everyday lives, incorporating the contexts in which they operate, as well as their frames of reference.

1.5.1. Research design. The study was designed from a qualitative paradigm. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), qualitative studies tend to have a peculiar life cycle, one that spreads collection and analysis throughout the study and calls for various modes of inquiry at different stages. The qualitative researcher makes a series of decisions at the beginning, middle and end of the study. It therefore implies that a qualitative design has an elastic quality. It adapts, changes and is redesigned as the study proceeds. Accordingly, the qualitative researcher focuses on the description and exploration, and all design decisions ultimately relate to these acts (Creswell, 2009).

Built into qualitative research is a system of checks and balances that includes staying in a setting over time and capturing and interpreting the meaning in individuals' lives (McAdams, 2006b). By prolonged engagement with the participants, the researcher has the opportunity to use data triangulation, theory triangulation and interdisciplinary triangulation to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility in the study. This allows for multiple views of framing the problem, selecting research strategies and extending discourses across several fields of study (Yin, 2009).

The study used an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) that seeks to understand the lived experiences and the meaning that individuals place on these experiences

(Brocki & Wearden, 2004). Literature has shown that IPA studies do not test a hypothesis but rely on participants being experts in their field (Brocki & Wearden, 2004; Flowers, 2007).

1.6. Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 1 Introduction. The chapter provides a brief outline of the thesis by identifying the context of the study, its research problem and justification and the methodology followed. It also provides a brief background to the conceptual and theoretical framework.

Chapter 2 Divorce. The chapter discusses the concept of divorce from a global perspective as well as a South African perspective, which is unique given its socio-historical context. The chapter also discusses the role of men in the post-divorce family.

Chapter 3 Symbolic Interactionism. The chapter discusses the philosophical development of the symbolic interactionism movement and its different schools of thought. It also identifies studies that are related to marriage and divorce that were applied to.

Chapter 4 Erikson's Psychosocial Theory. The chapter discusses the eight stages of psychosocial development in detail and how each stage relates to identity development. The concept of identity development in adulthood is discussed, focusing on its impact on marriage and divorce for men.

Chapter 5 Research Methodology. The chapter discusses the research design and sampling, the research procedure and the methods of data collection and analysis. The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as a data analysis theory is discussed in detail. The chapter then identifies the ethical considerations that were applied during the study and how the results of the findings are to be disseminated.

Chapter 6 Findings and Discussion. The chapter summarises the themes of the study in table form and discusses each theme as it relates to the participants' experience, impact and adjustment. Evidence in the form of direct quotations from the participants is provided. The

chapter presents the researcher's interpretation of the theme and a discussion on comparing the findings with similar studies by other scholars.

Chapter 7 The Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Model. The themes from the findings were summarised into a model that could be useful for the prediction and understanding of the behaviour of black South African men at the different stages of divorce.

Chapter 8 Conclusion, Limitations and Recommendations. The chapter summarises the study by revisiting the research findings based on the research aims and objectives and to ascertain if the research questions were answered sufficiently. In so doing the chapter highlights some key limitations and makes recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2

DIVORCE

2.1. Chapter Overview

The chapter provides an overview of family, marriage and divorce in South Africa and highlights the factors that influence adjustment to divorce. The divorce stress adjustment perspective will be discussed in detail as the main perspective. Other perspectives include family stress and buffer factors and the selection perspective will be discussed briefly. Divorce outcomes and the effects on gender, race and children conclude the chapter.

2.2. Background to Family, Marriage and Divorce in South Africa

Family preservation has been part of human history since time immemorial and continues to be up to this day. Families have been, and will continue to be, the pillar of societal structure and organisation (Famsa, 2009). The family continues to play a central role in the lives of the individuals involved as it continues to provide psycho-emotional and economic support (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009; Famsa, 2009). It remains society's main institution and plays a pivotal role in the socialisation, nurturing and care of social reproduction (Amoateng, Heaton & Kalule-Sabiti, 2007). The family is the foundation of human civilisation as it is able to transmit societal values, morals, customs and norms.

The world over, the structure and content of families has transformed over the years (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009; Famsa, 2009). This dynamism has not changed the way social phenomena has constructed and given meaning to the family, and the concept of marriage or divorce still has a bearing on raising children (Amato, 2010), religion, governance (Morrell, 2006), authority and the values and importance of education (Hunter, 2006; Kulik & Kasa, 2014). The strength of the family contributes to bettering society (Amoateng et al., 2007), as

it has access to all forms of resources, including emotional, material and spiritual, resources necessary to meet individual needs (Moore & Govender, 2013).

2.2.1. Apartheid and the South African family. The link between the family and other institutions in society cannot be underestimated, as the nature and structure of the country's economy will always impact on how individual members of the family participate in economic activity through employment (Hunter, 2006; Madhavan, Richter, Norris & Hosegood, 2014). To a large extent, services such as health care, quality of education and decent employment are determined by economic structures, while burdens such as diseases or lack of quality education may, to some extent, be due to the lack of skills and/or income on the part of the family (Bojuwoge & Akpan, 2009; Hosegood, Richter & Clarke, 2016).

While the family perspective may be positive due to its nurturing and caring function, it can be a source of legitimate oppression as patriarchy is the family's most enduring form of domination (Moore & Govender, 2013). In Africa, patriarchy exists alongside colonial subjugation and racial discrimination (Budlender, Chobokoane & Simelane, 2004). Black women in particular have suffered a double blow under colonialism and apartheid and capitalism reinforced patriarchy in employment issues too (Bojuwoge & Akpan, 2009). The system favoured men for employment, while women play a helper's role. With the dawn of democracy in South Africa, significant milestones have been achieved to alter the former arrangement as the constitution and progressive legislations have created equal opportunities in the labour market for men and women (Famsa, 2009; Hunter, 2006).

The disruption of families and parenting under colonisation and apartheid left its mark on men, women and children (Bojuwoge & Akpan, 2009). The relationship between men and women became deeply troubled (Amoateng et al., 2007, Hunter, 2007). Men are disempowered by having to depend on the very women that a patriarchal culture designates

as inferior to them (Madhavan et al., 2014). The dissonance between the cultural expectations of gender power relations on the one hand, and the realities of powerlessness on the other, set off a vicious cycle of low self-esteem, resentment, anger and abuse of the very source of their support – the wife, woman and lover (Morrell, 2006).

The literature on family history in South Africa is replete with claims of there being unprecedented crises at varying points (Delius & Glaser, 2002; Mager, 1999). At the same time it is important to probe discontinuities in relationship patterns and possible causes of such transformations. Two important challenges have been noted. First, from the mid-1970s unemployment began to rise drastically to its current rate and by the 1980s an increasingly large number of men were finding it difficult to find jobs, as women had joined the labour market (Hunter, 2007). Secondly, the fall in marital rates (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009; Famsa, 2009), most probably as a response to the increased cohabitation in urban areas as more educated women gained work opportunities and migrant labour challenging the ability of men and women to form long term relationships (Ramaphele & Richter, 2006).

One of the changes that has affected present day family life in perhaps a more dramatic way with far reaching consequences, is the increase in the divorce rate (Famsa, 2009). Statistics indicate that in the mid-19th century only 5% of first marriages ended in divorce, while researchers estimate that almost half of all recent marriages will end in divorce (Lamb, 2010; Madhavan et al., 2014). This trend was attributed to the changing economic and social climate (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009). The independence of women (Hunter, 2006), declining income for men, the increase in personal satisfaction from marriage (Hosegood & Madhavan, 2012), and the increased acceptance of divorce have all contributed to the voluntary dissolution of marriages (Amato, 2010).

The early and advanced decline in marriage in South Africa has been attributed to the profound and lasting influences of apartheid policies (Hosegood, McGrath & Moultrie, 2009). Although contemporary tribal, religious and legislative structures and processes have been favourable towards marriage, as it seeks to promote it as a preferred family institution, divorce is still a common phenomenon among South Africans. Despite this, the post-apartheid government formulated a new marriage act that exemplified the strong social norms about the positive value of marriage (Heaton, 2010).

The apartheid system created an environment in which men had to migrate, leaving their wives, in search of jobs and in the process the men often found other partners and formed second families at the place where they worked. This forced women to enter the labour market in large numbers in order to provide for themselves and their children with or without the support of male partners (Hosegood et al., 2009; Hosegood & Madhavan, 2012). The other result of this labour migration, was marital instability, not merely because of the physical separation, but by changing the role of husbands and wives (Hunter, 2006; Lamb, 2010). The unintended consequence was that parents and siblings often proved to be a more reliable and enduring source of emotional financial, and material support than marital partners.

In summary, post-apartheid South Africa created a change in the family structure among black families (Hunter, 2007; Morrell, 2006). The extended family, which was a source of support for individuals during the labour migration period, has weakened, and the nuclear family has once again become stronger (Hosegood & Madhavan, 2012). Substantial changes have also taken place with regard to the status of men in the family. The men were the main providers, they were the ones who assumed public positions and they bridged the gap between home and community (Kulik & Kasa, 2014). After apartheid many men have difficulty finding jobs and as a result the wives have become the main providers for the

family, even if she has a low level job. For women, the expectations of a 'traditional' wife are at odds with the modern female identity as empowered, income earning, educated and able to control their own fertility (Lamb, 2010).

2.2.2. Fatherhood and identity. Given the above situation the question that arises is, how do fathers work together to support fathering among low income black communities? Black fathers' experiences are shaped by two challenges, namely, structural inequalities that affect their ability to be successful fathers and cultural norms that challenge the hegemonic norms of family formation and fathering (Arendell, 1995; Hosegood & Madhavan, 2012; Lamb, 2010; Madhavan & Roy, 2012). The male adult definition of achieving success in life has been based on the ideals of a 'hegemonic masculinity' that was set by white, middle class, heterosexual men (Connell, 1998; Madhavan & Roy, 2012). According to this definition, financial provision and co-residence with children is important for successful fatherhood (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001). Black fathers, mostly in the low to middle income class, aspire to be providers and caregivers (Jarret, Roy & Burton, 2002) but they encounter unique challenges that leave them powerless (Hunter, 2006). The history of apartheid South Africa meant black men had to migrate from their families in search of employment (Ramphela & Richer, 2006). In the post-apartheid period, black South African men have been heavily affected by the change in the economic environment and high unemployment has made it difficult for them to solidify their positions as carers and providers for the family (Amoateng et al., 2007; Bojuwoje & Akpan, 2009).

Literature has been consistent in reporting factors that have shaped black South African men's behaviour in marriage, including labour migration and unemployment (Madhavan, Townsend & Garey, 2008; Morrell, 2006; Swartz & Bhana, 2009). Women tend to gain custody of the children more often than men following divorce (Khunou, 2006), which has made it more difficult for black South African men to maintain a close parenting

relationship with their children, yet fathering remains a critical component of every man's identity and family life.

While men's identity is important to family life, conflict in the ideals of the patriarchal system that installs the male as the provider, protector and decision maker (Hunter, 2006) on one hand, and the harsh realities of a lack of quality education and skills, compounded by high levels of unemployment and demoralisation on the other (Lamb, 2010; Madhavan et al., 2014), leaves young black men confused. They do not have the tools to assume the authority and responsibility of being male in a patriarchal society (Hunter, 2006).

2.3. Mediating Factors of Divorce

A family is a social system; the impairment of an individual involved may result in the disruption of the whole social system (Zandiyeh & Yousefi, 2014). The family is considered to be the most effective social institution for preserving cultural norms and values and transferring them to the future generation (Hosegood & Madhavan, 2012). Divorce on the other hand, can destroy the structure and function of society. Individuals marry with the hope of a lifelong and mutually rewarding relationship, making divorce usually unexpected and unwelcome (Hawkins & Fackrell, 2009, 2011).

Divorce should be conceptualised, not as a single stressful event, but as a process (Amato, 2010). This approach suggest the impact divorce has for men, women and children involves a confluence of factors and processes that occur well before the legal divorce and tend to continue after the divorce. This line of thinking also suggests that the divorce process is accompanied by negative outcomes for the family (Hawkins & Fackrell, 2011). For example, a family may have experienced trauma if there was conflict in the marriage, which might not have anything to do with the divorce process. Thus, the individuals involved may

have experienced negative family interaction prior to the divorce and possible strained family interaction after the divorce (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002).

The divorce process usually involves disentanglement or an emotional separation a year before the legal divorce is granted (Hawkins & Fackrell, 2009; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). This is because during the marriage one individual may feel alienated from the other and conflict may ensue, which may result in physical conflict. Once conflict escalates, individuals may begin to experience feelings of bitterness or helplessness, dissatisfaction and becoming emotionally distant, as they weigh the costs and benefits of continuing the marriage with that of a divorce (Amato, 2010).

The pre-divorce stress negatively affects the psychological being of the couple, leading to parental stress, anxiety and depression, thereby inhibiting effective parenting (Hosegood et al., 2016). The most difficult phase is the separation stage and the phase immediately after the divorce (Halford & Sweeper, 2013). This is due to the disentanglement process taking on several dimensions. The divorcing individuals are confronted with legal challenges and costs and their intentions become known to friends and family and they have to redefine parental roles as custodial and non-custodial parents. After the divorce, children experience different forms of families (single parent family/stepfamily), as they have to live with their mother in most cases and experience less contact with their father.

Studies have shown that most individuals enter into marriage with the hope of a rewarding, lifelong engagement (Amato, 2010; Hosegood et al., 2016; Lucas, 2005). Thus, divorce is often a shocking and painful experience. The divorcing individual may suffer short term setbacks, while others may encounter a long term downward spiral (Halford & Sweeper, 2013; Lucas, 2005). The way individuals handle the divorce stress and challenges and embrace new opportunities is based on their psychological being. A number of factors that

help explain why individuals differ in the way they respond to divorce have been highlighted in the divorce literature (Gaffal, 2010).

2.3.1. Conflictual marriage. Individuals who leave marriages that involve conflict or violence are likely to be happier over time after the divorce (Amato, 2010; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Couples who experienced conflict during marriage experience more antagonism than couples who had no major conflict and the latter are able to deal with conflicts following divorce and are friendlier towards one another (Fischer, deGraaf & Kalmijn, 2005). Research on the psychological effects of divorce has mainly been comparative, that is, comparing married individuals with divorced individuals (Amato & Holman-Marriott, 2007). Findings suggest that divorced individuals on average have poor physical and mental health (Hosegood et al., 2016; Rognum, Torvik, Idstand & Tambs, 2013). They are socially isolated (Wang & Amato, 2000), as contact for fathers with children is usually lost after a few years. Although new romantic relationships may help rebuild self-confidence, they could result in feelings of loneliness, unhappiness and low self-esteem (Amato, 2010; Gaffal, 2010; Hawkins & Fackrell, 2011). Most divorced individuals struggle to manage their emotional ties with their ex-spouses, thereby making it difficult for them to adjust after the divorce.

2.3.2. Embracing change. Successful adjustment to divorce is based on the individual's ability to embrace change (Amato, 2010; Hawkins & Fackrell, 2009; Lin & Raghuram, 2005). This may involve maintaining existing friendships and establishing new ones, returning to school or focusing on a new job opportunity (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Wang and Amato (2000) reported that more educated individuals adjust more easily to divorce than uneducated individuals, as they have better problem solving techniques and generally feel in control of their situation during the transition. Any choices that an individual makes after the divorce, for example, where to live, which day care centre to send their

children to, or whether to start dating, is based on the individual's ability to make a change (Lin & Raghbir, 2005).

Research has consistently highlighted the factors that influence the ability of the individual to successfully embrace change after a divorce. These include personal factors, relational factors, social factors and cultural factors (Amato, 2010; Gaffal, 2010; Hawkins & Fackrell, 2009; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Lin & Raghbir, 2005; Tschann, Johnston & Wallerstein, 1989). The level of personal resources such as income or educational qualifications influences the way individuals embrace change brought about by divorce (Lin & Raghbir, 2005). Lack of income makes it difficult for divorced individuals to develop bigger picture thinking and embrace long term change, as they are preoccupied by the immediate stress of survival. This may result in a sense of failure, purposelessness or depression that could lead to alcohol or drug abuse (Amato, 2010; Wang & Amato, 2000).

2.3.3. Attitude towards the divorce. The decision to divorce is not arrived at simultaneously by the couple; in most cases one of the spouses does not want the divorce and is still in denial while the other has already 'moved on' (Baum, 2003; Waite & Gallagher, 2002). The individual who is committed to the marriage tends to perceive the divorce as a personal failure, thereby struggling to adjust. It is usually the non-initiator of the divorce who finds it more difficult to adjust than the initiator (Locker et al., 2010; Steiner et al., 2015). To add to that, holding negative feelings towards a former spouse makes it even more difficult to adjust to the divorce (Lin & Raghbir, 2005). Avoiding conflict during the divorce reduces the negative emotion towards a former spouse after the divorce (Hawkins & Fackrell, 2009).

2.3.4. Insecure individuals. Studies have indicated that individuals who are insecure in a marriage are willing to stay, even if the marriage is unsatisfactory (Davila & Bradbury, 2001). The same individuals could find it difficult to adjust in the event of a divorce. More

emotionally secure individuals are capable of better negotiating and reasoning skills in the event of a divorce, thereby experiencing less physical and psychological health challenges after divorce (Hawkins & Fackrell, 2009).

2.4. Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Perspective

Literature on divorce and its effects on both adults and children have proved controversial; some studies have concluded that the nuclear family is the ideal setting for individuals to achieve stability, meaning and security while children develop into healthy, competent and productive citizens (Amato, 2000; 2010; Gaffal, 2010; Wang & Amato, 2000). This way of thinking leads to the conclusion that single parenthood is the cause of social ills such as substance abuse, erosion of neighbourhoods and communities, crime and declining academic standards. On the other hand, some studies have reported that individuals develop successfully in a variety of family structures, of which the nuclear family is one (Hawkins & Fackrell, 2009; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Locker et al., 2010; Steiner et al., 2015). According to these scholars, divorce, although temporarily stressful, represents a transformation of the family structure as it allows individuals a second chance at happiness. Social ills, poverty, crime, abuse and poor government service represents a more serious threat to an individual's well-being than to family dynamics (Hawkins & Fackrell, 2009).

The common assumption in most of the divorce research is that divorce is a stressful experience to which individuals have to adjust (Amato, 2010). The stress perspective has dominated divorce literature, with a number of studies using the established stress perspectives, such as the family stress and coping theory (Plunkett, Sanchez, Henry & Robinson, 1997), general stress theory (Thoits, 1995), or the risk and resiliency perspective (Hetherington, 1999). The common factor in these studies is that divorce is viewed as a process and not a discrete event. The process begins well before the legal dissolution is

concluded and ends long after the official divorce. It is through this marital dissolution process that a number of events emerge that the individual experiences as stressful. These stressful events lead to negative behavioural, emotional and health outcomes (Amato, 2010; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002).

By considering divorce as a process that begins well before the marriage is dissolved, implies that the process begins with the feeling of emotional estrangement, that is, a feeling of growing dissatisfaction with the marriage. This occurs because marriage is by nature an investment with lifelong rewarding and mutually supporting outcomes, making dissolution a painful experience (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). This is why some individuals spend time attempting to renegotiate the relationship, seeking advice from friends and family, while others deny that there is a problem. Considering that the decision to divorce is not arrived at simultaneously for the individuals involved, it means one of the spouses wants the divorce more than the other (Emery, 1999). This implies that the spouse initiating the divorce mourns the end of the marriage well before the divorce has been granted (Baum, 2003; Steiner et al., 2015).

Legal dissolution of the marriage does not necessarily signal the end of the negative emotional, behavioural and health outcomes associated with an unhappy marriage (Amato, 2010; Gaffal, 2010; Wang & Amato, 2000). The immediate post-divorce reality is that new events (mediators) emerge that have the potential to affect the behavioural, emotional and health outcomes of the individuals involved. These include single parenthood (custodial parent), loss of contact with children (noncustodial parent), conflict with the former spouse over child support, visitation and or custody rights and loss of emotional support from in-laws, married friends and neighbours, changing homes, school and/or work. These events or processes represent the short to medium term effects of divorce and can have long term

consequences on how divorce affects the health and well-being of the individuals involved (Amato, 2010; Gaffal, 2010).

In the divorce process there are moderating factors that introduce variability on the effects of mediating events on personal outcomes (Gaffal, 2010). As protective factors they mitigate the effects of divorce-related stress on the individual's health, behavioural and emotional outcomes (Amato, 2010; Gaffal, 2010). Moderating factors fall into three categories, including intrapersonal resources (self-efficacy, coping skills, social skills), interpersonal resources (social support), and structural roles and settings (employment, community services [including the church], supportive government policies). Another moderating factor is the manner in which the individual views divorce; that is, is it a personal tragedy or an opportunity for growth? Other moderating factors include, age, race, gender, ethnicity and culture, have been reported in literature (Bevino & Sharkin, 2003). Depending upon the way in which these moderating factors are configured in one's life, they predict why some individuals are more resilient or vulnerable than others, resulting in the diversity of outcomes (Amato, 2010).

The divorce adjustment perspective is based on two somewhat contradictory models, the crisis model and the chronic strain model (Amato, 2010). According to the crisis model, marital dissolution represents a short term disturbance in which individuals adjust over time (Halford & Sweeper, 2013; Lucas, 2005). In line with this model, personal resources and the way in which the individual defines divorce determine the length of time the individual takes to adjust. With time an individual returns to the pre-divorce level of functioning. On the other hand, the chronic strain model holds that divorce involves relentless strain upon the individual's behavioural, emotional and health outcomes (Amato, 2010; Gaffal, 2010). As long as personal resources and the individual's view of divorce impacts on the post-divorce

adjustment, individuals will not return to the pre-divorce level of emotional, behavioural and health functioning.

The stress perspective has been criticised for focusing exclusively on the negative outcomes of divorce while ignoring the positive outcomes divorce can have (Ahrns, 1994; Barber & Eccles, 1992). According to the divorce stress adjustment perspective, divorce can have positive outcomes too (Amato, 2010; Gaffal, 2010; Bevvino & Sharkin, 2003). This is in support of the divorce stress adjustment perspective, which holds that although divorce is a stressful event; its outcomes can either be negative, positive or mixed. Incorporated into this perspective is the understanding that most of the stress occurs before the actual divorce, is temporary and is accompanied by positive outcomes (Amato, 2010).

The divorce stress adjustment perspective addresses all the relevant factors that influence how individuals adjust to divorce (Amato, 2010). According to this perspective three groups of factors influence how individuals adjust and these include, personal factors, relational patterns and cultural factors. Personal factors include age and psychological qualities such as, beliefs and attitudes and socio-economic status (education, employment, income). Infidelity, initiator status and spiritual wellbeing (Steiner et al., 2015) are some of the personal factors that contribute to an individual's adjustment to divorce. Relational factors concern the individual's connectedness to others, this can be in the form of perceived or received support from children, family of origin, a possible new relationship/remarriage and close friends and all contribute to how the individual adjusts to divorce. Cultural factors, such as the degree of acceptance or stigmatisation that divorce is associated with, the legal statutes that deal with marital dissolution (child custody, division of assets, alimony etc.), and re-parenting options all contribute to how any individual adjusts to divorce (Gähler, 2006). A detailed analysis of these factors follows.

2.4.1. Personal factors. There are a number of personal factors that influence an individual's adjustment to divorce. The first is age at the time of divorce. Literature on how age influences post-divorce adjustment has been contradictory, with some studies reporting that it is more difficult for older people to divorce because they have limited post-divorce options in terms of employment and remarriage (Gaffal, 2010; Kitson & Morgan, 1990). Other scholars (Amato, 2010), have found better adjustment to divorce in older people because they have no parenting problems, as most of their children are adults.

Secondly, an individual's psychological disposition, that is, his intelligence, attitude and belief play an important role in how the individual adjusts to divorce (Gähler, 2006). This implies that the individual's subjective interpretation of the divorce influences how the individual adjusts to the divorce more than the factual situation. According to Wang and Amato (2000), the decline in the standard of living post-divorce may be seen as an opportunity for personal growth, as the divorced individual gains full control of his life. Personal resources in the form of educational qualifications have been reported to have a great influence on how individuals adjust to divorce. Individuals with higher levels of educational qualifications are better able to cope with stressful life events as they have better cognitive abilities to manage the post-divorce conflict, a stronger sense of self control, self-discipline, self-efficacy, higher self-esteem and a better social network than those with lower educational qualifications (Amato, 2010; Lin & Raghurir, 2005).

2.4.1.1. Beliefs and attitudes. Beliefs and attitudes construct the way in which an individual interprets and attributes stressful life events, such as divorce (Gaffal, 2010). They are developed early in one's life through socialisation and undergo critical evaluation from young adulthood. They have the power to organise and govern how an individual interacts with the world. Beliefs and attitudes affect behaviour in three ways: firstly, they control the process of receiving information from the outside world, thereby manipulating the

individual's perceptions. Secondly, they control how information concerning contact is processed and evaluated. Lastly, they facilitate the adjustment of mental processes to fit the actual situation (Halford & Sweeper, 2013; Lucas, 2005). This means that beliefs and attitudes have a stabilizing and flexible effect on the individual's behaviour. Once they are established they remain relatively stable throughout life, as any change will destabilise the whole personality, while change or modification remains inevitable (Amato, 2010).

Beliefs and attitudes have characteristics that make them rigid, rigorous and sometimes authoritarian by nature, thereby inhibiting personal development (Halford & Sweeper, 2013). When this occurs, the individual has to make changes in order to adapt. The need for protective factors, such as a positive attitude, becomes key to enable the individual to adjust to the negative consequences of divorce (Amato, 2010; Gaffal, 2010). Attitudes and emotions can be an effective predictor of how an individual will adjust to divorce (Wang & Amato, 2000). Thus, if the individual accepts change and sees divorce as an opportunity for a second chance, they are likely to adjust positively.

2.4.1.2. Attribution. What individuals attribute towards the failure of their marriage also contributes towards how individuals adjust to divorce (Halford & Sweeper, 2013; Lucas, 2005). The focus is on how the individual thinks about their divorce and how they explain the marital dissolution, as this provides a general impression of the individual's wellbeing and the likely effect upon the adjustment process. In a study by Newman and Langer (1981) on attribution responsibility of divorced individuals, two types of attribution, namely, interactive and person-related were identified. Interactive attribution focuses on the dyadic unit that has been established and person-related attribution refers to the characteristics of one spouse. Newman and Langer (1981) concluded that if an individual promotes or exaggerates their own feelings, it affects their adjustment process.

Through attribution, individuals are likely to blame themselves or the other spouse instead of assessing the whole relationship, which might be complex (Newman & Langer, 1981). A relationship may have many aspects at play, making it difficult for the individual to make an objective assessment. Making an interactive attribution puts the blame on a malfunctioning relationship, thereby removing the self-reproach that results in a change of behaviour. Interactive attribution leads the individual to have feelings of control over future relationships, believing that undesirable behaviours can be changed, while personal attributions induce a sense of failure on oneself or spouse (Amato, 2010; Gaffal, 2010). Thus, person attribution leads a person to have feelings of resentment and unreasonable assumptions that individuals or situations cannot be changed.

2.4.1.3. Personal resources. After the divorce either or both of the spouses may experience financial decline, although some will recover and regain their pre-divorce status. Individuals with reduced income may refrain from committing to a new relationship out of fear of further obligations (Fischer, 2007). After divorce the same income now has to be shared between two households. Research has indicated that individuals with a higher level of education, employment and social economic status adjust well to divorce in the medium to long term (Fischer, 2007; Gaffal, 2010; Lin & Raghubir, 2005). They experience less economic hardship after divorce compared to those with low income.

Gender differences impacting upon economic consequence have been reported by a number of studies (Rogers, 2004; Wilcox & Nock, 2006). Women experience more economic hardship after divorce than men in most countries. Thus, the individuals' adjustment after divorce is influenced by personal resources and these may be in the form of a good income, educational qualifications or work experience. The economic effects on divorce depend to some extent upon the socio-economic circumstances and family policies that are operational in a particular country (Fischer, 2007).

2.4.1.4. Initiator status. Another important factor that has an effect on the adjustment to divorce is the initiator status (Steiner et al., 2015). Most of the studies on divorce have found that there is usually one who initiates the divorce and the other who would prefer to continue with the marriage. Couples rarely initiate divorce simultaneously (Lin & Raghurir, 2005). The decision to divorce is usually reached after an individual has weighed the costs and benefits of continuing with the marriage. Research in Europe and the United States of America has shown that generally women initiate divorce (Brinig & Allen, 2000). There are a number of reasons for this, one of which is that men avoid separation because of the social status that comes with the title of ‘husband.’ On the other hand, women tend to watch their marriages carefully and are quick to notice any unsatisfactory situation, resulting in them initiating the divorce (Lin & Raghurir, 2005; Steiner et al., 2015).

Men and women approach marital dissolution differently (Courtney, 2000; Crane, Soderquist & Gardner, 1995; Symoens, Bastaits, Mortelmans & Bracke, 2013). Women tend to be more sensitive and quarrel less. As women understand the costs of divorce in terms of socio-economic status, increased responsibility for offspring and custody disputes, they are likely to have a plan in place before the divorce process and are likely to stick to it (Steiner et al., 2015; Symoens, Van de Velde, Colman & Bracke, 2014). Women are willing to communicate their decision to friends and family and to seek professional help. Another reason why women initiate divorce is that they have fewer resources to change their marriage to a more enjoyable state (Lin & Raghurir, 2005).

Women suffer high levels of stress before the divorce or during the decision making process (Lin & Raghurir, 2005). Cultural values do not encourage women to exert power over their husbands to change, while making compromises is socially unacceptable for husbands (Steiner et al., 2015). Although efforts are being made towards gender equality, it is more acceptable for women to embrace traditional male roles than it is for men to embrace

typical female roles, such as household chores and child care (Sweeney & Horwitz, 2001; Symoens et al., 2013; Symoens et al., 2014). This explains why women, as the initiators, will have finished mourning before communicating the decision to divorce (Baum, 2003). As the initiators, women usually have control over the whole divorce process, although Wang and Amato (2000) reported that both spouses experience distress after the divorce.

The initiator tends to be better adjusted and thus fares better emotionally after divorce (Hewitt & Turrell, 2011). Sakranda (2005) holds that non initiators struggle with the surprise of being left, manifest repetitive rumination about how things would be better if the spouse had not left and experience feelings of abandonment and rejection. For women, identity is formed by social relationships with significant others, thus, their self-value is based on how well they form and maintain relationships (Baum, 2009; Heaton & Blake, 1999), making them sensitive to conflict. Conflict with former spouses is expected to relate more to the mental health of women than men. Men value power, control and autonomy (Courtney, 2000; Symoens et al., 2013). When men feel betrayed, they experience significantly more harm to their self-image than women would in a similar situation. It is therefore expected for men to have feelings of inequity, as well as feelings of not being in control (when not the initiator of the divorce). Being the initiator has a positive effect on men's mental health as it reflects feelings of mastery and control (Hewitt & Turrell, 2011; Symoens et al., 2013). For women, choosing to divorce may be less straight forward in terms of positive psychological well-being, as women are more receptive to feelings of guilt, which could lead to separation disorder (Courtney, 2000).

The individual who has control over the divorce process tends to adjust more positively to the divorce (Steiner et al., 2015). This was confirmed by longitudinal studies conducted in Europe, which reported that, individuals who are involved in an unhappy marriage tend to adjust positively after the marriage. The factors that contribute to this

positive adjustment are social resources and the way in which the individual evaluates and defines divorce (Fischer, 2007; Symoens et al., 2014). Thus, individuals who see divorce as a second chance to love, to take an active role and to start a new relationship, adjust more positively to divorce. Maddox, Shaw, Rhoades, Allen and Markman (2013) suggested that a critical evaluation of self-conduct is important before beginning a new relationship, as a new relationship does not guarantee happiness.

2.4.1.5. Effects of infidelity. Infidelity has been identified as the most devastating experience an individual has to face in a marriage (Scott, Rhoades, Stenley, Allen & Markman, 2013; Steiner et al., 2015). It has been considered as the ‘final straw’ in a marriage as it leads to emotional pain that could cause psychological problems that are detrimental to the victim. The betrayed spouse faces emotions that range from anger, betrayal, rejection, jealousy, confusion and loneliness to depression (Steiner et al., 2015). According to Ortman (2005), victims of infidelity suffer from symptoms similar to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), such as irritability, rage, emotionlessness, re-experiencing the event and horror. How the individual responds to this traumatic event moderates its influence on post-divorce adjustment.

Victims of infidelity may develop what Ortman (2005) referred to as Post Infidelity Stress Disorder (PISD). Its primary symptom is rage, as the victim become impatient, irritable and angry more often than usual. The perpetrator is less likely to suffer from depression compared to the victim (Blow & Harnett, 2005). Reaction to infidelity is a gendered experience, men and women react differently to infidelity as it is culturally more acceptable for men than women to be unfaithful (Blow & Harnett, 2005; Sweeny & Horwitz, 2001).

Adjustment to divorce for victims of infidelity may take some time as individuals have to first forgive the offender before healing can begin (Steiner et al., 2015). Forgiveness has both an absence of negative and a presence of positive components (Ortman, 2005). Letting go of negative feelings, thoughts and behaviour towards the former spouse is the basis for the absence of negatives, while the presence of positives is about showing a positive attitude towards a former spouse (Rye, Folck, Heim, Olszewski & Traina, 2004). Forgiveness can lead to positive mental health, including reduced anxiety and decreased depression (Rey et al., 2004). Being part of a religious group or attending a religious congregation promotes forgiveness, healing and restoration for both the perpetrator and the victim (Ortman, 2005; Steiner et al., 2015).

2.4.1.6. *Spiritual wellbeing.* Studies have shown that there is a correlation between spiritual well-being and positive adjustment to divorce (Krumrei, Mahoney & Pargament, 2011). Spiritual well-being ranges from working with God to manage the divorce, engaging in prayer, private rituals, or public worship to overcome negative feelings to seeking spiritual purifications for wrongdoings that contributed to the divorce, or searching for comfort through the love, care or spiritual intimacy with congregation members, clergy, or both. If the divorced individual sees the divorce as a punishment from God they may develop negative spiritual coping mechanisms. This will lead to difficulties in adjusting and high levels of depression (Steiner et al., 2015).

How the individual views divorce in the context of their religious beliefs influences spiritual or religious coping. Negative spiritual coping may prevent the individual from ‘moving on’ and may result in depression (Krumrei et al., 2011). Several studies have reported that individuals with strong spiritual convictions have better resources to cope with a divorce and are generally happier and healthier than those for whom such conviction is less

important (Ellison & Fan, 2008; Patrick & Kinney, 2003; Jackson & Bergman, 2011; Steiner et al., 2015).

2.4.1.7. Forgiveness. The post-divorce adjustment can be influenced by how the individuals forgive each other. Forgiveness can take the form of an overt action, a psychological construct, a process or a learned attitude (Rohde-Brown & Rudestam, 2011). It is about letting go of the resentment even when the individual might have the right to be resentful or angry. Forgiveness can be in the form of an intentional process and not necessarily a behavioural form. Thus, some behaviour may resemble forgiveness, when they are not necessarily forgiveness, as they take place in the absence of genuine forgiveness and the internal process is therefore incomplete (Wohl, DeShea & Wahkinney, 2008; Yarnoz Yaben, 2009).

In the post-divorce process forgiveness is considered to be a mediating variable in the cognitive process and co-parenting quality (Bonach, 2008). This implies that if there is blame being attributed to the former spouse there is less forgiveness, thereby negatively affecting the quality of post-divorce co-parenting. There is a positive correlation between forgiveness and the quality of post-divorce co-parenting. Bonach holds that there are two major factors that contribute to forgiveness, namely, satisfaction with the financial arrangements for child support and remorse demonstrated by the former spouse. On the other hand, hostile divorce proceedings and conflict prior to the divorce undermines post-divorce co-parenting quality as well as forgiveness (Bonach, 2008).

The behaviour component of forgiveness is less influential in the mediation of interpersonal conflict than the intention of mutual support. The capacity of the individual to forgive fosters positive divorce adjustment. Lack of forgiveness has been observed to be among the most important reasons for post-divorce individuals to seek psychotherapy (Wohl,

et al., 2008). Individuals who are able to experience self-forgiveness are also able to experience the feelings of self-worth necessary in the divorce adjustment (Rohde-Brown & Rudestam, 2011). The period after the divorce is another factor that has been observed to play a role in forgiveness, thereby contributing to divorce adjustment, as the capacity to forgive facilitates the adjustment to divorce (Halford & Sweeper, 2013; Yarnoz Yaben, 2009).

Attitudes that exemplify a forgiving stance allow for a greater sense of inner management in working with the stress of separation and the divorce process (Rohde-Brown & Rudestam, 2011). A lack of forgiveness of the self or other may not only affect adjustment to divorce but might also enhance feelings of depression and anger (Bonach, 2008). Forgiveness of the self has been reported to be an effective form of intervention in situations that involve anger, depression, guilt, drug abuse, broken relationships in marriages, abuse and divorce (Rohde-Brown & Rudestam, 2011; Wohl et al., 2008; Yarnoz Yaben, 2008). The paucity of attention given to forgiveness in divorce studies is often explained away by the close association between forgiveness and religion and its lack of conceptual clarity (Rohde-Brown & Rudestam, 2011).

There is dearth of information on the factors that influence an individual's willingness to forgive, that is, the process by which individuals come to the decision whether to forgive or not (Yarnoz Yaben, 2008). Particularly disturbing is the lack of knowledge regarding forgiveness on the role of the post-divorce co-parenting dyad (Rohde-Brown & Rudestam, 2011). Negative causal attributions are likely to impede the forgiveness of the former spouse who may feel most injured and who continues to place the blame on the other for causing the problems that led to the divorce. Attribution of cause, which is located internally in the former spouse, has demonstrated to be inversely related to forgiveness and to increased conflict. The more an individual attributes the cause of the divorce to the former spouse the less the level of forgiveness. Forgiveness is thus a mediator in the relationship between cause

attribution to the former spouse and the quality of co-parenting (Bonach, 2008; Wohl et al., 2008).

2.4.2. Relational factors. There are a number of relational factors that affect the individual's adjustment to divorce, including psychological disposition, attachment style to the former spouse, social support received from family and friends and the quality of the parent-children relationship (Amato, 2010; Gaffal, 2010). How an individual adjusts to divorce is influenced by the readiness of the individual to accept the change that comes with the divorce, that is, the ability of the individual to separate the role of being a parent and that of being an ex-spouse. In most instances support from the family of origin becomes an important factor (Bouchard & Doucet, 2011; Hogerbrugge, Komter & Scheepers, 2013). It is common that a number of relationships are affected by the divorce. This implies that the more socially isolated the divorced person is, the more difficult it is to adjust.

Pre-divorce psychological function is a special indicator for post-divorce adjustment (Amato, 2010, Gaffal, 2010, Hawkins & Fackrell, 2009; Steiner et al., 2015). An individual who is emotionally stable and who has developed coping strategies has the pre-requisites for a positive adjustment to divorce. Such an individual has high self-esteem, self-discipline and the social skills to cope with any stressful event (Lin & Raghubir, 2005).

2.4.2.1. Attachment style. The degree and style of attachment to the former spouse has a significant influence on the adjustment of an individual to divorce (Bevino & Sharkin, 2003). Attachment theory classifies individuals as having either a secure or insecure (avoidant or disorganised), attachment style (Gaffal, 2010). Secure attachment is associated with productive communication skills, better coping strategies and a willingness to solve conflicts that are beneficial to the individuals involved (Amato, 2010). Individuals with a secure attachment style facilitate managing the divorce and are the basis of shared parenting,

while an insecure attachment style has negative adjustment outcomes for divorce. A secure attachment style has positive benefits for the couple and their offspring. Securely attached individuals exhibit social coping strategies (using friends and family as ‘safe havens’), and recover faster emotionally and adjust well to divorce (Cohen & Finzi-Dottan, 2012; Davis, Shaver & Vernon, 2003). On the contrary, an insecure attachment style leads former spouses to find it difficult to avoid emotions such as anger, hatred and love (Amato, 2010; Gaffal, 2010).

Any long term relationship has psychological implications and divorce results in emotional deprivation (Frisby et al., 2012). This emotional deprivation may lead the divorced individual to react with feelings of anger against the former spouse. When the anger turns to hatred, or impulsivity to insult, it implies that emotions have taken a pathological turn (Hogerbrugge et al., 2012). Such rapid cycles of emotions may be as a result of the divorced individual feeling offended in the following areas: self-esteem, sense of justice, breach of trust and confidence, the termination of the sexual relationship and a change in the relationship with the children (Gaffal, 2010).

2.4.2.2. Style of attachment to former spouse. Hetherington (2003) investigated the typology of attachments and how they changed after divorce. She identified five types of couple relationships. These include the pursuer-distancer type – the wife is nagging, hostile and contemptuous, while the husband is withdrawn and in denial; the disengaged type – the husband and wife live separate lives, have few common interests or friends, communication is less frequent and they rarely have arguments, the operatic type – the spouses are not interested in a harmonious family relationship but rather seek sensation and diversion, and the cohesive individualised type – the marriage is full of warmth, caring, respect and mutual support. The marriage has balance as individuals pursue their interests and at the same time enjoy the marriage. Finally, the traditional marriage – the man is the breadwinner and the

head of the household. If the woman works her income is only to supplement what the husband brings in. The couple share a traditional view of gender roles.

The styles of attachment influence the level of instability in a family (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). The most stable style is the traditional marriage couple. They usually enjoy the mutual relationship and support each other. The only challenge are when the individual's attitudes and values change over time, for example, when the woman seeks more independence (Hetherington, 2003). The cohesive individualised style has the lowest risk of divorce as the marriage has high levels of tolerance and social skills from both sides. The pursuer-distancer marriage has the highest level of instability and is likely to end in a divorce, as the spouses do not develop joint problem solving strategies. In a disengaged marriage, instability is caused by the fading of emotional attraction and children gaining independence.

2.4.2.3. New relationships. Research has shown that new relationships have a great influence on the positive adjustment of individuals who divorce. These can be in the form of cohabitation or remarriage (Amato, 2010; Gaffal, 2010; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997). New relationships can only lead to happiness if the divorce was reflected upon, as there is a danger of repeating the same mistake. Hetherington (2003) identified six adaptive patterns divorced individuals use to cope with a new situation.

2.4.2.3.1. Enhancers, is a group of well-adjusted individuals, mostly women. They will have grown more competent over time and have succeeded in work and school, are remarried and happy. Their positive adjustment is a result of internal and external reasons. These individuals have high levels of self-esteem, achievements, social responsibility and self-efficacy and show low levels of depression and anti-social behaviour. The external reason is overcoming single parenthood by seeking further education or looking for a job in order to improve their economic situation. As enhancers improve their occupations they also

improve their social circles, thereby enhancing their chances of meeting someone from a better socioeconomic status than their previous partner.

2.4.2.3.2. *Good enough*, is a group of average individuals (usually men and women in their first year of divorce), struggling to cope with divorce, although they have some success, they also encounter set-backs. Although they try to improve their situation economically and socially, they are not as ambitious as enhancers. They maintain the same social class and end up choosing partners that are similar to their former spouses. Those who remarry are likely to divorce again.

2.4.2.3.3. *Seekers*, are a group of men and women who try to find new partners immediately after the divorce. Research has indicated that it is more important for men to seek a new partner for the sake of well-being than for women (Hetherington & Kelly, 2003). Male seekers have low self-esteem and struggle on their own, thereby seeking a new partner who cares for them. Seekers are not very selective in choosing a new partner and most likely end up repeating the same mistakes as in the previous marriage.

2.4.2.3.4. *Swingers*, dress up in youthful clothing and usually have superficial relationships. They have an antisocial personality and are low in social responsibility. They feel liberated by the divorce and tend to lead an untamed lifestyle. Swingers are usually unhappy, depressed and anxious as they feel guilty about the dissolution of the marriage and miss their family. Hetherington (2003) described them as 'fairly conventional people' who revert to their old characteristics once they are involved in a new romantic relationship.

2.4.2.3.5. *Competent loners*, are usually a group of well-adjusted individuals (women mostly). They are socially skilled, have professional jobs and lead an independent social life. If they are involved in a romantic relationship, it usually does not last as they are not prepared

to share their life with a partner. They are independent and autonomous and only commit to a new relationship if they find an exceptional individual.

2.4.2.3.6. *Defeated*, is a group of individuals who have literally given up on life after the divorce. They have low self-esteem, low social responsibility, high depression and an antisocial personality. They do not have the resources to reconstruct their life. Studies have shown that the majority of the men and women fall in this group one year after the divorce. The difference in how men and women adjust to divorce is reflected in how they move from one group to another a year after divorce.

2.4.2.4. *Children's custody*. Children may be a special factor for relational support as they have an effect on the well-being of the divorced individuals. The amount of time the parent spends with the child exposes the child to the influence of that parent. Amato and Gilbreth (1999) reported that it is the quality rather than the quantity of the parent-child relationship that is more important on the positive divorce outcomes for children. Children have been reported to offer relational support to women because in the majority of cases they retain custody. On the other hand, children can be a source of post-divorce stress. Research has shown that divorced individuals struggle to separate their role as former spouses and as parents (Amato, 2000; Bouchard & Doucet, 2011). They may remain emotionally engaged to the former spouse long after the legal divorce. To the divorced individuals, children tend to have an ambivalent effect, as they can be a source of emotional support and at the same time a reminder of the failed marriage (Hetherington & Kelly, 2003).

Based on a systematic view of family, divorce does not necessarily mean the end of a relationship, but it marks the beginning of a transformation (Amato, 2010; Gaffal, 2010; Hetherington & Kelly, 2003). Former spouses continue to have influence over each other through the children and the former spouses can be a source of emotional support for each

other. The need for emotional support arises because the custodial parent may be overwhelmed by the day-to-day tasks of raising children, while on the other hand, the non-custodial parent – usually the father, may feel depressed by the reduced contact with his children, thereby negatively affecting the post-divorce adjustment process. The current non-fault based policy was intended to reduce conflict between former partners with children; it appears instead to have shifted the focus of conflict to establishing claims for custody, visitation disputes and difficulties with mandatory shared parenting (Amato, 2000; Arkes, 2015).

In a study by DeGarmo, Patras and Eap (2008) on the impact of social support on the three main stressors associated with divorce, that is, conflict with the former spouse, daily life and family stressors and role overload, they reported that social support introduces variability in the way fathers adjust to divorce. Similarly, the divorce stress adjustment perspective assumes that social support tends to moderate the negative effects of divorce stressors. It can be concluded that there is a strong correlation between social support and resilience to divorce stressors (Amato, 2010).

The first challenge divorcing parent face relates to parenting (Fischer, 2007). Parenting relationships usually result in conflict with the former spouse, especially in the first three years after the divorce. Thereafter, most parents will have reached a more stable parenting relationship (Braver, Griffin & Cookston, 2005). The shifting of parenting routines and change of residence is another stressor divorcing parents have to face, as this affects how individuals go about their daily business. After the divorce the fathers have to give up their role as a spouse and retain the parenting role (Amato, 2000). This results in high levels of stress as divorced father's roles, identities and functions have to change and new roles and boundaries have to be set, as fathers become either full time or part time caretakers (Hetherington & Kelly, 2003). Research has indicated that divorced fathers report higher

levels of parental strain than married fathers. Parental strain is associated with poor psychological health, and role overload is associated with poor quality parenting (DeGarmo et al., 2008).

2.4.3. Social support. While personal and relational factors are important for adjustment to marital dissolution, social support and economic status and social networks have also been observed to contribute to post divorce adjustment (Amato, 2010; Gaffal, 2010). Social support is the belief that an individual is loved, esteemed and valued and that they belong to a network of mutual obligation. The network can be of friends, family, co-workers or colleagues. The importance of social support for the emotional, behavioural and health outcomes of an individual during periods of stressful life events is well documented (Thoits, 1995).

It is common knowledge that divorce results in the individual losing formal support from the other partner, however, the individual continues to need emotional support from significant others. Divorced individuals do not just lose support of a partner (Gähler, 2006), they also lose the social network that was attached to the marriage (Hogerbrugge et al., 2013). Friends quickly disappear and others distance themselves. Divorced individuals have less in common with married friends and may feel awkward among singles. This makes it difficult for divorced individuals to adjust successfully to divorce, as research has indicated that there is a strong correlation between divorce adjustments and the presence or absence of a social network (Gähler, 2006; Wilcox, 1981).

Cross-cultural studies have shown that men are less likely to be severely affected economically than women as a result of divorce (Gähler, 2006; Holden & Smock, 1991; Poortman, 2002). Participation in social networks and the perception of social support has a positive impact on an individual's socioeconomic status that is associated with anxiety and

depression (Gähler, 2006). Controlled studies on how economic well-being, social support and social networks affect psychological well-being have reported no significant difference between married individuals and divorced individuals (Gähler, 2006; Lorenz et al., 1997).

2.4.4. Cultural factors. Although personal, social and relational factors have a strong influence on how individuals adjust to divorce, cultural factors also play a significant role in moderating the effect of divorce on the individuals involved (Gaffal, 2010; Gähler, 2006). Cultural factors determine the degree of stigma associated with divorce. Transformation in the structure of marriages has made forms such as cohabitation, singleness, voluntary childlessness, homosexuality or serial monogamy more acceptable and divorce is no longer the moral abomination it was centuries ago (Fischer, 2007). Most legal statutes have adopted the principle of private autonomy as opposed to fault-based divorce laws (Gaffal, 2010).

While research has historically considered marriage as an institution that involves sacrifice and giving up private life for the sake of future opportunities and children, the state no longer has the mandate to moralise punitive institutions in the divorce process (Fischer, 2007). Divorce has become more acceptable as individuals are able to unilaterally file for divorce, although in some countries divorce still faces public disapproval and stigmatisation, as it is considered to put the future opportunities of children at risk (Gähler, 2006).

Researchers have used direct questions to participants in an effort to measure beliefs and attitudes, but it has proved difficult to reach a clear understanding of the structures, roots, state of integration and how deeply they are embedded in the brain (Gähler, 2006). This has resulted in the use of the relational approach, where beliefs or attitudes are measured against other concepts, for example, men's attitudes towards divorce. In a longitudinal study, Martin and Parashar (2006) hypothesised that highly educated women would have the most permissive attitude towards divorce because of their need to keep divorce options available in

the event that the marriage fails. They found educated women to have an adaptive, restrictive attitude towards divorce. They maintain some level of self-esteem and achievement or they adopt subtle biases towards divorce. Their response to the pain of divorce is adaptive and not pathological.

Traditional attitudes towards divorce can also impede the way in which individuals perceive divorce, thereby influencing behavioural adjustment outcomes (Gähler, 2006). Research has reported a significant difference between the attitudes, beliefs and values towards divorce in urban and rural areas (Gaffal, 2010). Individuals who live in urban areas tend to have high levels of autonomy and social distance as they undergo rapid changes. In these areas divorce occurs regularly and is less stigmatising. On the other hand, individuals who live in rural areas experience low social distance and divorce is less frequent and tends to be highly stigmatised.

2.4.5. Outcomes of the divorce-stress-adjustment perspective. The divorce stress adjustment perspective posits that the divorce experience interacts with experience to determine the adjustment outcomes (Amato, 2010; Halford & Sweeper, 2013). The initiator status is important in determining the level of stress an individual experiences. Studies have shown that women initiate most of the divorces (Hewitt, Western, & Baxter, 2006) and men have been observed to show higher levels of psychological distress and attachment to the former spouse (Bevino & Sharkin, 2004; Lucas, 2005) than women, suggesting that divorce is an unwanted experience for men.

A relationship is considered to be an investment by the individuals involved (Halford & Sweeper, 2013), through mutual friends, shared property and children. With time the investment grows and leads to marriage – a social and religious ritual, which symbolises the growing investment and commitment to each other (Coontz, 2005b). Separation and divorce

does not necessarily mean the end of the investment, as children represent the continued contact that could result in post-divorce conflict (Rhoades et al., 2011). The presence of children increases the chances of stress among mothers who have to adjust to life as a single parent. Fathers have limited contact with their children and this increases the chances of stress in men, which makes co-parenting a major source of conflict after divorce (Halford & Sweeper, 2013; Sbarra & Emery, 2008).

Halford and Sweeper (2013) reported that stress effects on divorce, that is, the amount of investment as reflected by the number of years in marriage and income status and individual vulnerabilities (lack of social support and high attachment anxiety), is associated with the adjustment trajectory – the path followed by an individual towards reaching the pre-divorce state. Attachment to the former spouse, loneliness and psychological distress will decrease over time, while co-parenting will remain stable over time. In summary, studies have suggested that divorce approximates a transient crisis on the outcomes of attachment, loneliness and psychological distress, while co-parenting was suggested to cause chronic strain (Halford & Sweeper, 2013; Rhoades et al., 2011; Sbarra & Emery, 2008).

2.5. Family Stress and Buffer Perspective

According to Gaffal (2010), the family stress and buffer factors take into account two major components that have dominated divorce research. These are the temporal component and the research perspective. The temporal component refers to the tendency of the researcher to view divorce as producing only negative outcomes, thus resulting in a deficit perspective. Recent research has indicated that divorce may benefit the individuals involved by enhancing their emotional, behavioural and health outcomes. The research perspective entails that divorce adjustment is a process that improves life over time. However, many scholars have neglected the time factor, thus disregarding the variability of the adjustment

and the temporal recovery (Amato, 2010; Arkes, 2015; Hawkins & Fackrell, 2011; Halford & Sweeper, 2013).

The family stress and buffer factors are based on Hill's (1949) theory cited by Gaffal (2010). Hill's theory was based upon comparing the factors that influenced family stability during the Great Depression in the 1930s. He reported five important components that are important in understanding family processes, namely interaction, structural-functional elements, situational components, institutional aspects and development features. These concepts changed the way in which modern day research on families is conducted, as it is now focused on family strengths and resources rather than the deficit perspective that pathologises divorce.

Mederer and Hill (1983) identified three components that influence the way in which individuals adjust to divorce namely, the accumulation of stressors, the individual's resources for coping with stress and the definition of the incident that produces stress. According to this theory, incidents such as divorce produce acute stress that will lead to a family crisis, especially when the stressors are accumulated. The family crisis will then lead to emotional, behavioural and health problems. After the crisis activation, several factors interact in the development of an appropriate response, which Hill (1949) referred to as the ABCX theory of family stress. Factor A is the stress producing event, factors B and C act as the buffer for the family, thereby acting as the protective factor for reducing the direct correlation between multiple stressors and family crises.

According to Mederer and Hill (1983), there are two protective factors, namely attachment style and social relationships (factor B), and family perception and parental self-efficacy (factor C) that correlate with the acute stress of divorce (factor A) to predict family crises (factor X). The theory assumes that social isolation (factor B) has an impact on family

functioning. On the other hand, how the individual perceives stressful events (factor C) will reflect on the values and attitudes toward divorce. These attitudes and values may lead to either hope or despair (Gaffal, 2010).

2.6. The Selection Perspective

According to the selection perspective, individuals who adjust poorly to divorce are selected out of marriage. These individuals have problematic personal and social traits that predispose them to divorce and to poor post-divorce adjustment. These individuals bring characteristics to the marriage that are a high risk for divorce. Characteristics such as an anti-social personality, high levels of depression and a general history of psychological disorders, predispose such individuals to both divorce and poor post-divorce adjustment (Davies, Avison & McAlpine, 1997; Hope, Power & Rodgers, 1999). Divorce may be as a result of selective effects of prior levels of depression (Wade & Pevalin, 2004). Individuals who have at least one onset of psychological disorder before or during their marriage experience a marital disruption or divorce (Wade & Cairney, 2000).

The selection perspective posits that life following divorce can be a time for self-fulfilment, autonomy and personal freedom. It can also be an opportunity to establish a new sense of self, renewal of old interests and the need to focus on one's own needs rather than the needs of others (Montenegro, 2004; Putman, 2011; Thomas & Ryan, 2008). Research has indicated that individuals reported personal, informal strategies of adjusting to divorce, such as avoidance, acceptance and forgiveness, as well as confiding in friends and co-workers and more formal assistance through counselling (Canhan et al., 2014).

2.7. Determinants of Divorce Outcomes

Research on the effects of divorce has utilised mostly comparative analysis, where the researcher compares the physical and mental health of married couples and divorced

individuals (Amato, 2000; Bierman, Fazio & Milkie, 2006; Waite, Luo & Lewin, 2009). The comparative analysis studies reported low levels of physical and mental health, on average, for divorced individuals compared to married couples. The relationship between divorce and poor mental health was seen to be stronger in divorced men than divorced women. Divorced individuals have been reported to have higher rates of psychiatric hospital admission, are more likely to suffer from anxiety, depression, anger, rejection, loneliness and feelings of incompetence (Gähler, 2006). They also have high mortality risks, such as suicide, motor vehicle accidents and homicide and are likely to be diagnosed with coronary heart disease and cirrhosis of the liver due to alcohol abuse (Lorenz et al., 1997; Mastekaasa, 1995). One of the criticisms of these research studies is that they used mostly cross sectional data, which is considered to be less reliable than longitudinal data (Amato, 2010; Hetherington, 2003; Johnson & Wu, 2002).

In trying to understand divorce outcomes, social science research has mainly focused on answering the following questions; can the adverse effects of divorce be directly attributed to the divorce itself? (Crisis theory); do the negative changes in living conditions indirectly affect the effects of divorce? (Social Role theory); lastly, whether divorced individuals exhibit higher psychological distress during the life of the marriage? (Social Selection theory). The latter focuses on whether individuals with psychological problems are predestined to divorce. In such cases divorce only act as a catalyst for divorce and these individuals' well-being is likely to deteriorate further after the divorce (Halford & Sweeper, 2013; Hetherington, 2003; Johnson & Wu, 2002; Putman, 2011).

2.7.1 Social Causation or Social Selection? There are two theoretical perspectives that have dominated the literature on divorce, these are the causal effect perspective – where divorce has a causal effect on the emotional, behavioural and health outcomes of the individuals involved and the selection perspective – assumes that there is an association

between behavioural, emotional and health outcomes and selection factors. In other words, longitudinal research has focused on answering whether psychological distress increases the risk for a divorce or vice versa (Gähler, 2006).

According to the causal effect perspective, divorce is a stressful experience because it marks the end of a long term relationship and the individual has to deal with feelings that range from anger, sadness, changing of residence, a decline in the standard of living to adapting to a single lifestyle (Gähler, 2006). Based on the stress theory, and considering that these events happen in a short space of time, they are likely to have an adverse effect on the individual's psychological well-being (Pearlin, Schieman, Fazio & Meersman, 2005). Marriage is considered to offer social support benefits such as companionship, emotional support, healthy lifestyle – eating healthily, smoking less and regular medical check-ups; benefits that will be lost as a result of divorce, thereby negatively affecting the individual's psychological wellbeing (Amato, 2010). Some scholars have reported that the relationship between divorce and negative outcomes is spurious (Overbeek et al., 2006; Wade & Pevalin, 2004). Individuals who separated or divorced had poor mental health prior to the divorce or separation. According to Wade and Pevalin, (2004) mental health declines after the divorce, thereby supporting the selection perspective.

Mastekaas (1995) confirmed early studies by Booth and Amato (1991) that indicate high levels of psychological distress for divorced individuals compared to those in intact marriages. He also observed that this difference was already evident shortly before the divorce. The interpretation of these results indicates a support for the social selection perspective. However, Mastekaas found such interpretation problematic through his theory of temporary selection, which implies that distress is not caused by divorce, but it appears shortly before the marital dissolution and causes the divorce. This means that temporary

selection and social causation may be two different theoretical concepts that are difficult to separate empirically (Gahler, 2003; Simon, 2002).

2.7.2. Crisis versus Chronic Strain. Studies have continued to explore the extent to which divorce outcomes affect the individuals involved (Amato, 2000; Halford & Sweeper, 2013; Hetherington, 2003; Johnson & Wu, 2002). Divorce can be conceptualised as being temporary, to which individuals adjust (crisis model), or it can persist over an extended period of time (chronic strain). While the mediating factors have a crisis effect on the individual, the moderators introduce variability in predicting if the outcome becomes chronic strain (Halford & Sweeper, 2013; Hetherington, 2003; Johnson & Wu, 2002). Some of the outcomes, such as single parenthood, maintaining positive parent-child relationships for the non-custodial parent and child support, create a strain and will persist in the long term.

Both models have been supported by research, with Waite et al. (2009) reporting that the outcomes depend on the level of pre-divorce, marital happiness. Divorce may be a source of happiness if the marriage involved physical and/or emotional abuse (Amato, 2010). Although individuals encounter a decline in psychological well-being immediately after the divorce, this does improve with time and they may even remarry (Johnson & Wu, 2002).

Although divorce can signal a relief to some individuals, the bond of marital attachment has been reported to continue years later, regardless of liking, admiration or respect, especially where children are involved (Amato, 2000; Halford & Sweeper, 2013; Hetherington, 2003; Johnson & Wu, 2002). The continued attachment to the former spouse may result in continued low psychological well-being. This contradicts what Halford and Sweeper (2013) observed, in that divorce adjustment is correlated with time, thus, psychological well-being improves over time after the divorce. Although Booth and Amato (1991) reported that psychological distress is higher immediately after the divorce and

decreases gradually over time. Mastekaasa (1995) reported no differences in psychological distress over time, concluding that divorce can leave a permanent strain on the individual.

The inconsistencies in the research findings may be a reflection of the limitations of the methodologies (Halford & Sweeper, 2013). Some large scale quantitative studies have used brief mental health measures with unknown psychometric properties, while others (Lucas, 2005) have used rating scales to assess distress, health and life satisfaction. Others, like Blekesaune (2008), have measured only mental health, while Aseltine and Kessler (1993) measured depression only as a divorce outcome. These measures have failed to address specific divorce-related challenges, such as loneliness, emotional attachment with the former spouse, co-parenting issues and the loss of social networks (Amato, 2010). Adjustment to these challenges depends on the trajectory individuals follow (Halford & Sweeper, 2013). In a longitudinal study by Mastekaasa (1994), attachment to the former spouse and loneliness were reported to have a crisis effect, which means they subside after a few years of divorce, while co-parenting conflicts had a chronic strain effect.

2.7.3. Gender differences. Theoretical reasoning will show that divorce affects the psychological well-being of men and women differently (Bevino & Sharkin, 2003). This may be true considering that on average, men have higher incomes than women, which may mean lower levels of distress. A woman's life is changed in a number of ways following a divorce and they usually retain custody, which means a greater work load (Lin & Raghurir, 2005). It has also been reported that women invest more in a marriage and therefore view divorce as a failure (Gähler, 2006). Other scholars hold that traditional gender roles make men more vulnerable to divorce than women (Bevino & Sharkin, 2003; Lin & Raghurir, 2005). Traditional men are not used to performing household chores; they do not have social

support and are dependent on the marriage, which makes single women better off than single men.

Gender studies on the adjustment to divorce have reported a number of factors that contribute to the difference in how men and women adjust to marital dissolution. A primary factor among them is the non-existent or weak social network men have outside the marriage (Bevino & Sharkin, 2003; Lin & Raghubir, 2005). A number of difficulties and continued attachment to the former spouse have been reported to contribute to poor post-divorce adjustment for men (Gähler, 2006). This implies that successful adjustment may require distancing from the former spouse while meeting the needs of the children after divorce. Because of the diversity of studies on men's emotional, behavioural and health outcomes after divorce it is not surprising that some scholars have reported that men benefit from divorce while women's overall psychological well-being declines (Halford & Sweeper, 2013). Others have reported that women are the ultimate beneficiaries while men bear the brunt of the negative consequences (Amato, 2010; McManus & DiPrete, 2001).

As gender interacts with other social determinants, women's distress due to stressful life events has been reported to be the consequence of their differential sensitivity to events. Thus, gender differences in post-divorce adjustment may be as a result of role differences, rather than women experiencing more stressful events (Afifi, 2007; Nazroo, 2001). In general, women are not more vulnerable to life events than men are. This means that women with no social support and who are exposed to stressful life events are equally as vulnerable as men without social support (Afifi, 2007). Dalgard et al., (2006) concluded that the higher rate of depression in women is not explained by gender differences to negative life events, social support or vulnerability. Chronic strain, low mastery and rumination were each more

common in women than in men, thereby mediating the gender difference in depression symptoms.

Women's lack of social power and gender differences in biological responses to stressors can contribute to women developing depression more than men (Steiner et al., 2011; Sweeney & Horwitz, 2001). Beyond gender, age at which one divorces can also predict post-divorce adjustment. Women who divorce in midlife might experience a more painful adjustment than men because of age specific stressors, namely, a change in accustomed lifestyle, interdependence on young adult children, a diminishing remarriage pool and finding body changes (Steiner et al., 2011).

When considering gender differences in 'mourning' the death of the marriage, men experience a delay in the mourning yet they experience the higher level of stress compared to women (Baum, 2003). Men are seldom seen as victims and this makes male mourning non-masculine. Baum indicated that men mourn several times after the marital dissolution. Firstly, they mourn the loss of their spouse, secondly, the loss of child(ren) custody and finally maintenance orders. These mourning patterns are influenced by a number of factors, including individual and social perception of masculinity (Baum, 2003; Heaton & Blake, 1999).

A number of studies have re-evaluated the gender difference with regard to the effects of marital dissolution and reported that the change in economic environment has seen women becoming more actively involved in the labour market, thereby reducing the power of men as the single 'breadwinner' and impacting upon the male mourning pattern (Baum, 2003; Brid Featherstone, 2009; McManus & DiPrete, 2001). If the change in the employment pattern is taken into consideration, it means men do not necessarily gain more from divorce, given the growing job insecurities regarding periods of unemployment and sickness or disability after

the divorce. This challenges the traditional belief that men are unlikely to be victims of divorce (Sun, Ee Chong & Lim, 2014).

Research into gender differences in marital dissolution is far from conclusive and the findings have been inconsistent. Some scholars have reported that divorce affects the psychological well-being of women more than that of men (Bevino & Sharkin, 2003; Kurdek, 1990; Lin & Raghubir, 2005), while others have reported results to the contrary (Gove, 1972). Other studies have found no gender differences (Johnson & Wu, 2002). The findings on gender differences have been inconclusive or inconsistent, depending on the mental health indicator used (Simon, 2002). Men have been reported to have a significant increase in drug and substance abuse, while women have been reported to have high levels of depression following marital dissolution (Gähler, 2006).

2.7.4. Children's socioeconomic status after divorce. A number of studies on the way in which divorce affects the socioeconomic status of children have been comparative in nature. Such studies compare the resources of single parent families and those of remarriages with those of intact families. Two competing hypotheses have been delineated in these studies; the first one being that high levels of paternal resources increase the effects of divorce while high levels of maternal resources moderate the divorce effects (Bouchard & Doucet, 2011; Fischer, 2007). The second hypothesis is that high levels of pre-divorce resources will always moderate the effects of divorce (Gähler, 2006).

When considering the effects of parental resources on children post-divorce, it is important to differentiate the father's resources from the mother's resources (Fischer, 2007). As mothers usually gain custody of children, maternal resources are more important to the child(ren)'s adjustment. Children are deprived of most of the paternal resources after divorce. Paternal resources can be economic and educational, implying that due to the limited

interaction between father and child after divorce, the child will have limited access to the father's educational resources, while the economic resources may be evenly distributed through child support (Bouchard & Doucet, 2011).

Paternal resources indicate a loss to the child's experience, making the maternal resources more important after divorce (Amato, 2010). There is a strong correlation between single parenting and poverty (Fischer, 2007; McLanahan, 2004). Mothers with few resources have a high risk of economic distress after divorce. This economic distress may be moderated by education skills and experience when mothers are successfully reintegrated into the labour market (Fischer, 2007).

Although maternal and paternal resources are an important moderator of divorce, overall family resources are important in reducing the effects of divorce on children (Bouchard & Doucet, 2011). These resources may be in the form of financial resources or highly educated parents. The presence of financial resources means that there is a likelihood that children will maintain the same lifestyle. Fischer (2007) reported that families with high levels of resources are unlikely to fall below the poverty datum level than those families with low levels of resources. Going below poverty datum level is a reality for most single mothers, while high education is associated with positive co-parenting, thereby reducing the level of post-divorce conflict (Gaffal, 2010). Better contact with the father means that the child benefits from the social and cultural resources of the father, making them experience less divorce distress than children with less committed fathers (Kalmijn, De Graaf & Poortman 2004).

2.7.5. Race, divorce and mental health. Historically, research on race, divorce and mental health has been relatively limited and concentrated in the USA. These research studies tend to support the claim that marital dissolution has a weaker mental health effect on African

Americans than white Americans (Barrett, 2003; Kitson & Holmes, 1992). The findings indicate that blacks have low levels of subjective stress and are less stigmatised than whites. The same results were also reported by Menaghan and Lieberman (1986), who reported that divorced blacks experience fewer symptoms of depression than their white counterparts. In these studies the researchers were measuring a wide range of mental illnesses and they provided a potential clue to the variations in race and mental health outcomes associated with divorce (Lawson & Thompson, 1995).

African Americans who are either separated or divorce reported increased levels of alcohol and drug abuse or dependence, while whites reported an increase in a wide range of psychiatric disorders, including alcohol abuse or dependence, drug abuse or dependence, major depression, anxiety disorder and schizophrenia (Barrett, 2003). Several explanations have been offered to explain this difference, some scholars have argued that blacks' low levels of mental health outcomes is related to the role of the extended family (Cherlin, 1992). A more normative status of singlehood and single parenting among black communities both contribute to moderating the effects of divorce (Kitson & Holmes, 1992).

In a qualitative study with black men, Lawson and Thompson (1995) reported that African Americans relied on the support of family and friends to a greater extent than their white counterparts. Another major factor that contributed to lower mental health problems among blacks was the cognitive style they had developed over years as a result of marginalisation and racism that is embedded in American society. They believe that they will prevail despite their difficult situation (Barrett, 2003; Franklin-Jackson & Carter, 2007).

Besides the factors related to the family and community, there are demographic factors that reportedly contribute to lower mental health outcomes for African Americans (Barrett, 2003). One of these factors is the long periods of separation before divorce among

blacks. The average period of separation is associated with the mental health outcomes of individuals involved due to the fact that the mental health outcomes are strongest near the transition and decline over time (Barrett, 2003; Halford & Sweeper, 2013). In the medium to long term, mental health problems will have subsided as the individual comes to terms with the divorce, having adjusted and developed new social networks (Barrett, 2003). This could be a plausible explanation for why blacks reported lower levels of mental health outcomes as they tend to stay longer in separation before the actual divorce.

The stage of the divorce process is another factor that has been considered in the race differences on mental health outcomes in divorce literature. Studies have indicated that whites spend less time in separation than blacks (Lawson & Thompson, 1995; Thoits, 2013). This could be a plausible explanation for why divorced black men have been observed to have lower mental health outcomes, as they would have used the time in separation to build new networks and adjust to divorce. Some studies found no race differences in the way mental health problems manifest (Barrett, 2003; Franklin-Jackson & Carter, 2007). Thoits (2011) found that the differences in mental health consequences could be explained by variances in the nature and timing of their manifestation in the marital dissolution process.

Barrett (2003) reported that mental health problems are similar but differ in the timing of the marital dissolution process, with whites reporting to have stronger mental health outcomes during separation than blacks. Separated white individuals reported high depression levels, while blacks reported high substance abuse or dependence after the divorce. Barrett concluded that it is the initial stages of the marital dissolution that produces negative mental health outcomes for whites. For blacks, separation may not signal the end of the marriage, therefore, negative mental health outcomes do not appear until the marriage is officially over.

Consistent with Barrett (2003), other scholars have observed that the race difference in the duration of negative mental health outcomes is not an important factor (Halford & Sweeper, 2013; Thoits, 2013). In fact, research has confirmed that there is a significant race difference in the effect of recent marital loss and mental health outcomes, with blacks reporting lower levels of stress. Similar results were reported by Kitson and Holmes (1992), confirming that duration does not explain the observed race difference in mental health outcomes. Studies on substance abuse or dependence suggest that race differences in the duration do not play a critical role on the effects of marital dissolution that were observed for externalised disorders.

Although the coexistence of depression and symptoms of substance abuse in individuals undergoing marital dissolution have not been studied, researchers have speculated that the most immediate effects of separation and divorce on mental health outcomes tends to be linked to symptoms of depression (Barrett, 2003; Franklin-Jackson & Carter, 2007; Thoits, 2011). Other symptoms, such as drug abuse or dependence, may appear later. It could be plausible to say that individuals will use substances as a coping strategy rather than to use them as a consequence of marital dissolution (Lawson & Thompson, 1995; Thoits, 2013).

2.7.5.1. Stage and duration. Studies of race differences on the effects of marital dissolution have not explored how duration and stage of the separation and divorce affect mental health outcomes (Barrett, 2003; Halford & Sweeter, 2013; Mezuk et al., 2010). Kitson and Holmes (1992) reported that the duration of separation and divorce accounted for the race differences in the mental outcomes post-divorce. They concluded that better adjustment for blacks compared to whites cannot be explained by the duration of the separation and divorce or by the length of time that the marriage was troubled before the divorce.

Given that the nature of separation and divorce differs between blacks and whites, it is appropriate that the stages and duration of mental health outcomes be analysed separately. Separation for blacks is not only longer, but may lead to reconciliation (Barrett, 2003; Thoits, 2011). In line with this trend, research has reported that separation among blacks may be considered as a ‘cooling off period’ or ‘taking a break’ from a demanding marriage (Lawson & Thompson, 1995; Mezuk et al., 2010). These results suggest that race difference in how individuals understand the meaning of separation compared with divorce may explain the race difference in mental health outcomes among races. As blacks have a longer separation period it is plausible to conclude that much of their adjustment takes place during the separation stage rather than after the divorce (Franklin-Jackson & Carter, 2007; Thoits, 2011).

2.7.5.2. Variation by gender. As was highlighted above, there is limited research with regard to the potential variation in gender on separation and divorce among blacks and whites (Lawson & Thompson, 1995). Studies have reported that there is a race difference on the effects of marital dissolution on blacks and whites and when gender is taken into consideration the difference widens for women (Franklin-Jackson & Carter, 2007; Thoits, 2011). There is a gender variation among races in the types of psychiatric disorders associated with marital dissolution (Mezuk et al., 2010). Barrett (2003) reported that being involved in a marital dissolution is significantly related to higher risks of mental illness among white women than black women. These disorders may include substance abuse or dependence, drug abuse or dependence, major depression and schizophrenia. Separated and divorced black women are associated with substance abuse or dependence and drug abuse or dependence only (Thoits, 2013).

A number of studies have reported race differences in the health outcomes for separated and divorced men and women (Barrett, 2003; Franklin-Jackson & Carter, 2007; Kitson & Holmes, 1992; Lawson & Thompson, 1995; Thoits, 2011). Separated or divorced black women have reported to have significantly higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of meaninglessness than their white counterparts. White women have been reported to have higher levels of internal locus of control and higher psychosocial adjustment to divorce. Race does not seem to be a moderating factor of negative effects on the well-being of men (Barrett, 2003; Thoits, 2011).

Barrett (2003) advocated for the need to consider multiple mental health outcomes in research that focuses on gender or race. His argument was in support of Horwitz, White and Howell-White (1996), who highlighted that gender specific experiences of distress could lead to misleading conclusions about the effects of separation and divorce. This suggests that by considering the findings of depressive symptoms only, it appears neither separation nor divorce has an effect on men's mental health. However, the results from substance abuse or dependence studies reveal that separated and divorced men have elevated symptoms compared to married men (Barrett, 2003; Thoits, 2011).

Consistent with previous research on divorce and its effect on marital dissolution for white women and black women, Barrett (2003) reported that when using a measure of depressive symptoms, there is evidence to support that black women adjust better to divorce than white women. The same could not be said when considering substance abuse. It can therefore be concluded that the advantage black women have over white women can only be found in the early stages of the marital dissolution. The importance of the separation period on mental health outcomes can explain why women suffer symptoms earlier in the process than men, although some researchers have reported that the acceptance of single parenthood

and the support of extended family play an important role in moderating the effect of marital dissolution on mental health outcomes for African Americans (Cherlin, 1992; Fine, Kurdek & Hennigen, 1992; Barrett, 2003).

Research has indicated that African American women fare better during separation and divorce than white American women, while it is the opposite for men. African American men experiencing separation and divorce have been reported to have significantly higher levels of substance abuse than their white counterparts (Franklin-Jackson & Carter, 2007; Thoits, 2011). In addition, African American men experience some unique stressors, including racial bias in the determination of child custody, economic and occupational stress, negative stereotyping of being black fathers and the constant encounter with the legal system during child support hearings (Lawson & Thompson, 1995; Mezuk et al., 2010; Thoits, 2013).

2.7.6. Finding meaning in divorce. A number of studies have reported the negative consequences that traumatic events have on individuals (Bevino & Sharkin, 2003; Coffman, 1996, Collins, Taylor & Skokan, 1990). These traumatic events range from fear and feelings of vulnerability to depression. The traumatic event may be an opportunity for personal growth, reappraisal and the reordering of one's life priorities. Individuals who experience traumatic events, such as death of a spouse, divorce or loss of a job, also experience posttraumatic growth that can surpass their pre-trauma psychological functioning, as they find meaning in the mishap. Finding meaning has been reported as a positive function of adjustment (Bevino & Sharkin, 2003).

Studies on the search for meaning have been based on the theoretical conceptualisation of Frankl's (1963) theory. Frankl believed that the search for meaning is the foundation of positive psychological adjustment to suffering, thereby making

meaningfulness a strong predictor for positive psychological adjustment. Frankl described how ‘finding meaning’ determines the pervasive feeling that an individual’s internal and external environment can be controlled for the expected outcome, thus, finding meaning can lead to positive adjustment to divorce (Bevvino & Sharkin, 2003).

Divorce has been classified as one of the most traumatising life events in modern society (Amato, 2010). Divorce often leads to distress, anxiety and grief. Individuals who have been divorced are at high risk of psychiatric illness including suicide, alcoholism, homicide and physical illness. Although research on divorce has focused on the negative outcomes on both adults and children, Veevers (1991) has observed that divorce can provide an opportunity for growth if the individual finds meaning in the marital dissolution. The search for meaning may differ according to gender, as men and women seek to find meaning in the divorce in different ways, making the impact of divorce a gender function of the perception of marriage (Bevvino & Sharkin, 2003).

According to Bevvino and Sharkin (2003), ‘finding meaning’ after divorce is a function of the meaning of divorce. Individuals with high levels of psychological well-being are likely to seek positive meaning after divorce. These findings have been criticised on the basis that they do not explain the nature of the meaning ascribed to divorce adjustment. Meaning has also been reported to be related to years of separation, initiator status and divorce (Steiner et al., 2015). This implies that the period of separation, having been initiated or not, and high levels of disentanglement, are related to finding meaning in the divorce experience. When controlled for its unique contribution to psychological well-being, meaning was found to have a predictive power over and above other predictor variables. Bevvino and Sharkin (2003) concluded that finding meaning is an important variable in predicting positive post-divorce adjustment.

2.8. Chapter summary

Marriage has been considered to be the culmination of any romantic relationship. Because of that, it has been regarded as a model for raising children. Divorce has been viewed as the antithesis of family and societal development. The traditional nuclear family has always considered men as being the head of the household and women playing a subsidiary role. With the advent of democracy in South Africa and the changes in the family and labour laws and gender equality, women have acquired equal status to that of men. This has made it difficult for men who experience divorce to adjust positively. Divorce has been considered to be a stressful process that begins well before the official divorce order is granted and ends well after the marital dissolution, and it comes with considerable ramifications for men, women and children. A number of factors have been considered to mediate the effect of divorce, including personal factors, namely beliefs and attitudes, attributions, personal resources, initiator status, infidelity and spiritual well-being. Relational factors including attachment style, new relationships and child custody contribute towards the way in which individuals adjust to divorce. Social support and cultural factors are some of the moderators of the divorce experience. Divorce can be as a result of social causation or social selection, which makes it either a crisis in which individuals adjust immediately after the divorce or it, can result in chronic strain. Gender and race also contribute to how individuals experience divorce. The next chapter discusses the theoretical framework of the study, namely Symbolic Interactionism and its application to men and their adjustment to divorce.

CHAPTER 3

SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

3.1. Chapter overview.

This chapter explores the origin and development of symbolic interaction, focusing on the historical emergence, basic assumptions, concepts and explanations. Throughout the chapter empirical work associated with marriage and divorce is examined. An evaluation and critique of the theory concludes the chapter.

3.2. Background of symbolic interactionism.

The dawn of industrialisation and urbanisation in the 20th century resulted in new social problems that prompted scholars of that time to develop a theoretical perspective for the systematic study of human social behaviour (Benzies & Allen, 2001). This perspective, later labelled symbolic interactionism, has its roots in social psychology (Pascale, 2011). Some of the intellectual antecedents of symbolic interactionism are found in the ideas of 18th century Scottish moralists and 19th century German idealists (Benzies & Allen, 2001). The Scottish moralists expanded the concept of *I* and *me*, providing the foundation for symbolic interactionism, while the German idealists contributed the idea that individuals construct their world based on their perception of the world (Meltzer, Petras & Reynolds, 1975).

Symbolic interaction also draws from Darwin's theory of evolution, which posits that the environment is dynamic and that all behaviours are determined by adapting to the environment (Charon, 2010; Hier, 2005). Also emerging from evolution theory is that each individual and the environment is inextricably linked through reciprocal relationships (Hier, 2005). This explains why ideas and behaviours are distinctive processes that continue to

change, depending on how the individual interprets the environment (Denzin, 2007; Pascale, 2011).

The idea of understanding covert and overt behaviour is a concept that was drawn from behaviourism by symbolic interactionism (Benzies & Allen, 2001). What differentiates symbolic interactionism from behaviourism is how covert behaviour is defined and interpreted and the meaning that the behaviour has as opposed to measuring observable behaviour (Hier, 2005). Pragmatists who had a strong influence on the development of symbolic interactionism held the view that the meaning of an object resides in the behaviour directed at the object and not the object itself. Thus, knowledge is acquired through active communication of the meaning of the object and as a consequence, *truth* is fluid (Benzies & Allen, 2001).

Symbolic interactionism emerged as a counter to laboratory research and rigid behaviourism, which posited that social life can only be understood through the conception of the stimulus – response (Benzies & Allen, 2001). Its philosophical roots are premised on the concept that individuals and society are interdependent and inseparable (Pascale, 2011). The individual and society are constituted through shared meaning. Based on these assumptions, symbolic interaction shifted the aim of social research from empirical reality to a deeper understanding of symbolic practices that make a shared meaning possible (Denzin, 2007; Hier, 2005; Pascale, 2011).

The creation of symbolic interactionism can also be credited to the work of Max Weber, as he influenced the breakaway from a physical science model to a social science model (Hier, 2005; Pascale, 2011). Weber did not agree with the focus of physical science that empirical finding should be reduced to social laws. According to Weber, laws are only conceptual aids for understanding reality and cannot be used to understand reality (Denzin,

2007). Knowledge of cultural process is possible only by understanding the meaning that the specific and shared reality holds for those involved (Weber, 1978).

Marriage and divorce, like any other form of human social behaviour, is symbolic in nature and involves language and thought. Couples use symbols and exist in a world of meaning created by these symbols. Different symbols have different meanings depending on cultural learning, as meaning is transmitted in cultural settings (Denzin, 2007; Hier, 2005). The meanings associated with men and divorce has been of interest to symbolic interaction and social science researchers for a very long time and will continue (Longmore, 1998; Pascale, 2011). To this end, symbolic interactionism has been viewed by researchers as more of a conceptual framework than a real theory because of the vagueness in some of its major concepts. For example, a concept like the *self*, which is central to the theory, is too unrefined to allow for precise assertions to be made. This implies that the self and identity have been the basis of the symbolic interactionism framework from the times of Charles Horton Cooley, William James, John Dewey, William Isaac Thomas, and George Herbert Mead (Pascale, 2011).

3.2.1. Historical perspective. Symbolic interactionism was popularised by American sociologists who were interested in social psychology (Longmore, 1998; Scheff, 2005). They emphasised the face to face interaction of the individual and society. Although it has a short history, its philosophical roots can be traced back to the Scottish Enlightenment era, including Smith (1723-1790), Hume, (1711-1776) and Ferguson (1723-1816), who viewed society as an interconnection of individuals (Denzin, 2007). These pragmatic philosophers appreciated that human interaction was the basis of human adaptation and thereby diverted from the human science (biological) approach. The concepts of communication, sympathy, imitations, habits and customs influenced the development of this approach (Longmore, 1998; Stryker, 1981, 2008).

The Scottish pragmatic philosophers also emphasised empiricism, which is the importance of observations and critical assessments of experience over religious revelation and philosophical speculations (Stryker, 1972, 1980, 2008). Secondly, these philosophers emphasised the recognition and importance of social change and social organisation in the development of morals (Denzin, 2007; Hier, 2005). Thirdly, they acknowledged the changes brought about by industrialisation while recognising that these changes may not result in individual happiness (Benzies & Allen, 2001). Finally, they highlighted the need for new paradigms that were independent of religion, to explain social change (Longmore, 1998; Pascale, 2011).

Following the Scottish philosophers came the American pragmatic philosophers, including Cooley, James, Dewey, Thomas and Mead (Benzies & Allen, 2001; Pascale, 2011). They viewed the mind and mental processes as instruments open to scientific investigation. As pragmatists, they emphasised the importance of nature, the social world and the emergence of the individual (Meltzer et al., 1975; Stryker, 2008). For example, James (1915) saw the *self* as a multifaceted concept that is a product of interaction with others. According to James this has two implications, firstly, it means the *self* is a social product and secondly, each person could be said to have many *selves*. That is, a person can be a parent, student and athlete at the same time. Pragmatic philosophers believed that the potential for human nature can only be actualised in interaction with others, which is why they were concerned with identifying the conditions necessary to maximise human potential (Longmore, 1998; Snow, 2001).

3.2.1.1. John Dewey (1859-1952). Dewey (1922) stressed the uniqueness of individuals to think and adjust within their environment. He conceptualised thinking as a process of defining objects in one's world, outlining the possible conduct, imagining the possible consequences of alternative conduct, eliminating conduct that is not likely to achieve

the desired results and selecting the conduct that will lead to the desired goal (Longmore, 1998; Pascale, 2011). According to Pascale (2011), Dewey did not believe in what he referred to as ‘spectator knowledge’ – “the idea that knowledge is based on the accurate observation and representation of existing realities” (p. 79). To him, knowledge production was an active process. Thus the *truth* is not a property of an idea; rather it is a process of becoming. The truth is *made* true through everyday interactions.

Contemporary scholars working with what is now called symbolic interaction drew a lot of influence from the work of William James and John Dewey (Scheff, 2005; Strauss, 2005). Concepts such as the looking glass self, significant symbols and lines of action by Charles Horton Cooley, George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer, can be traced to the works of James and Dewey. Cooley agreed with James that society nurtures human behaviour and creativity in social settings. Thus, society provides the conditions under which individuals develop (Denzin, 2007). Cooley’s work is linked to that of Mead through an analytic thread as they tried to find a methodologically satisfactory solution for the problem of the separation of the subject and object (Helle, 2005; Pascale, 2011).

3.2.1.2. Charles Horton Cooley (1864-1929). Cooley developed the concept of ‘sympathetic introspection’, which influenced contemporary symbolic interaction at the Chicago School (Longmore, 1998). According to Cooley, society can be viewed as a relationship among personal ideas. He posited that individuals use sympathetic introspection empathically to imagine situations as others see them. Cooley saw the individual and the society as two sides of the same coin, that is to say, one cannot exist without the other. To illustrate this connection, Cooley coined the concept ‘looking glass self.’ This concept is about how individuals perceive themselves in the eyes of others and the self-feeling that goes with the perception. It was Cooley’s belief that the *self* develops in the context of small groups in which face-to-face interaction is likely to occur (Meltzer et al., 1975; Scheff, 2005).

While most of Cooley's work was focused on the emergence of the *self*, Thomas (1931) was interested in the social psychological processes involved in redefining the *self*. He emphasised the importance of both the subjective and objective facts of experience (Denzin, 2007; Pascale, 2011). Mead, a philosophy professor at the University of Chicago from 1893 – 1931, referred to himself as a 'social behaviourist' to distinguish himself from main stream behaviourism that focused on stimulus-response. He is credited with the systematic review of the above concept, subsequently providing a framework for symbolic interaction (Denzin, 2007; Hier, 2005; Pascale, 2011).

3.2.1.3. George Herbert Mead (1863-1931). In his attempt to separate the subject from the object, Mead extended what was previously a province of psychology into sociology (Helle, 2005). Mead viewed himself as both a pragmatist philosopher and a social behaviourist scientist (Mead, 1962). Both fields marked his contribution to symbolic interaction. Expanding on the work of James' concept of multiple selves, Mead argued that institutional order is real only as far as it is realised in performed roles (such as parent, student and athlete) (Pascale, 2011; Rousseau, 2002).

According to Mead, the concept of personality can be viewed from the *self* that is structured into two phases; the *I* (how one see others) and the *me* (how one imagines that one is seen by others), which develops through language and behaviour when the individual views himself as an active object (Gallant & Kleinman, 1983; Gusfield, 2003; Stryker, 1972; Vom Lehn & Gibson, 2011). The individual becomes an object when he views himself from the standpoint of the other. This makes behaviour an outcome of the conversation between the *I* and the *me*. The *me* being the internalised organised attitudes of others, that is, social roles, while the *I* represent the response of the individual to these attitudes (Rousseau, 2002; Stryker, 2001).

The self is a reflective process, that is, it is an object unto itself. For Mead (1934), it is the reflexivity of the self that distinguishes it from other objects and from the body. For the body and other objects are not objects unto themselves as is the self:

It is perfectly true that the eye can see the foot, but it does not see the body as a whole. We cannot see our backs; we can feel certain portions of them, if we are agile, but we cannot get an experience of our whole body. There are, of course, experiences which are somewhat vague and difficult of location, but the bodily experiences are for us organized about a self. The foot and hand belong to the self. We can see our feet, especially if we look at them from the wrong end of an opera glass, as strange things which we have difficulty in recognizing as our own. The parts of the body are quite distinguishable from the self. We can lose parts of the body without any serious invasion of the self. The mere ability to experience different parts of the body is not different from the experience of a table. The table presents a different feel from what the hand does when one hand feels another, but it is an experience of something with which we come definitely into contact. The body does not experience itself as a whole, in the sense in which the self in some way enters into the experience of the self (Mead, 1934, p. 136).

Mead was also influenced by the work of John Dewey on the need for the researcher to examine the 'lines of interaction' in order to effectively understand the order of social interactions (Rousseau, 2002). As a pragmatic philosopher, Mead argued that understanding interactions is related to the truth. To this end he believed that *truth* and *meaning* must be understood relative to purposeful action, rather than as an expression of relationships of correspondence to reality (Denzin, 2007; Stryker, 2008; Vom Lehn & Gibson, 2011). Mead makes it clear that he was a social behaviourist through his conceptualisation of interaction as a linear trajectory and his focus on social behaviour (Helle, 2005). He theorised how

individuals fit lines of interaction together by distinguishing between what he referred to as *gestures* and *significant gestures* or *significant symbols* (Mead, 1962; Pascale, 2011). Mead introduced the idea of *gestures* with his famous example of the dog-fight:

Dogs approaching each other in hostile attitude carry on such a language of gestures. They walk around each other, growling and snapping, and waiting for the opportunity to attack The act of each dog becomes the stimulus to the other dog for his response. There is then a relationship between these two; and as the act is responded to by the other dog, it, in turn, undergoes change. The very fact that the dog is ready to attack another becomes a stimulus to the other dog to change his own position or his own attitude. He has no sooner done this than the change of attitude in the second dog in turn causes the first dog to change his attitude. We have here a conversation of gestures. *They are not, however, gestures in the sense that they are significant.* We do not assume that the dog says to himself, "If the animal comes from this direction he is going to spring at my throat and I will turn in such a way." What does take place is an actual change in his own position due to the direction of the approach of the other dog. (Mead, 1934, pp. 42-43).

Mead came up with some fundamental concepts that form the basis of symbolic interaction. *Social act* is the behaviour displayed by an individual stemming from an impulse requiring some adjustment to another individual. The social act involves two individuals and occurs over time, thereby making it possible for the appearance of *gestures*. A gesture has meaning that appears at a later stage of a social act. The gesture becomes a *significant symbol* when they mean the same to the sender and the receiver. Thus, language is a significant symbol as it is a social act. Language becomes a system of shared meaning, which implies that language is a system of shared behaviour (Mead, 1934; Pascale, 2011; Stryker, 2001).

According to Mead, interaction between individuals is more often in response to the interpretation of gestures – significant gestures or significant symbols. Significant gestures are about using symbols for a specific meaning; it therefore becomes ‘language’ (Mead, 1962). Any significant gesture will be interpreted as a significant symbol if it indicates future lines of action (Blumer, 2004; Mead, 1962). According to Mead, interaction is based on three key points, firstly, it is always conducted in anticipation of future behaviour, secondly, interaction is based on the imaginative rehearsal of the prospective action of the other; thirdly, interpretation is self-directed not evoked. This implies that action is not a simple reaction but an intentionally chosen action (Blumer, 2004; Pascale, 2011).

Mead (1934) distinguished the *self* from the body. According to him the *self* is reflexive and the body is not. What distinguishes human beings from animals is their ability to communicate through significant symbols, particularly words that are directed at both the self and others. Therefore symbols (that is, words), are defined behaviourally (Mead, 1934). Mead proposed that communication gives rise to the understanding of the self as it does to the understanding of the existence of society. The significant symbols mean the same to the sender and the receiver and indicate similar future phases of activity for both the receiver and the sender. Communication is thus important to see the world from others’ perspectives, which enables individuals to create, describe, transform and evaluate themselves just as they describe and evaluate other objects (Denzin, 2007; Hier, 2005).

Language is communication through *significant symbols*, and it is through significant communication that the individual is able to take the attitudes of others toward himself. Language is not only a *necessary mechanism* of mind, but also the primary social foundation of the self:

I know of no other form of behaviour than the linguistic in which the individual is an object to himself When a self does appear it always involves an experience of another; there could not be an experience of a self simply by itself. The plant or the lower animal reacts to its environment, but there is no experience of a self When the response of the other becomes an essential part in the experience or conduct of the individual; when taking the attitude of the other becomes an essential part in his behaviour, then the individual appears in his own experience as a self; and until this happens he does not appear as a self (Mead, 1934, p. 195).

3.2.2. Contemporary perspectives. Contemporary symbolic interactionism has been divided into two main schools. Firstly, the situational symbolic interactionists, popularly known as the Chicago School, popularised by Herbert Blumer, a former student of Mead, and which emphasises the emergence of the *self* in face-to-face interaction (Helle, 2005; Hier, 2005). The second school is the social structural interactionists, otherwise known as the Self Theory, or the Iowa school, popularised by Manford Kuhn (1911-63), who was a strong critic of the Chicago School. This school examines the structural features of social groups and the consequences of role relationships for individuals (Denzin, 2007; Pascale, 2011).

3.2.2.1. The situational approach. According to the Chicago School, the subject of interaction is naturally occurring as it views behaviour as indeterminate, unpredictable, impulsive and spontaneous (Longmore, 1998; McPhail & Rexroat, 1979; Strauss, 2005). The focus of study is on the way in which individuals construct reality through the way they define their situation. This approach was a direct response by Blumer to the macro orientation of sociology, which downplays individual differences while emphasising socially constructed roles like family roles, work roles and gender roles (Hier, 2005; Pascale, 2011). Blumer (2012) provided the first attempt to categorise the basic assumptions of symbolic interaction. To that end he suggested that individuals create and re-create roles depending on the

situation. This means that different situations demand different responses and different individuals may respond to the same situation in a different way.

Blumer (2012) criticised survey and quantitative methodologies for their unrealistic nature, as they ignored individual realities by focusing on group actions. According to Blumer, group action was a result of individual lines of action fitting together through role taking. He advocated for the sensitisation of concepts as opposed to empirically defining variables as a guide to social research. Blumer's view was that society was a process and not a structure and reality was a social construction. The situational approach has been critical of the functional and conflict theories that dominated mainstream sociology in the 1960s (Benzies & Allen, 2001; Longmore, 1998; Snow, 2001).

Blumer, drawing from the influence of Mead's teachings, developed a distinction between a personal *I* and the social *me*. He referred to the on-going conversation between the *I* and *me* as 'self-indication', which is an internal conversation (Hier, 2005; McPhail & Rexroat, 1979). For the individual to be able to answer questions that they pose to themselves, they must take the position of another person looking at them. The individual then shapes behaviour in response to the imagined perspective. According to Blumer (1986), the basis of any social interaction is the process of representation. Individuals represent themselves to themselves, as they think about themselves and other objects of consciousness. Blumer delimited three types of objects; these are firstly, the social object – parents, teachers and students, secondly, the abstract object – trust, compassion and loyalty and thirdly, the physical object – buildings, parks and desks. Physical spaces are not just a backdrop of social interaction, they are an important part of interaction, as individuals assign both symbolic value and forms of agency to them (Benzies & Allen, 2001; Smith & Bugni, 2006).

Self-indication is a mental process that takes place when an individual asks himself questions like, Should I say this? Will this joke be funny? Will I look foolish if I do this? It helps the individual to create meaningful, purposeful action; to adjust to circumstances that emerge and to imagine how others might react (Blumer, 1986). In line with Dewey and Mead, Blumer argued that self-indication involves multiple selves. For example, an individual may shape his behaviour at school as a teacher, which will be different from his behaviour at home as a father, spouse or lover. Blumer believed that identity changes depending on the context, which he named identity-in-use. These changes in identity imply that socially constructed realities are likely to be characterised by multiple and changing meanings rather than fixed and shared ones (Smith & Bugni, 2006; Snow, 2001). This implies that symbolic interaction is more concerned with the multiplicity of realities within any situation (Pascale, 2011; Prasad, 2005)

Blumer posited that the empirical world is always interpreted through human imagery (Blumer, 1986). For Blumer, objects are social products that emerge out of social interaction. This implies that meaning is based on how individuals make the object meaningful. This does not necessarily make Blumer a radical constructionist – one who believes that the world exists only in terms of the conceptions and images that individuals hold of it – he argued that the world can and does ‘talk back’ (Helle, 2005; Hier, 2005). The world does not bend to individual conceptions of it; the task of social science is to test the images and concepts that individuals use by scrutinising the empirical world (Pascale, 2011; Smith & Bugni, 2006).

In 1937 Herbert Blumer coined the phrase ‘symbolic interaction’ in reference to ongoing research regarding the use of significant symbols at the University of Chicago (Blumer, 1986; Platt, 1996). To date it has become a powerful theoretical framework in both social psychology and sociology. It has thrived in a number of schools and genres, none of

which represents a homogenous intellectual presence. Some researchers have infused symbolic interaction with feminist and race theories, while several distinctions have been institutionalised as per particular schools of symbolic interaction (Pascale, 2011).

The Chicago School was the first symbolic interaction school; emerging when social science researchers at the University of Chicago moved away from laboratory research towards a more naturalistic mode of inquiry (Travers, 2001). These researchers included the likes of Herbert Blumer, Robert Park, Nels Anderson and Everett Huges (Prasad, 2005; Strauss, 2005). Their research studies were mainly ethnographic case studies and tended to incorporate functionalist analyses. After the Second World War, the Chicago School transformed and rejected generalisability as an analytic goal and focused mainly on internal validity and the production of theory (Smith & Bugni, 2006; Stryker, 2008; Travers, 2001). The focus was now on sympathetic introspection, participant observation and interviews that are the basis of current ethnographic studies (Pascale, 2011; Platt, 1996).

3.2.2.2. *The structural approach.* This approach, also known as the Self Theory or the Iowa School, was developed at the University of Iowa by Manford Kuhn (1911-1963) and his students (Longmore, 1998; Pascale, 2011). It was in direct opposition to the situational approach as it drew from the behaviourist aspects of the Chicago School and the physical sciences, advocated for survey research, objective measurements and quantitative analyses (Longmore, 1998; Meltzer et al., 1975). According to Kuhn (1964), behaviour is deterministic and the *self* and society is structured as opposed to the processional conception of situational symbolic interactionism. Just like situational symbolic interaction, structural symbolic interaction emphasised that divorce is a social construct. Thus, individuals learn about marital dissolution and how to interpret the divorce experience within a cultural context (Platt, 1996; Prasad, 2005).

While situational symbolic interactionists attempted to make sense of society by increasing understanding of past events, Kuhn focused on building testable, predictive explanations of universal social behaviour (Benzies & Allen, 2001; Stryker, 2008). According to Kuhn (1964), the ideas of symbolic interactionism can be defined and tested using empirical methods. He saw the *self* as a pattern of relatively stable attitudes that are a result of social roles. The Iowa School used quasi-experimental designs, statistical analyses and secondary analysis of survey data, ethnomethodology, tests and laboratory procedures (Benzies & Allen, 2001; Gallant & Kleinman, 1983).

The structural symbolic interactionism approach places special emphasis on the location of social structures as the primary force influencing the social construction of reality, including the conceptions and experience of marital relationships (Gallant & Kleinman, 1983; Prasad, 2005). To emphasise the influence of primacy in the social structure on marital relationships, Lauman, Gagnon, Michael and Michaels (1994), used a national probability survey to indicate that individuals are likely to marry people who share the same kind of background, including race, age, ethnicity, education and income. In trying to understand individual differences in experience, the structural symbolic interactionists will probably ask if the difference can be reflected differently in the structure of the *self*. There has been limited research using the structural symbolic interaction approach compared to the situational symbolic interaction on marital relationships (Lauman et al., 1994; Longmore, 1998).

Kuhn incorporated positivist features into Blumer's concepts— in particular standardisation and hypothesis testing, and aspects that could be operationalised, resulting in a quantitatively driven deterministic view of human behaviour (Denzin, 2007; Longmore, 1998). After the death of Kuhn, Carl Couch continued with the quantitative approach to symbolic interaction. Couch fused the positivist approach with pragmatic philosophical

foundations, thereby emphasising the study of dyadic relationships over time (Pascale, 2011). The Iowa School was later subdivided into four schools with each school connected to Mead and Couch's empiricism but with distinctly different themes (Katovich, Miller & Hintz, 2002).

One of the schools to come out of the Iowa School was the Illinois School, led by Norman Denzin with a version of symbolic interaction that is combined with postmodern and post structural theories (Katovich et al., 2002; Travers, 2001). The focus of the Illinois School was to divert symbolic interaction towards cultural studies. It underscored the reflexive nature of interaction and extended the concept to researchers, who must 'role-take' in order to understand the interactions, objects, events and context (Pascale, 2011). This allows symbolic interaction at the Illinois school to have a double hermeneutic; one that involves the relationship and interpretation among participants, and the other involving the relationship of the researcher to, and interpretation of, the social context and interaction (Helle, 2005).

3.3. The Nature and Basic Assumptions of Symbolic Interactionism

The symbolic interaction practiced today is based on Cooley's looking-glass self and Blumer's interpretation of Mead's theories (Smith & Bugni, 2006). Symbolic interaction is grounded within three fundamental tenets. The first is that individuals act towards objects (these can be in the form of physical objects – trees or chairs; other people – mother, spouse, children; institutions – schools or government; or activities of others), based on the meanings that these objects hold for them (Blumer, 1986). This means that people, individually or collectively, do not respond to objects directly but they attach meaning to them and act on the basis of that meaning. For example, a dog may be a frightening animal to one person but a pet to another. Each individual will act on the basis of the meaning it holds for that person. Based on this perspective, an individual and the world are separate but the world is interpreted

through shared symbols (language) of meaning. Thus, the world is interpreted through symbolic interaction (Benzies & Allen, 2001; Pascale, 2011). The second perspective is that meaning is generated over time through human interaction (Blumer, 1986). This implies that the source of meaning in symbolic interactionism, is universal and neither individually determined nor intrinsic to the object.

The final perspective is that meanings are modified during interaction through an interpretative process (Blumer, 1986). For an individual to derive meaning from an object they have to involve an interpretative process. This begins by the individual communicating with himself through a process of self-indication so that he can regroup, suspend or transform the meaning (Denzin, 2007; Helle, 2005; Hier, 2005). Symbolic interaction has a nondeterministic perspective, one that says that an individual has the freedom to make choices as long as the choice is constrained within societal and cultural boundaries (Smith & Bugni, 2006). For example, in the process of filing for a divorce, the individual may think that marriage is a sacred institution that needs to be preserved.

Based on these assumptions, symbolic interaction is an interpretive framework that depends on the procedural techniques of analytical induction, inductive logic and empirical evidence in localised contexts (Helle, 2005; Smith & Bugni, 2006; Pascale, 2011). The common modes of study in symbolic interactions include participant observations, ethnography, life history, focus groups, unstructured interviews, as well as visual and textual media analyses (Pascale, 2011).

According to Blumer (1986), few researchers have accepted the importance of the first perspective, that is, that individuals act towards objects on the basis of the meaning that those objects hold for them. This perspective has been ordinarily ignored or set aside in most social science research (Hier, 2005; Snow, 2001). The tendency is to treat human behaviour

as a product of several factors that impact upon human beings, focusing rather on the factors that produce such behaviour (Blumer, 1986; Strauss, 2005). Thus, the focus of research is on such factors as attitudes, stimuli and conscious or unconscious motives to account for human behaviour. In the process, the meaning of objects is either bypassed or incorporated into these factors. This implies that if a researcher is to say that a type of behaviour is the result of certain factors, then the concern for meaning that the individual places on the objects is disregarded in the process. Alternatively, meaning may be seen as an initiating factor or a neutral link between the initiating factor and the behaviour. In both cases meaning either disappears into the causal factor or is a mere transmission link that can be ignored in favour of the initiating factors (Benzies & Allen, 2001; Lopata, 2003).

In contrast to the above, Blumer's (1986) symbolic interactionism emphasised the importance of meaning as central to individual behaviour. This implies that if meaning towards objects is ignored in a study of how individuals act towards objects, then the research has falsified the behaviour under study. To bypass meaning in favour of factors that are alleged to have produced that behaviour will be to neglect the role that meaning plays in shaping such behaviour (Stryker, 2008; Snow, 2001). This perspective makes it difficult to differentiate symbolic interaction from other approaches that share this premise. The second perspective that refers to the source of meaning then clarifies this differential (Blumer, 1986).

Historically there are two ways to account for the origin of meaning. The first regards meaning as basically intrinsic to the object (Blumer, 1986). For example, a chair is a chair in itself. In this instance, meaning merely has to be disengaged by observing the object that has meaning. Therefore, there is no process of extracting the meaning; all that is needed is to recognise that there is an object. The other approach to account for the origin of meaning is the psychical accretion that is brought to the object by the individual for whom the object has

meaning (Stryker, 2008). The psychological accretion is an expression of constituent elements of the person's psyche. These constituent elements include feelings, sensations, ideas, motives, memories and attitudes. Meaning is therefore the psychological expression of the object (Lopata, 2003; Strauss, 2005).

Symbolic interactionism views meaning differently from the two historical accounts of the origin of meaning (Blumer, 1986). Firstly, symbolic interaction does not regard meaning as emanating from the intrinsic object that has meaning, and secondly, it does not view meaning as originating from the psychological elements of the individual. For symbolic interaction, meaning originates from the process of interaction between individuals (Blumer, 1986; Helle, 2005; Hier, 2005). Therefore, the meaning of the object for an individual grows out of the ways in which other individuals act towards the person with regards to the object. In short, the activities of other individuals operate to define the meaning of the object for the individual (Pascale, 2011). This implies that for symbolic interaction, meanings are social products that are a result of how individuals interact.

The third perspective that meanings are modified during interaction through interpretive processes (Blumer, 1986), differentiates symbolic interactionism from other approaches in the sense that although meaning is formed in social contexts, it is a mistake to think that the meaning is used by the individual as it was derived. The use of the information by the individual has to follow an interpretive process (Benzies & Allen, 2001; Longmore, 1998; Smith & Bugni, 2006). The interpretive process follows two distinct steps; firstly, the individual has to indicate to himself regarding the object that he has to act upon, then make an indication to himself about the meaning of the object. In so doing the individual is engaged in an internalised social process. After the internalised communication with the self, interpretation becomes a matter of handling meanings. By this the individual selects, checks,

suspends, regroupes and transforms the meaning in light of the situation. Interpretation should therefore not be viewed as an automatic application of established meanings but as a formative process in which meanings are used and revised as instruments of the guidance and formation of the action (Longmore, 1998; Meltzer et al., 1975; Scheff, 2005; Snow, 2001).

Blumer (1986) argued that the three basic assumptions of symbolic interaction are necessary to lead an analytic scheme of human society and individual conduct that is distinct. This distinctive scheme is guided by basic ideas that Blumer referred to as 'root images.' The root images refer to, and depict, the nature of the following matters; human groups, social interaction, objects, the human being as an actor, human action and the interconnection of action. Collectively these root images represent the way in which symbolic interactionists view human society and individual conduct (Benzies & Allen, 2001; Snow, 2001; Vom Lehn & Gibson, 2011).

Manis and Meltzer (1978) provided seven principles of symbolic interactionism. Firstly, distinctive individual behaviour and interaction are carried out through a medium of symbols and their meanings; secondly, the individual becomes humanised through interaction with others; thirdly, human society is mostly usefully conceived as consisting of individuals in interaction; fourthly, individuals are active in shaping their own behaviour; fifthly, consciousness involves interaction with oneself; sixthly, individuals construct their own behaviour in the course of its execution and lastly, an understanding of individual conduct requires the study of the actors' covert behaviour.

3.3.1. The nature of human group life. Human group life consists of individuals engaging in actions that can be performed individually or collectively as they deal with successive situations confronting them (Snow, 2001; Vom Lehn & Gibson, 2011). Individuals can also act on behalf of, or as a representative of, an organisation or group of

others. Blumer (1986) argued that this somewhat redundant characteristic is fundamental to symbolic interaction, as human society or groups *exist in action* and must be seen in action. The picture of human groups as existing in action should be the point of departure for any scheme that intends to treat and analyse human society empirically (Denzin, 2007; Gusfield, 2003). Any scheme that conceptualises society in a different way will be diverting from the complexity of ongoing activities that constitute group life. This is true of the two dominant conceptions of society in contemporary social psychology, which is culture and social structure (Hier, 2005; Stryker, 2008).

The concept of culture, whether defined as custom, religion, norms, tradition, or rules, is clearly derived from what people do. The same is true for social structure, whether it is defined as status, social class, prestige, authority, or role, refers to the relationships derived from how people act towards one another (Blumer, 1986; Denzin, 2007). The life of any human group is an ongoing process of the activities of individual members, through this complex process an organisation or structure is formed (Stryker, 2008). Therefore, as a cardinal principle, any research of society using symbolic interaction must respect that human society consists of individuals engaging in action. To be consistent the study must be consistent with the nature of the social action of individuals (Blumer, 1986).

3.3.2. The nature of social interaction. For it to be called group life, individuals must be interacting with other members of the group (Blumer, 1986). The actions of the individuals are predominately in response to one another or in relation to one another. While this is an agreeable definition of human society, social interaction is usually taken for granted and treated as if it has little significance in its own right (Gusfield, 2003; Pascale, 2011; Vom Lehn & Gibson, 2011). This is evident in most social science researches that treat social interaction as merely a medium through which determinants of behaviour pass through to

produce the behaviour. Most social science studies ascribe behaviour to factors such as cultural norms, status, role demands, attitudes, motives and hidden complexities, without the need to account for social interactions (Blumer, 1986).

By ascribing behaviour to social factors, social interaction is a mere forum through which social psychology determinants move to bring about given forms of human behaviour (Vom Lehn & Gibson, 2011). It should be noted that social interaction is an interaction between individuals and not between factors imputed into them. To this end, symbolic interactionism does not merely provide an impetus to social interaction; it recognises the importance of social interaction in its own right (Blumer, 1986; Pascale, 2011). This is because social interaction is recognised as a process that forms human behaviour instead of being just a means for the expression of human behaviour. Individuals' interactions have to take into account what each of them is doing. The actions of others enter as positive factors in the formation of another's action or conduct; this may lead them to either abandon, check or suspend their action. The individual has to fit his own line of activity in some manner into that of others (Hier, 2005; Lopata, 2003; Strauss, 2005).

In his penetrative analysis of symbolic interaction, Mead identified two levels of social interaction in human society. These are 'the conversation of gesture' and 'the use of significant symbols.' Blumer later termed them 'non-symbolic interaction' and 'symbolic interaction' respectively. Blumer defined non symbolic interaction as that action performed when one responds directly to the action of another without interpreting that action and symbolic interaction as the interpretation of the action (Gusfield, 2003; Helle, 2005). Non-symbolic interaction is apparent in reflex actions. In social interactions individuals engage in plenty of non-symbolic interactions when they respond immediately to the actions of other's

body movements, expressions and tone of voice. When they seek to understand the meaning of the actions of others then that becomes an interaction at the symbolic level (Blumer, 1986).

Through the analysis of the presentation of gestures and the meaning of these gestures, Mead saw the importance of symbolic interaction (Pascale, 2011). A gesture signifies a part of, or an on-going expression of a larger act. For example, refusing to be intimate with a marriage partner can be an indication of loss of interest in intimacy or a declaration of marital disengagement. Things like requests, orders, and refusals are gestures that convey to the individual who recognises them, an idea of the intentions of forthcoming actions by the individual who presents them. The individual who presents the gestures advances them as an indication of what he is planning and what he expects from the respondent and the respondent responds in a way that indicates what the gesture means to them. If the gesture has the same meaning for both, it implies that the two have an understanding.

From the forgoing discussion it can be concluded that gestures make three distinct actions possible (Blumer, 1986). Firstly, they direct the intended person to do what has to be done; secondly, they reveal the plan of the person who is making the gesture and thirdly, they signify the joint action that the initiators and respondents have to take. For example, a divorce summons signals to the respondent that the initiator wants out of the marriage, secondly, that the initiator is planning a divorce and lastly, that the initiator expects both to agree to the divorce. If there is a misunderstanding at any stage of these lines of meaning, communication becomes ineffective, interaction is impeded and the formation of joint action is blocked. Blumer (1986) noted that for communication to be effective parties in the interaction must take each other's role, that is, to indicate to the other what he is to do. The initiator has to

make that indication from the standpoint of the respondent. Such mutual role-taking is indispensable for communication and effective symbolic interaction.

According to Blumer (2012), the most important part of symbolic interactionism is group interaction. Interaction is central to group life. Such interaction can be in the form of individuals acting towards others, thereby engaging in social interaction. The social interaction usually takes place at the symbolic level, acting as an individual, collectively or representing others, while taking into account the actions of others as they form their own actions. This is achieved through a dual process in which individuals indicate to others how to act and interpret the actions made by others. It is through this process that individuals come to fit their actions to one another and to form their own behaviour. Through symbolic interactionism, group interaction has been made a necessary formative process and not merely an arena for the expression of pre-existing factors (Hier, 2005; Snow, 2001).

3.3.3. The nature of objects. According to the symbolic interactionism perspective, the 'worlds' that exist for individuals and their groups consist of 'objects' and these objects are products of symbolic interaction (Blumer, 1969, 1986). As was highlighted in previous sections, these objects can be grouped into three categories for the sake of convenience. These are: physical objects – houses, trees or parks; social objects – father, teacher, pastor, friend and abstract objects – values, loyalty, philosophical doctrine or moral principles. The nature of the object depends on the meaning the individual assigns to the object. This meaning will set the way in which the individual views the object, acts on the object, and talks about the object. Similar objects may have different meanings for different people. It is important to note that the meaning of an object depends on the way the object has been defined by those who interact with the individual. Thus, meaning is collective for that group (Vom Lehn & Gibson, 2011; Snow, 2001).

Based on the definition of object, the implication is that the individuals' environment consists of only those objects that the individual recognises and knows. The nature of this environment is set forth by the meaning that the objects have for those individuals (Blumer, 1986). This does not necessarily mean that individuals living side by side have the same environment. Individuals or groups living in the same spatial location may have different environments. This is the reason that Blumer preferred the word 'world' to 'environment' to designate the settings, the surroundings and the texture of things that confront them. Thus, in order to understand the individual, it is important to understand their world of objects (Denzin, 2007; Hier, 2005; Smith & Bugni, 2006; Snow, 2001; Straus, 2005).

By nature objects are a result of an individual's social creation as they are formed and arise out of the definition and interpretation process that takes place through interactions. The object's meaning is formed, learned and transmitted through a process of social indication. This places group interaction at the symbolic interaction level and responsible for forming, sustaining and transforming the objects of their world and giving them meaning (Pascale, 2011). Thus, objects have no fixed meaning. Their meaning is sustained through indications and definitions that people make of the objects. This makes it apparent that objects in all categories undergo change in meaning (Strauss, 2005). For example, divorce was a different object in apartheid South Africa than it is currently. From the symbolic interactionism standpoint group life is a process in which objects are being created, affirmed, and transformed and set aside. Group life and the actions of individuals necessitate change to take place in the world of objects (Vom Lehn & Gibson, 2011).

3.3.4. The human being as an acting organism. From the above discussion, two conclusions emerge regarding symbolic interactionism. Firstly, that the individual must have a make-up that fits the nature of social interaction and secondly, that the individual does not

only respond to others at a non-symbolic level but makes indications to others and in turn, interprets their indications (Vom Lehn & Gibson, 2011). This was summed up by what Mead referred to as the *self*, meaning that an individual can be an object of his own creation. For example, he can see himself as a parent, a lover, or a student. Thus, he becomes an object unto himself and acts towards himself and guides himself in his actions towards others on the basis of the type of object he is. Objects emerge out of the process of social interaction and the *self*, like any other object, emerges from social interaction (Helle, 2005; Smith & Bugni, 2006).

Mead used the concept of role-taking in trying to trace how the self as an object emerges out of social interaction (Blumer, 1986), and suggested that for this to be possible the individual has to see himself from the outside world. This is only possible if the individual places himself in the position of others and acts towards the self from the position of another (Denzin, 2004). The individual can take the role of discrete individuals, which he referred to as the *play stage*, through that of discrete organised groups, which he referred to as the *game stage*, to that of the abstract community or the *generalised other*. It is through role-playing that the individual is able to address himself. For example, a young boy 'playing father' is able to address himself in the same way that his father would (Blumer, 1986; Meltzer et al., 1975).

Expanding on Mead's concept of the *self*, Blumer (1986) holds that the *self* enables the individual to interact with himself. This interaction is not between two psychological systems as in the id and ego in the Freudian style, it is in the interaction between emotions, feelings and needs or between ideas. It is a social communication in which the individual addresses himself and responds to the address (Hier, 2005; Lopota, 2003). For example, when an individual wishes to spur himself onto success or when an individual is angry with

himself, he talks to himself. These instances exist to indicate that self-interaction is a process of making indications to oneself. It is a lifelong process that an individual has to live with as they consider one or another matter or observe things occurring. For an individual to be conscious about anything he has to indicate it to himself (Gallant & Kleinman, 1983; Helle, 2005).

The forgoing discussion paints a picture of a human being as an organism that interacts with itself through a social process of making indications to itself. This can be considered to be a divergent position from the social science approach that is dominating contemporary social psychology, which views human beings as complex organisms whose behaviour is in response to factors interacting with the organisation of the organism (Pascale, 2011; Vom Lehn & Gibson, 2011). Under this shared view in contemporary social psychology, the human being is only seen as *social* in the sense of either being a member of the social species, or of responding to others, or of having being incorporated within the organisation of its group (Helle, 2005).

The symbolic interactionist view of human nature is different from that of contemporary social psychology in that it views individuals as *social* in the sense that as an organism, a human being emerges from the social interaction with itself by making indications to itself and responding to such indications (Vom Lehn & Gibson, 2011). Therefore, the individual is not just an organism that responds to the play of factors on or through it, it is seen as an organism that has to deal with what it observes. It engages in the process of self-indication when it observes the object and gives it meaning and uses that meaning as a basis for directing its action. In this sense, the human being who is engaging in self-indication is not merely responding but is also acting (Hier, 2005; Pascale, 2011).

3.3.5. The nature of human action. Human action is given a distinctive character by its capacity to make indications to itself (Blumer, 1986). This implies that the individual is faced with an environment in which he has to interpret in order to act, as opposed to a world in which he has to respond because of his organisation. The individual has to cope with a situation in which he has to act, make meaning of others and map his own line of action after making such interpretation. This implies that the individual does not merely respond to factors operating through him but he has to construct and guide his action (Hier, 2005; Pascale, 2011; Vom Lehn & Gibson, 2011).

This view of human nature in that the individual directs his action by making indications is in contrast to the current view of human nature in psychology and social science in general, which ascribes human action to an initiating factor or a combination of such factors (Snow, 2001; Strauss, 2005). Thus, action can be traced to the attitudes, motives, unconscious complexities and situational demands. Through this link to the initiating factor, human action is regarded as fulfilling a scientific task. Yet this approach disregards the process of self-interaction through which the individual manages his own world and constructs his action. It ignores the fundamental process of interpretation in which the individual notes and assesses what is presented to him and through which he maps out lines of overt behaviours prior to execution (Blumer, 1986; Helle, 2005; Snow, 2001).

It is important to note that an individual action consists of a process of taking into account various things before deciding on a line of action based on the interpretation (Blumer, 1986). These things that should be taken into account include the individual's wants, wishes, and objectives, available means to achieve the action, the anticipated action of others and the likely result of taking such action. The individual's action is guided by the process of indication and interpretation (Benzies & Allen, 2001; Snow, 2001). As part of this

process a line of action may be started, stopped, abandoned or postponed. The action may be confined to planning, or to the inner life of reverie, or if initiated, may be transformed (Blumer, 1969). Basically, human activities consist of meeting a flow of situations in which they have to act, in which their action is built on the basis of what they note, how they assess and interpret what they note, and what projected lines of action they map out. This process is not fixed by ascribing action to some kind of factor that is thought to initiate the action and propel it to its conclusion (Vom Lehn & Gibson, 2011).

3.3.6. Interlinkage of action. As noted above, group life consists of, and exists in the fitting of lines of action of each individual by the members of the group. This conceptualisation gives rise to joint action. Thus, a societal organisation is a sum total of the conduct of the different acts of its diverse participants. Although the joint action is made up of the diverse component acts, it is different from any one of them or its mere aggregation. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The whole has a distinct character in its own right, one that lies in the articulation or linkage, apart from what may be articulated or linked. Thus, the joint action may be identified as such and may be spoken of and handled without having to break it down into separate acts that comprise it (Denzin, 2007; Hier, 2005). This is what happens when referring to such joint action like marriage, divorce, or parenting. Social science research has been dominant in precisely studying the joint actions of, and the collections of joint action (Longmore, 1998).

Joint action of the collectivity is an interlinkage of the separate acts by the individuals (Blumer, 1986; Snow, 2001). Failure to recognise this will lead one to overlook the fact that a joint action always has to undergo a process of formation. The formation process takes place through a dual process of designation and interpretation. The individuals have to guide their respective acts by forming and using meanings (Gusfield, 2003; Longmore, 1998; Pascale,

2011). Based on this, there are three observations on the implications of interlinkage that constitute joint action (Meltzer et al., 1975). Firstly, joint action can be repetitive and stable. Thus, stable environments exist in the form of recurrent patterns of joint action. When individuals act towards one another they know in advance how the other individual will react. This suggests that individuals share a common and predetermined meaning of what is expected in the action of participants. The second observation refers to the extended connection of actions that make up so much of group interaction (Denzin, 2004; Helle, 2005).

The third observation is that any instance of joint action, whether newly formed or long established, has necessarily arisen out of the background of previous actions of the participants (Meltzer et al., 1975). A new kind of group action will never come into existence separate from such a background. Individuals involved in the formation of a joint action always bring to the formation the world of objects, the set of meanings and the schemes of interpretation that they already possess. Thus the new joint action always emerges out of, and is connected within, a context of previous actions (Gusfield, 2003; Helle, 2005; Hier, 2005).

3.4. Conceptualisation of Symbolic Interactionism

Blumer's three core principles of symbolic interaction, that is firstly, that people act towards things on the basis of meaning; secondly, these meanings are derived through social interaction and lastly, that meaning is transformed and managed through an interpretive process (Blumer, 1969, 1986) have been referred to as the core premises of symbolic interaction (Meltzer et al., 1975; Snow, 2001). Although there is variance in the perspectives of how social scientists view symbolic interactionism, these three principles remain dominant in explaining its defining essence (Denzin, 2007; Hier, 2005; Lindersmith, Strauss & Denzin, 1988; Vom Lehn & Gibson, 2011).

These core principles are an expansion of what George Mead had noted; that the key to understanding how individuals view the world and communicate with one another is through symbols (Carter & Fuller, 2015; Serpe & Stryker, 2011). The concept of the *self* was Mead's demonstration of this idea. The self helps to explain how an individual forms his identity through interaction with society. It is divided into two components, the *I* representing the active, spontaneous and creative individual and the *me*, which is considered to be the socialised individual through interaction with significant others, and is thus seen as the object. Mead's idea of the *self* and significant others are the primary variables determining how individuals think, signal and interpret (Carter & Fuller, 2015; Henslin, 2010). Mead added that individuals are not able to think without symbols and these symbols are provided by society along with language (Henslin, 2010).

Blumer's conceptualisation becomes the basic introduction of the symbolic interactionism perspective. Just like many other seminary conceptual and theoretical underpinnings, it focuses on some aspects of social action while disregarding others (Stryker, 2008; Snow, 2001). Symbolic interactionism makes meaning and interpretation the central focus of human interaction. All empirical and analytic focus has been on these two main concepts. This diverts attention from other concepts related to both symbolic interactionism and social psychology such as culture, religion and race. This restricted focus on meaning and interpretation has resulted in criticism of Blumer's three principles (Carter & Fuller, 2015; Fine, 1992; Snow, 2001; Stryker, 2008)

As a corrective measure against Blumer's conceptualisation of symbolic interaction and his focus on meaning and interpretation, Snow (2001) suggested broadening these concepts in order to capture what he referred to as the 'glossing over' of the cornerstones of

Blumer's perspective. A detailed analysis of the principles identified by Snow (2001) follows.

3.4.1. The principle of interactive determination. The principle of interactive determinism holds that the understanding of focal objects of analysis cannot be fully achieved by only attending to the qualities presumed to be intrinsic to them (Snow, 2001). These objects of analysis can be in the form of self-identities, roles, identities, social movement or even organisational practices. The principle of interactive determinism requires the consideration of the interconnectedness of the relationships in which they are embedded. Understanding these objects is only possible through their interactions, whether real, virtual or imagined. This is because the individual, society or the object did not exist prior to the interaction (Benzies & Allen, 2001; Stryker, 2008).

The principle of interactive determinism is an important concept in the theorisation and study of roles, self-concepts, deviance and negotiation processes (Denzin, 2007; Gusfield, 2003). Goffman (1967, p. 2) holds that '.....a proper study is not the individual and his psychology, but rather syntactical relations among sets of different persons mutually present to one another.' By considering interactive determinism as a fundamental concept of symbolic interaction does not ignore its importance to the generality of both social psychology and sociology research. This principle has arguably been considered as the core principle of social science research (Hier, 2005; Snow, 2001). What makes interactive determinism a fundamental principle of symbolic interaction is due to two factors. Firstly, it makes interaction dynamics and processes problematic and therefore topics of observation and analysis, in social psychology research, interactions are either glossed over or are a given. Secondly, it is for the sake of understanding the other principles of symbolic

interactionism, as they are embedded in, and emerge from interactive determinism (Snow, 2001; Stryker, 2008).

3.4.2. The principle of symbolisation. This principle signifies the process in which events; conditions, individuals, aggregations and other features of the environment take on a particular meaning, becoming objects or orientations that produce specific feelings and actions (Snow, 2001). Although this principle is the cornerstone of Blumer's symbolic interaction as it focuses on meaning and the interpretative processes, it is problematic in two ways. Firstly, symbolisation is a continuous problematic concept for social actors and secondly, individuals are always engaged in the process of interpretative work and making sense of the social environment as they encounter it throughout their daily lives (Denzin, 2007; Stryker, 2008).

Blumer's theory is problematic in the sense that it fails to recognise the extent to which symbols and the meaning they convey are embedded in, and reflective of, existing cultural and organisational contexts and systems of meaning (Benzies & Allen, 2001; Smith & Bugni, 2006). According to Goffman (1974), treatment of frames of meaning and symbolisation can provide a concrete amplification and illustration, as it can be constrained and embedded culturally. Goffman used the frames as the object of analysis and attempted to isolate the basic frameworks of understanding available in society for making sense of events and to organise the specific vulnerabilities to which these frames of reference are subject. The frames can be either fleeting or enduring, making them subject to historical change rather than static cultural entities (Goffman, 1981). Moments and situations occur in social life in which the relevance of fit of extant cultural frames is likely to be ambiguous, open to question and thus contestable, as is often the case in such contexts, as collective behaviour and social movements (Goffman, 1974; Gusfield, 2003; Snow, 2001).

When integrated, the above observations indicate that the issue of meaning and interpretation associated with the principle of symbolic interaction has both structural and constructionist dimensions (Stryker, 2008). This makes it more complicated than Blumer's three principles of conceptualisation suggest (Snow, 2001). This raises fundamental questions as to whether individuals act towards objects in terms of the meaning of the objects or how they are symbolised. The question should be, how does symbolisation become taken for granted, become *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990), or become *spacious present* (Mead, 1938), or the *primary frameworks* (Goffman, 1974)? What kind of social environments, relational connections or social processes facilitate making meanings routine? Lastly, the conditions and ways in which meanings can be contested or debated resulting in the symbolic basis of action becoming problematic and calling for new interpretations and framings, should be understood.

3.4.3. The principle of human agency. The principle of human agency highlights the active, wilful character of individuals (Snow, 2001). According to this principle, individuals do not behave in a controlled manner or merely respond to directives or codes of internal or external processes. In symbolic interactionism, structural, biological and cultural directives are not dismissed in the explanation of behaviour, but rather viewed as predisposing factors on action without necessarily determining the character of that action. Thus, social actions take into account the structural and cultural constraints, including roles, values and social expectations, which impose on situations in which they find themselves in the course of developing their respective lines of action (Gusfield, 2003; Helle, 2005; Smith & Bugni, 2006).

In everyday life, structural and cultural constraints and the behaviours they prescribe are taken for granted and made routine (Blumer, 1969; Bourdieu, 1990; Cohen, 1989; Mead,

1938). When this occurs the principle of agency, be it at the individual level or group level, fades into the background as routinely cultural and structural patterns take over. When the routine behaviour is disrupted or when the goal directed behaviour is thwarted, then the issue of agency is likely to spring to the surface as individuals attend to some kind of remedial action. It is at this point that prospects of collective agency action move to the centre stage and take the form of collective behaviour (Benzies & Allen, 2001; Stryker, 2008; Vom Lehn & Gibson, 2011).

In summary, similar to other principles, the principle of agency is not only of interest to symbolic interactionists, as it is common in other areas of social psychology and sociology, both theoretically and substantively. The parallel issues of agency and action, particularly in relation to structure, have long been problematic for sociology (Dawe, 1978; Giddens, 1979). What makes the principle of agency an orienting concept of interactionism is that work within traditional interactionism has tended to accent and focus on those niches and crevices of social life in which matters of interactions and action are at play. The fundamental concepts of symbolic interactionism contrast with much sociological analysis, which is skewed in the direction of structural and cultural constraints (Benzies & Allen, 2001; Blumer, 1986; Vom Lehn & Gibson, 2011).

3.5. Methodological Orientation of Symbolic Interactionism

Blumer (1969) considered symbolic interactionism as a ‘down-to-earth’ approach to the scientific study of group life and individual behaviour. He saw the natural world and individual life as its empirical world. Thus, symbolic interactionism lodges its problem in human group life and individual behaviour, conducts its research and derives its interpretation from such naturalistic environments. For example, when studying religious cult behaviour, the symbolic interaction researcher has to go to the religious cult and observe the

members as they carry on with their lives. Similarly, if the researcher has to study fatherhood or parenting in general, the researcher has to observe the participants in their daily life and trace their chronological history and life experiences.

The methodological principle of symbolic interaction is that of direct examination of the social world (Benzies & Allen, 2001; Stryker, 2008). This implies that it recognises that such direct examination permits the researcher to meet all of the basic requirements of empirical science, which are firstly, to confront an empirical world that is available for observation and analysis; secondly, to raise abstract problems with regard to that world; thirdly, to gather necessary data through careful and disciplined examination of that world; fourthly, to unearth relationships between categories of such data; fifthly, to formulate propositions with regard to such relationships; sixthly, to weave such propositions into a theoretical scheme and lastly, to test the problems, the data, the relationships, the propositions and the theory by renewed examination of the empirical world (Denzin, 2007; Stryker, 2008; Vom Lehn & Gibson, 2011).

The symbolic interaction researcher should not be misled by the mythical belief that to be scientific it is necessary to shape one's study to fit a pre-established protocol of empirical inquiry (Blumer, 1986), such as adopting the working procedure of advanced physical science, or forcing the study into the mould of laboratory experimentation, or imposing a statistical or mathematical framework on the study. Symbolic interactionism recognises that a genuine mark of empirical science is to respect the nature of its empirical world (Gusfield, 2003). An empirical study seeks to fit its problems, its guiding concepts and its theories to that world. It believes that this determination of problems, concepts, research techniques and theoretical schemes should be through the direct examination of the actual empirical social world rather than by working with a simulation of that world or with a pre-

set model of that world (Denzin, 2004; Hier, 2005). For symbolic interaction, the nature of the empirical, social world is to be discovered, to be dug out by direct, careful and probing examination of that world.

It is through this methodological stance that symbolic interaction provides answers to the frequent charge that it does not lend itself to scientific research (Stryker, 2008). This accusation emanates from those who advance the ideas that symbolic interactionists should be judged based on a scientific inquiry. The critics ask how symbolic interactionism will operationalize concepts such as the *self*, or what appropriate device can be used to measure the interpretation of gestures. Although some symbolic interactionism researchers take them seriously and try to meet these requirements, these demands are unnecessary. The concepts and propositions of symbolic interactionism are derived from the direct examination of the empirical social world. Their value and validity are to be determined in that examination and not in seeing how they fare when subjected to the alien criteria of an irrelevant methodology (Blumer, 1986).

Just like any methodological premise, the underpinning concepts of symbolic interaction that Blumer (1969) referred to as the 'root images', must be empirically tested for validity for it to be considered a scientific methodology. Blumer argued that the test for symbolic interaction should be performed in the empirical social world as the premises are a declaration of the nature of that world. Thus, the test for the validity of symbolic interactionism should be a direct examination of actual group life and individual behaviour and not be reduced to a laboratory experiment. This makes the premises of symbolic interactionism simple and easily tested and validated merely by observing what goes on in the social world (Carter & Fuller, 2015).

Symbolic interaction can be performed using different methodologies; the most common include observation studies, field surveys, case studies, interviews and life histories. The methodological implications of symbolic interactions to the study of human group life and individual behaviour can be divided into four central concepts (Blumer, 1986; Denzin, 2007; Hier, 2005). Firstly, people, individually or collectively, are prepared to act on the basis of the meanings of the objects that compromise their world; secondly, the association of people is necessarily in the form of a process in which they are making indications to one another and interpreting each other's indications; thirdly, social acts, whether individually or collectively, are constructed through a process in which the actors note, interpret and assess the situations confronting them and lastly, the complex interlinkage of acts that compromise organisation, institutions, division of labour and networks of interdependency are dynamic and not static affairs.

3.5.1. Acting on the basis of meaning. The methodological implication of acting on the basis of meaning signifies that if a researcher wishes to understand the actions of individuals, the researcher has to see their objects as they see him (Blumer, 1986). The failure by social scientists to see objects from the perspective of the participants, or substituting them with their own meaning, has been the biggest error committed by most researchers (Benzies & Allen, 2001; Snow, 2001). Individuals act toward objects based on the meaning that these objects have for them and not on the basis of the meaning that these objects have for the researcher. The deliberate neglect of such methodological considerations by researchers is due to two reasons. Firstly, the researcher considers himself an expert in the use of scientific techniques and he sees the provisions in the given theory as sufficient tools to study unfamiliar territory. Secondly, the emphasis placed on meeting the requirements of objectivity implies seeing things from the position of a detached outside observer (Denzin, 2007).

A researcher who is not familiar with the world of the individual may find it difficult to identify objects that comprise such a world. This implies that the researcher has to place himself in the position of the individual. Taking up the role of the other is a skill that has to be cultivated if the researcher is to be effective. By and large the training of most social science researchers today does not cultivate such skills (Pascale, 2011). In order for one to identify the central object of concern, one must have a body of relevant observations. These observations are rarely those yielded by such research procedures as questionnaires, surveys, polls, scales or the setting of pre-designated variables. There are narrative accounts from individuals on how they have acted towards the object, and how they refer to the object in the conversations with other members of their own group (Helle, 2005; Hier, 2005).

The last methodological implication of acting on the basis of meaning is that researchers, like other human beings, are slaves to their preconceived meaning of objects (Denzin, 2004), and are thus prone to assuming that others see objects in the same way that they do. Researchers have to guard against taking things for granted and should focus on deliberately testing their preconceived ideas of the object. When considering that individuals act towards objects on the basis of the meaning the object has for them, the need for a methodology that takes that into account becomes important (Benzies & Allen, 2001; Stryker, 2008; Vom Lehn & Gibson, 2011).

3.5.2. Group life as a process. The methodological implication of seeing group life as a process in which individuals interact in different situations, indicate lines of action to each other and interpret the indications made by others, implies that the individual behaviours have to be understood in light with the lines of action of the others with whom they interact (Blumer, 1986). Two important implications can be reached by these assumptions. Firstly, the questioning of the validity of most approaches currently in use in social science research.

These approaches treat social interaction as a mere medium through which determining factors produce behaviour. By so doing they ignore the fact that social interaction is a formative process in its own right. Thus, individuals in interaction are not just giving expression to such determining factors in their lines of action but are directing, checking, bending and transforming their lines of action to what they encounter in the actions of others (Benzies & Allen, 2001).

The second methodological implication of seeing group life as a process is the lack of merit in compressing the process of social interaction into a special form (Denzin, 2004). Such compression has dominated the literature. It can be seen in the old-fashioned notion that social interaction is a process of developing 'complementary expectations.' It is also illustrated in the contrary premise that human society is organised in terms of a conflict process. It can also be seen in the popular view that human interaction follows the principle of 'game theory' (Gusfield, 2003, Hier, 2005). Through observing human interaction one can see that human participants, individually or collectively, meet one another's action in varying forms. They sometimes tolerate, cooperate, conflict and are sometimes indifferent to one another. Human interaction is therefore not organised in the form of a special type of interaction but has variety (Blumer, 1986).

As individuals make indications to one another and interpret these indications in line with the situation, this implies that the process of social interaction is not constrained to a single form (Blumer, 1986). The goal of research on social life is therefore to ascertain what form of interaction is in play instead of imposing some preset form of interaction. In trying to identify this form, the researcher has to go back and forth until the interaction at play is achieved by chance. The result is that the form of social interaction is a matter of empirical discovery and not fixed in advance (Denzin, 2004; Helle, 2005).

3.5.3. The construction of social acts. The perspective of symbolic interactionism is that social action consists of individuals and collective activities and has a number of significant methodological consequences. It forms the observation of social action from which researchers derive categories used to give conceptual order to the social make-up and social life of human group life (Blumer, 1986). Each of the categories represents the form of social action (Snow, 2001), for example, the priest, the chief, the president, the father. The categories are meaningless unless they are seen in terms of social action. In this strict sense, social action should be the primary subject matter in social science research, the subject matter from which it should begin and to which it should return with its schemes of analysis (Vom Lehn & Gibson, 2011).

The concept that social action is constructed by the actor through a process of noting, interpreting and assessing things, and of mapping out a prospective line of action, is fundamental to how social action should be studied (Blumer, 1986). In order to treat and analyse social action, the researcher has to observe the process through which it was constructed. This is not possible using a scheme that relies on the premises that social action is merely a product of pre-existing factors that play on the acting individual. A different methodology is necessary, a methodology that will lift the actor out of a position of being a neutral medium in the play of determining factors, to the status of an active organiser of the action.

3.5.4. Molar parts of human society. Human society – institutions (marriage and family included), class systems, division of labour and others, constitutes what has been largely regarded as the domain of sociology (Hier, 2005). The tendency has been to see these large complexes as entities operating in their own right with their own dynamics. Each is usually seen as a system, composed of given parts of interdependent arrangement and subject

to the play of mechanisms that belong to the system as such. Given this general view, individuals in the unit of human society are logically merely media in the play and expression of forces of the system itself (Blumer, 1986).

The perspective of symbolic interactionism regarding these large societal organisations is that they are molar units in a different way. It sees them as an interlinkage of individuals in their respective actions (Snow, 2001). The series of such actions taking place at different points constitutes the organisation of the given molar unit. Like other approaches, the symbolic interactionism skeletal description of an organisation will be the same. However, symbolic interactionism takes a different route when considering the organisation as an organisation of action. While social science approaches view organisational activities as principles or systems, symbolic interaction seeks explanations of the way in which the individual participant defines, interprets and meets the situation at their respective points. The linking of such information leads to the formation of a complex system (Benzies & Allen, 2001; Smith & Bugni, 2006).

While the organisational systems and principles may identify the limits beyond which there are no series, they do not explain the form and nature of such series. The methodological view of symbolic interactionism is that complex organisations should be seen, studied and explained in terms of the process of interpretation engaged in by the acting participants as they handle the situations in their respective positions in the organisation (Blumer, 1986). Blumer added two noteworthy points that have bearing on the shift from seeing the organisation as a self-contained matter with its own principles, to seeing it as an interlinkage of the activities of individual actors.

The first noteworthy point is that stable and recurrent forms of joint action do not carry on automatically in their fixed form but have to be sustained by the meanings the

individuals attach to the type of situation in which the joint action reoccurs. Underneath the rules and norms of relationships there are two concurrent processes taking place, one in which the individuals are defining each other's perspective, and at the individual level, through self-interaction when the individual is redefining his perspective. The results of this dual process will determine the fate of the rules and norms. The second noteworthy point is the need to recognise that joint action is temporally linked with previous joint action. Thus, the designations and interpretations through which people form and maintain their organised relations are always, to some extent, a continuation of the past. The methodological position of symbolic interactionism is to pay particular attention to the historical linkage of what is being studied (Benzies & Allen, 2001; Blumer, 1986; Longmore, 1998).

3.6. Evaluation of Symbolic Interactionism

Like any theory, symbolic interaction has been evaluated and criticised for its flaws. Stryker (1980) summarised the five basic criticisms of symbolic interaction: firstly, the key concepts do not lend themselves to sound theory; secondly, the concepts are impossible to operationalize, thus few testable propositions can be formulated and scientific explanation is rejected in favour of intuitive insight; thirdly, by emphasising reflexive thought, symbolic interaction underplays the importance of emotions and the unconscious social life; fourthly, the emphasis on actor's definitions, the immediate situation of action and the emerging character of organised behaviour minimises the facts of social structure and the importance of large-scale features of society and leaves the perspective incapable of dealing adequately with those large scale features and lastly, the neglect of social structure constitutes an ideological bias.

According to Longmore (1998), although valid, these criticisms apply to particular viewpoints of symbolic interactionist practitioners. That is, some of them are directed to one

school of symbolic interactionism and not the other. For example, while situational symbolic interaction ignores the social structure, structural symbolic interactionism emphasises social structure. There is nothing in the framework that requires either conceptual vagueness or the rejection of scientific explanation. Burke (1980) argued that definitions in a research process begin as an abstraction and then develop precision as the researcher expands his understanding of the process being examined.

Symbolic interactionism has been criticised for its focus on the individual at the expense of the community and in this process fails to show the bigger picture (Stryker, 2008). As Longmore (1998) put it; “symbolic interactionists are criticised more often for examining the trees so closely that they fail to show us what the forest looks like” (p. 55). This focus on detail ignores the power differences and the role of social institutions has made symbolic interaction attract a lot of criticisms from its detractors. Symbolic interaction directs attention to the concrete details of human life as seen through the eyes of the individual experiencing it, thereby failing to connect the individual with their connections in the social structure. Typical factors of location in the social structure such as gender, race, age, ethnicity and sexual orientation are usually downplayed in symbolic interaction research (Denzin, 2007; Vom Lehn & Gibson, 2011).

Some of the criteria on which symbolic interactionism can be evaluated include testability, internal consistency, parsimony, adequacy of explanation and the ability to predict behaviour. As for testability, only structural symbolic interaction meets the criterion as it states concepts and tests hypotheses using statistical analysis. Situational symbolic interaction does not view the lack of testability as a weakness, as it is not the major aim of its approach (Hier, 2005; Smith & Bugni, 2006). It is more concerned with the understanding of specific behaviour than the generation and testing of hypotheses. Similarly, it is easier to demonstrate

internal consistency from the structural perspective than from the situational perspective, as the relationships are more clearly outlined. The lack of internal consistency is not surprising, as symbolic interactionism has been described as a framework for guiding research rather than as a thoroughly formulated theory (Longmore, 1998; Stryker, 1980).

As for parsimony, symbolic interaction provides an understanding of behaviour as it has few concepts that attempt to explain the wide range of behaviours. When it comes to the adequacy of explanation, symbolic interaction provides adequate explanation for behaviour. This is achieved through its focus on the relationship between the individual and society, thereby highlighting the social construction of behaviour. When evaluating symbolic interaction along the lines of predictive usefulness, situational symbolic interaction is not interested in prediction. It is based on the nature of self that says behaviour is impulsive and unpredictable, making it impossible to predict (Longmore, 1998; Stryker, 1980, 2008).

One of the advantages of symbolic interaction in the study of divorce that is overlooked when assessing its adequacy in terms of predictability and parsimony, is that it is devoid of moral judgement. This is part of the philosophical heritage of the Scottish Enlightenment that played a part in defining symbolic interaction. The emphasis has been on the importance of observation and critical assessment of experience over religious revelation and philosophical speculation, as well as the importance of social change in the development of morals (Denzin, 2007; Longmore, 1998).

3.7. Conclusion

Symbolic interactionism is aimed at understanding human behaviour in relation to society through the use of symbols (which form meanings), as they consequently shape attitudes and behaviours. The theory emerged in the mid-twentieth century from a number of influences. Although Herbert Mead is regarded as the founding father because he developed

the self-concept as one of the ways to understand how symbols are negotiated through the interaction of individuals and society, Herbert Blumer developed the concept of Symbolic Interactionism. Blumer adopted Mead's ideas of and proposed a number of principles to investigate social interaction as it relies on the use of symbols. Human interaction such as marriage, divorce, or fatherhood, can be understood sufficiently using this perspective, as individuals use symbols to communicate and attach different meanings to them. While the meaning of marriage in the black South African community is regarded as a socially approved union of two adults (male and female), through a proper ceremony, divorce symbolises a breakdown of such a union and is thus not approved socially. Despite its limitations, symbolic interactionism provides an important perspective to study social life. The next chapter will discuss Erikson's Psychosocial Theory as a complementary theoretical framework for the study.

CHAPTER 4

ERIKSON'S PSYCHOSOCIAL THEORY

4.1. Chapter Overview

This chapter will explore the development of Erikson's (1963) theory of psychosocial development. The development of personality, stages of development, lifespan identity development, generativity and development and the evaluation of the theory follows.

4.2. Introduction to the Psychosocial Theory.

In order to understand Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, understanding his biographical profile is important as it illuminates the basis of the development of his theory (Fleming, 2008; Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 2008). Erikson was born in 1902 in Germany to a Jewish mother and an unknown Danish father as an illegitimate child. He resembled his father in appearance, blond and Nordic, which made him stand out among his Jewish friends. His failure to fit into the majority German society and even the minority Jewish community has been attributed to him having an 'identity problem', as evidenced by his unconventional lifestyle and his ideas about crises that individuals encounter at each stage of life (Fleming, 2008; Meyer et al., 2008; Sokol, 2009).

The young Erikson was a wanderer and travelled through Europe, became an artist and self-trained psychologist (Erikson&Friedman, 1999). It was through teaching art to American children who came to Vienna to study psychoanalysis that he met Anna Freud, which resulted in him becoming one of the few certified psychoanalysts without a medical degree (Fleming, 2008; Sokol, 2009). In 1933 after marrying Joan, he emigrated to America to escape fascism (Meyer et al., 2008). Erikson taught at some prominent universities and

intuitions in America, among them Yale, Berkeley, the Menninger Foundation and Harvard (Fleming, 2008).

Besides psychoanalysis, Erikson was also interested in cultural anthropology and he wrote a number of books with psychological and cultural themes. The term *identity crisis* stemmed from his research with war veterans (Fleming, 2008). He wrote several books, among his major works are *Childhood and society* (1950/1985); *Identity; Youth in Crisis* (1959/1980); *Young Man Luther* (1958) and *Gandhi's Truth* (1969). There are several characteristics of Erikson's experiences reflected in his works. For example, literature indicated that his special interest in identity is probably because he had several identity problems of his own (Fleming, 2008; Louw & Louw, 2007; McLean & Pasupathi, 2012; Meyer et al., 2008). He also frequently wrote about the influence of society on individual development as a reflection of his interest in cultural anthropology (Meyer et al., 2008). Erikson's work is considered to have literary value; it conveys a rich diversity of thoughts at the expense of scientific definitions (Sokol, 2009). This is a criticism that he acknowledged when he stated that ".....at times the reader will find me painting contexts and backgrounds where he would rather have me point to facts and concepts" (Erikson, 1985, p. 265).

4.3. The development of personality.

Erikson's process of human development is explained as a life span process comprising eight stages. These stages of development can only be understood by first understanding Erikson's thoughts on the basic principles of development and his conception of developmental crises, modes and rituals (Erikson, 1959, 1963).

4.3.1. The principle of development. Erikson's view of human development is that it is a result of two simultaneous and complex influences, that is, genetic and social factors (Schultz, 1990). To explain this complex influence, Erikson used the term *epigenetic*

principle, a concept that he derived from biology (Erikson, 1963, 1985; Meyer et al., 2008). The epigenetic principle defines an individual's characteristics as emerging at a certain age and in a particular, genetically determined sequence, in such a way that the individual constantly develops as a whole (Erikson, 1959). Development therefore takes place in both visible and non-visible ways. Although the epigenetic principle is purely biological, Erikson found it to be valid for all aspects of development, including behaviour and personality attributes (Louw & Louw, 2007; Meyer et al., 2008). He writes:

...anything that grows has a ground plan, and that out of this ground plan parts arise, each part having its time of special ascendancy, until all parts have arisen to form a functioning whole (Erikson, 1968, p. 92).

From the epigenetic principle, Erikson argued that each personality trait continues to develop even though the development may not be evident at a specific stage. This implies that each characteristic must respond to the change in other traits of the personality. In so doing the individual will be dealing with all the eight stages during the lifespan (Fleming, 2008; Sokol, 2009). Erikson also holds that social influence is always present in society and makes demands and offers opportunities for growth for the individual at the same time (Erikson, 1963). The demands and opportunities are in accordance with the developmental needs of the individual at a given stage. Through the eight stages of development Erikson asserts that personality development takes place from birth to old age. At a given age certain personality traits emerge while others continue to develop 'below the surface,' in line with the epigenetic principle (Erikson, 1966, 1985; Fleming, 2008; Meyer et al., 2008).

4.3.2. The developmental crises. According to Erikson (1963), the interaction between genetic development and social influence results in what he referred to as *developmental crises* at each stage of development. These development crises are as a result

of the needs, possibilities, expectations and opportunities that arise at each stage of development, thereby demanding two opposing outcomes. As the individual has to make a choice between two opposing developmental possibilities, it results in what Erikson referred to as developmental crises. The possibilities that each stage offers are implicit in the names he assigned to them (Fleming, 2008; Meyer et al., 2008). For example, the first stage is trust versus mistrust, meaning that a child learns from birth to trust or mistrust his environment. Thus, the crisis of either trusting or mistrusting must be solved. Overindulging the child implies the child trusts too much and becomes passive and dependent, while mistrust leads to cynicism (Erikson, 1959, 1963; Sokol, 2009).

At each level of development Erikson identified what he referred to as *basic strength* and *core pathologies* (Erikson, 1950). Basic strengths emerge as a result of the successful resolution of the developmental crisis at any stage of development. Core pathology, which is the opposite of basic strength, is a result of the individual having failed to successfully resolve developmental crises. Thus, *hope* is the basic strength for the first stage (trust versus mistrust) and *withdrawal* is the core pathology (Erikson, 1963; Louw & Louw, 2007; Meyer et al., 2008). Crane (2005) posited that Erikson's theory qualifies as stage theory in the same way as Piaget's or Kohlberg's theories, as the stages refer to qualitatively different behaviour patterns; they concern general issues; they unfold in an invariant sequence and they are thought to be culturally universal. Although this may be true in general life, research has indicated that difficulties such as the loss of a job, the death of a loved one, or divorce may result in the individual's regression (Fleming, 2008; McLean & Pasupathi, 2012; Sokol, 2009).

4.3.3. Modes. The concept of mode plays a major role in Erikson's theory (Meyer et al., 2009). He used it not only to describe development during the first six years of life, but also as a function in his explanation of all the stages (Fleming, 2008; Meyer et al., 2008). It is

important to first understand that Erikson's view of the ego is similar to that of Freud, in that it is a predominant aspect of personality. The ego's function is to find a creative solution to the developmental crises that emerge as development occurs (Louw & Louw, 2007; Sokol, 2009). The success of the solution must meet the requirements and possibilities of the individual's social environment. This implies that human function is determined by the interaction between the individual's developing needs and possibilities on one side and the social environment on the other (Crane, 2005; Meyer et al., 2008).

In Erikson's theory the first six years of a child's life correspond with Freud's pregenital stage and involves specific characteristics such as sucking, biting and defecation, which are related to specific needs (Erikson, 1963). These behaviours are what Erikson named the *organ modes* because of the manner in which specific bodily organs function. They gradually form the basic pattern for the large variety of more general forms of behaviour forms that Erikson named *psychosocial modalities* (Erikson, 1963, 1982). The umbrella term that Erikson used to refer to both organ modes and psychosocial modalities is *modes*, as he regarded these modes as an important link between the child's psychosexual development and psychosocial and cognitive development throughout the lifespan (Marcia, 2002). For example, the organ mode of sucking is related to basic psychosocial modalities like endearing, friendly captivating behaviour, as well as the absorption of knowledge. Although the organ mode of sucking refers to the intake of food (sucking, biting, etc.), its psychosocial modalities have the function of 'taking in' people, love and knowledge (Erikson, 1963; Meyer et al., 2008; Sokol, 2009).

Erikson (1956, 1985) proposed a number of modes. The mode of incorporation is predominant in the first year of a child's life when the function of the child's mouth is the incorporation of food. This process begins as a passive activity and later becomes more aggressive as the child begins taking, grabbing and biting (Erikson, 1963). The psychosocial

modalities of incorporation relate to behaviours like receiving or taking in with the hands, eyes, mind and emotions as they follow the taking in of food. This mode of incorporation determines the type of attitudes and feeling the child associates with, and has a lifelong influence on behaviour. The incorporating behaviour and how the child manages the developmental crisis of the first stage (trust versus mistrust), determines the lifelong functioning of the individual in terms of their interaction with others, their views of the world, and their attitude towards knowledge and cognitive functioning (Erikson, 1963, 1982; Meyer et al., 2008).

The second mode is the mode of expulsion (Erikson, 1950, 1985). This mode is linked to the anal body zone. Just like feeding, the initial stage of expulsion is passive and later gains some control as the child acquires a degree of muscle control that enables him to have more control over his life than before (Fleming, 2008). Through the process of muscle control the child develops socially acceptable toilet habits. The anal function of holding and letting go becomes a prototype for a number of psychosocial behaviours such as holding on or letting go of people, holding onto something against others wishes or letting things happen passively (Erikson, 1982; Meyer et al., 2008).

The third mode is the mode of inclusion and intrusion (Erikson, 1950, 1985). This mode occurs between the ages of three and five and is associated with the sexual organs. According to Erikson, this mode has a wider function than just that related to the sexual fantasies of the child's sexual organs. It forms the foundation of the child's ability to move and coordinate movements (Erikson, 1982). At this stage the child can take care of more activities than before, some that may result in feelings of guilt. The associated psychosocial modes are aggressive forms of intrusion and the other extreme is the passive form of inclusion. The modes are prototypes of various forms of behaviours, such as interpersonal relations and sexual behaviour (Erikson, 1963, 1982; Sokol, 2009).

4.3.4. Rituals. Rituals or ritualisation is a behaviour that has been observed in animals (Fleming, 2008; Meyer et al., 2008). For example, when dogs meet they always sniff each other. Other animals and birds also have their rituals and they are instinctive and particular to an animal species. Rituals observed in human beings are often culturally determined and of a playful nature. These rituals allow individuals to express their feelings and urges in an acceptable way and provides them with some degree of security in a continually changing environment (Erikson, 1963, 1994; Sokol, 2009). There are different rituals at the different stages of development. During the infant stage the most common rituals take place in the morning between the mother and the child. These rituals consist mainly of eye contact, kissing, stroking and hugging. The infant responds through cooing sounds, smiling and intense staring (Erikson, 1966, 1977).

The second stage of development is characterised by rewards and punishment. These rituals involve the parents and the child scolding each other in a playful manner. Such a ritual serves the function of communicating to the child what is acceptable behaviour and what is punishable behaviour (Erikson, 1963; Fleming, 2008; Meyer et al., 2008). This usually occurs during toilet training. During the play age (approximately three to five years), children use rituals in the games that teach them to see things from others perspectives. At this age children want to play-act as they take different roles and begin wearing adult clothes. Ritualisation can also be observed in the educational process through the repetition of formal behaviour as they learn how to speak to teachers and other figures of authority or how to use certain methods in mathematical problem solving. Ritual sums up the constructs of Erikson's view of personality development in the first six years of an individual's life. The next section explores the life span development of personality (Erikson, 1977).

4.4. Stages of Development

Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development are based on the premise that each stage has a developmental crisis and that development is controlled by the epigenetic principle (Fleming, 2008; Meyer et al., 2008). Each developmental crisis emerges at a genetically predetermined age and in a fixed sequence. According to Erikson (1963), the concept of psychosocial development is that the holistic character of development has two implementations. Firstly, the crisis at each stage must be successfully resolved to make it easy to deal with future crises, if not it complicates the handling of ensuing crises. Secondly, if a crisis is not resolved satisfactorily at any given stage, the individual will always have the opportunity to resolve the crisis at a later stage. By so doing Erikson make a provision for spontaneous recovery of developmental crises, thereby giving the theory an optimistic view (Erikson, 1963, 1982; Meyer et al., 2008).

What follows is a detailed discussion of the psychosocial developmental stages suggested by Erikson (1950), illustrating significant relationships, psychosocial modalities, psychosocial virtues, maladaptations and malignancies.

4.4.1. Trust versus mistrust. The stage of trust versus mistrust covers the first year afterbirth and development is centred at the mouth and the intake of food. This mode has a psychosocial modality of incorporation (Erikson, 1950, 1985). The action of the infant moves from the passive to active intake of food as the teeth appear. The psychosocial incorporation also moves from passiveness to aggressiveness. At this stage of development the basic strength is *hope* – the idea that no matter how difficult life may be, eventually there is a positive outcome. On the other hand, lack of hope results in *withdrawal*. The major source of social interaction at this stage is the mother. Through the interaction with the mother the child learns both to trust and mistrust (Fleming, 2008; Meyer et al., 2008).

According to Erikson (1963), the child must achieve a healthy balance between trust and mistrust. Overindulging, like neglect, may result in problems for the infant (Meyer et al., 2008). The correct proportion of both trust and mistrust will lead to successfully dealing with other social interactions in the future. While the child experiences pleasure from the breast, he also needs physical attention to develop a sense of trust along with the development of the ego. In this process the infant learns that its needs will be met in an orderly way while also sensing the importance of delayed gratification (Erikson, 1963, 1982).

Through the development of trust the child learns to accept the absence of the mother without undue anxiety (Meyer et al., 2008). This concept has also been credited in the development of attachment theories between mother and child. While the infant learns to trust its mother it must also learn to trust itself. Through the process of self-regulation the child acclimatises to teething and learns how to suckle the breast gently (Fleming, 2008). Erikson (1963) emphasised the importance of the mother in the child's development of trust by saying that the mother not only meets the basic comfort and nurturing of the child but also builds confidence in herself. If the mother is anxious, she will transmit that anxiety to the child, which is unhealthy. A mother's tension has a corresponding effect of tension on the child, resulting in the child becoming withdrawn and lacking trust and hope (Erikson, 1963, 1982; Meyer et al., 2008).

The characteristics of individuals who have a high sense of basic trust, includes being able to ask others for help, being optimistic, focusing on the positive aspects of behaviour of others and begins with the assumption that individuals are generally good. On the other hand, individuals who have trouble asking for help or support, find it difficult to accept favours, gifts or compliments from others and have a general pessimistic worldview, have some of the characteristics of a low sense of trust (Hamachek, 1988).

4.4.2. Autonomy versus shame and doubt. The stage of autonomy versus shame and doubt takes place from the second year of the child (Erikson, 1963, 1982). Through physical development children are able to experiment with two psychosocial modalities; holding and letting go. The child faces struggles on how to control bodily function such as large and small motor skills, that is, walking and talking, feeding, as well as bowel functions. In most cases the child wants to do these things without adult assistance. The process of exercising this new-found muscle control leads the child to autonomy – if the action is performed successfully, or shame and doubt – if the performance was unsuccessful (Fleming, 2008; Meyer et al., 2008).

The healthy balance between autonomy and shame and doubt is the development of what Erikson referred to as *will power* – the ability to make independent choices and exercise control (Erikson, 1963, 1982; Meyer et al., 2008). The two possible outcomes of this stage are *will*, which is the basic strength, or *compulsion*, the core pathology. According to Erikson (1959), this stage is decisive in the manner in which an individual hates or loves, cooperates or is wilful, expresses freedom or suppresses others. It is from a sense of self control that individuals express self-esteem with a lasting sense of goodwill and pride and from a sense of over control from parents comes a loss of self-esteem and a lasting propensity for shame and doubt (Fleming, 2008; Meyer et al., 2008).

The virtue of hope gained from the previous psychosocial developmental stage crisis “leads inexorably into conflict between the rapidly developing self-will and the will of others from which the rudiments of will must emerge.” If *will power* “is built securely into the early development of the ego it survives, as *hope* does, in the evidences of its limited potency, for the maturing individual gradually incorporates a knowledge of what is expectable and what can be expected of oneself” (Erikson, 1964, p. 119). This implies that there is a need for self-will and self-restraint that will enable the individual to make free choice decisions that will

result in optimal functioning. This is the basis for acceptance of law and necessity, and the parameters within which one must function (Capps, 2009).

According to Hamachek (1988), some of the characteristic behaviours of individuals who have a high sense of autonomy could include enjoying making one's own decisions, being able to say 'no' without feeling guilty, being able to work well on their own with unstructured tasks and open-ended deadlines and being able to listen to their own inner feelings when deciding what is right and wrong, appropriate or inappropriate. On the other hand, individuals who prefer being told what to do and what is expected of them, who tend to allow others to dominate, or who have problems with unstructured and open-ended projects and tend to want things 'just so' as a way of avoiding others' disapproval and criticism, have a sense of shame and doubt.

4.4.3. Initiative versus guilt. The stage of initiative versus guilt approximately equates to the ages three to six years (Erikson, 1963, 1982; Meyer et al., 2008). At this stage development is about the child's increased movement and independence. The focus of stimulation at this stage is the genitals and the psychosocial modalities are inclusion and intrusion. The task at this stage is that the child acts on their initiative and can feel guilt about their behaviour. The child experiences conflict between his ability to intrude into other people's lives and his newly discovered realisation of moral rules, which encourages his identification with the same sex parent (Fleming, 2008). It is at this stage that conscience develops. The danger with this stage is that the conscience will develop too strictly or in a moralistic way (Erikson, 1959; Meyer et al., 2008).

The successful resolution of the developmental crisis of this stage lies in finding a balance between the childlike enthusiasm for doing and making things and the tendency to be too strict in self-judgement (Erikson, 1963, 1982; Meyer et al., 2008). Parents play an

important role in this realisation. The child's conscience can be dampened by its active development if parents instil guilt feelings by insisting too strongly on 'good' behaviour. Thus, the basic strength associated with this stage is a sense of *purpose* and its core pathology is *inhibition* (Erikson, 1959).

During this stage of initiative versus guilt, if a child is allowed to explore without boundaries and with too much initiative and too little guilt the child will manifest the maladaptive tendency Erikson referred to as 'ruthlessness.' Ruthlessness is evident in an individual's ability to plan their success, even at the expense of others. The extreme form of the ruthless individual would be a sociopath. Ruthlessness may not be good for the people around the ruthless individual, but it may result in general success for the person. The malignancy of too much guilt is what Erikson (1963) referred to as 'inhibition'. The inhibited individual will not engage in spontaneous or risk taking behaviour in any form in order to avoid the guilt that may result (Erikson, 1963).

The characteristic behaviours of individuals who have a high sense of initiative might include preferring to get on with what needs to be done to complete the task at hand, tending to be fast self-starters, effective leaders, good goal setters and generally having high energy levels and a strong sense of personal adequacy. Individuals with a high level of guilt might manifest some of the following behaviours: postponing tasks, procrastinating, poor or ineffective goal setting and having a weak sense of personal adequacy. They may also try to 'outrun' their guilt with a tireless show of accomplishment, believing that efficient production may compensate for being a deficient person (Hamachek, 1988).

According to Erikson (1964), a good balance between the individual's enthusiasm to 'do' and to 'create' and a tendency to experience guilt leads to the psychosocial strength of

‘purpose’. This involves having the courage to act while being aware of past failures and limitations. The rudiments of purpose are developed in the experience of play.

Play is to the child what thinking, planning, and blue-printing are to the adult, a trial universe in which conditions are simplified and methods exploratory, so that past failures can be thought through expectations tested (Erikson, 1964, p. 120).

4.4.4. Industry versus inferiority. The stage of industry versus inferiority covers approximately from the age of six to twelve (Erikson, 1963). It is at this stage that the child has covered all the organ modes and learns to get recognition for producing things. This stage coincides with the school going age where the child is taught how to read and write as they develop a sense of industry, that is, the child learns to handle the tools of his culture and at the same time collaborates in any production process (Fleming, 2008; Meyer et al., 2008). The society creates opportunities for cooperation and learning for these children by meeting their tendencies. The dangers of this stage are that the child may not meet the expectations of their culture, thereby developing a feeling of inferiority. The challenge with this stage is for the child to reach a healthy balance. This can only be possible if the child develops the ego quality of competence, that is, when they develop a sense of proficiency, which is one of the conditions for participating successfully in the cultural process of productivity and later maintaining a family (Meyer et al., 2008).

The basic strength of this stage is *competence*. This is achieved when a child is well prepared for school and has the tools for learning from life’s experience; those who do not have the competence will despair (Erikson, 1963, 1982; Meyer et al., 2008). Successful resolution of this stage largely depends on the preparations from earlier stages. The core pathology of this stage is *inertia*, that is, being inert or passive, which Erikson defined as the antithesis of competence. For most children this is a period of relative calm as inner conflict

gives away to increased learning and mastery of the skills needed to succeed in later life (Fleming, 2008).

During this stage of industry versus inferiority a child learns that there is pleasure, not only in conceiving a plan, but also in carrying it out. Erikson (1968) emphasised the necessity of learning the value and pleasure of achieving something through the individual's efforts – of being productive. Where an individual is unable to experience the success of his or her own efforts, for whatever reason (for example, harsh teachers or rejecting peers), a sense of inferiority or incompetence may arise instead. Individuals should be able to engage in work that is meaningful to them, to their level of ability and related to their interests (Fleming, 2008).

An overemphasis on industry, perhaps where individuals are pushed to specialise their talents and generally not allowing them to explore their interests and the world, leads to the maladaptive tendency referred to as 'narrow virtuosity' (Erikson, 1959). While one might admire 'prodigies', the risk of an otherwise empty or lonely life is great. More common, however, is the malignancy referred to as 'inertia' – this manifests in an individual who does not develop social skills and who may, in later life, avoid social interaction (Erikson, 1963). These individuals may show signs of 'inferiority complexes' as was described by Adler (1929).

The characteristic behaviours of individuals who have a high sense of industry might include enjoying learning about new things and experimenting with new ideas, combinations and syntheses, having a high sense of curiosity and a good habit of work completion through steady attention and persevering diligence. The characteristic behaviours of individuals with a high sense of inferiority include a concentration on what *must* be done rather than on what they *like* to do, sticking to known and proven methods, procrastinating and having difficulty

in taking pride in their work – perhaps to the point of taking criticism poorly and using it as a reason to stop trying (Hamachek, 1988).

An individual who successfully navigates this stage sees a balance between industry and inferiority emerge, that is, a healthy sense of industry and competence with a realistic sense of one's own limitations and inferiority, bringing about the ego strength or virtue, which Erikson (1963) referred to as 'competency'. Some individuals may prefer not to work, however, the reality of the individual's existence in the world is that they must work so as to develop the ability to work well or competently rather than learning merely to have a façade of 'busyness' under which is not true competence (Erikson, 1958).

4.4.5. Identity versus role confusion. This stage of identity versus role confusion is considered to be the stage of adolescence, according to Erikson (1963, 1982). It begins at puberty and ends at the beginning of early maturity, depending on the culture and the period required for the individual's academic adjustment. The adolescent is faced with several changes to their physical being, compounded by the onset of sexual maturity and societal expectations. The adolescent has to re-examine earlier certainties and be able to make career choices (Erikson, 1968; Kroger, 2002).

The basic task at this stage is to separate oneself from one's same sex parent and in the process the adolescent develops an identity of his own (Erikson, 1968; Fleming, 2008; Kroger, 2002). Assuming an identity of his own is not a simple task, as research has indicated that many adolescents do not succeed in this task until they are beyond their teens (Fleming, 2008; Meyer et al., 2008). The most challenging aspect of this stage is to overcome the oedipal conflict. The adolescent, who is no longer a child, has to displace his feelings for the opposite sex parent on to others. The stage ends when that individual is able to displace these

feelings through a ritual of courtship, traditionally known as dating in today's society (Meyer et al., 2008; Sokol, 2009).

During this stage adolescents do not just ask themselves 'who they are' but they also learn to define and invent themselves (Erikson, 1963, 1968; Kroger, 2002). This quest for self-image, continuity in life and congruence between self-image and the role expectations of society is what Erikson referred to as the *search for identity*. According to Erikson (1963), identity is tried out like new clothes and role models can be in the form of teachers, movie stars, musicians or parents. The concept of identity is one of the most enduring concepts that Erikson contributed to psychology (Sokol, 2009). Adolescents engage in a number of activities in their search for identity, including participation in group activities, falling in love, or participation in youth movements (Kroger, 2002, 2007).

As the adolescent's search for identity continues, society provides a platform for a psychological moratorium as it creates an environment for the adolescent to experiment with various identities (Kroger, 2007). Society does that through the provision and support of institutions such as universities, colleges, initiation schools, military service and extended vocational training. The challenge is when the parents wish to exert control over the child who is also an adult. Adolescents, just like young children, at times require the imposition of rules and limits, especially when their activities border on being dangerous, for example, when experimenting with drugs, permissive sexual behaviour, the internet, social media, pornography or hanging out with the 'wrong group.' The challenge for the parent is how much control to assume and how much freedom to grant. The development of mutual respect is an important part of this process (Al-Owidha, Green & Kroger, 2009; Meyer et al., 2008).

The adolescence stage is challenging for the individual, as it could result in what Erikson (1963) referred to as an identity crisis, in other words, it is a turning point of

increased vulnerability and heightened potential (Erikson, 1968; Kroger, 2002). The basic strength that results from the satisfactory resolution of the identity crisis is what Erikson referred to as *reliability or fidelity* (Kroger, 2002). This is characterised by being truthful and consistent with one's core values, awareness of other possible identity choices that could have been made and the capacity to be loyal towards one's social role or roles (Erikson, 1963; Meyer et al., 2008; Ryckman, 1989). Unsuccessful resolution of the identity crisis will result in what Erikson referred to as *repudiation*. It could be in the form of defiance of authority or resignation and despair, which Erikson (1968) referred to as *diffidence*.

Some of the suggested characteristic behaviours of individuals who have a high sense of identity might include having a stable self-concept that does not easily change, being able to combine short term goals with long term plans, being generally optimistic, being able to be physically and emotionally close to another person and being cognitively flexible – the sense of self does not depend on being 'right'. An individual with a strong sense of role or identity confusion could display characteristic behaviours such as setting short term, rather than long term goals, experiencing difficulty in making decisions, depending on being 'right' to establish their sense of self and being generally cynical, particularly about themselves (Hamachek, 1988).

Successful negotiation of this stage sees an individual equipped with the virtue of what Erikson (1963) referred to as 'fidelity'. Fidelity, or loyalty, is the ability to live by society's standards despite their imperfections and incompleteness and inconsistencies. It is a certainty in the individual's identity (Erikson, 1963; Meyer et al., 2008). Erikson (1964, p. 125) defines fidelity as "the ability to sustain loyalties freely pledged in spite of the inevitable contradictions of value systems". This makes receiving inspiration from confirming systems of belief and values and from encouraging peers and companions, the cornerstone of identity. In the individual, fidelity manifests itself in such things as attention to detail and accuracy,

loyalty to friends and family, the valuing of truthfulness and the keeping of promises (Capps, 2009; Erikson, 1964).

4.4.6. Intimacy versus isolation. The stage of intimacy versus isolation focuses on early adult life and the primary focus is on love (Erikson, 1963, 1982; Meyer et al., 2008). According to Erikson, individuals have to first develop a separate identity before they are able to be intimate with another person. Identity enables the individual to be able to share his identity with another person, that is, to have an ongoing relationship and to develop ethical strength to continue the relationship despite the challenges, sacrifices and compromises that comes with such a relationship (Fleming, 2008; Meyer et al., 2008). This is because it will be difficult for two people to mature together in a marriage if they had not first matured separately. This implies that couples who marry at an early age often end up divorcing (Sokol, 2009).

The pinnacle of most intimate relationships is marriage (Sokol, 2009). Failure by individuals to reach this peak will result in identity confusion, which can be attributed to the unsuccessful resolution of previous stages and ultimately leads to feelings of isolation, as the individual is preoccupied with the self (Erikson, 1968; Fleming, 2008). This is the reality for most young adults as they have to choose between these two extremes. The successful resolution of this crisis leads to the ego strength of *love* or *genitality*. By genitality Erikson was referring to sexual intimacy, that is, the physical correlate of psychological intimacy. Thus, a good sexual relationship depends on the ability of individuals to share and care for each other and not to exploit each other. *Isolation* is the core pathology of this stage (Erikson, 1963, 1982).

The suggested characteristic behaviours of individuals who have a strong sense of intimacy includes being tolerant, willing to trust others, satisfied in relationships and tending

to perceive sex both as a means of achieving physical closeness and of expressing love. There is the ability and a tendency in such an individual to develop co-operative, affiliate relationships with others. Individuals with a strong sense of isolation might display characteristic behaviours such as being intolerant, unwilling to trust, hesitant to form relationships and having difficulty in committing to relationships that demand sacrifice and compromise (Hamachek, 1990).

With specific regard to romantic and sexual relationships, Erikson (1963, p. 264) suggests that “as the areas of adult duty are delineated, and as the competitive encounter, and the sexual embrace, are differentiated, they eventually become subject to that *ethical sense* that is the mark of the adult”. He goes on to write that “it is only now that *true genitality* can fully develop; for much of the sex life preceding these commitments is of the identity-searching kind” (p. 264).

4.4.7. Generativity versus stagnation. This stage of generativity versus stagnation is considered the adulthood age and the important function of this stage is care (Erikson, 1963, 1982; Meyer et al., 2008). This stage spans generations. While the adult is still developing he is also involved in the development of the next generation. To this end Erikson believed that an adult wants to feel needed by people, which in turn will lead to wanting to care for other people, and wanting to pass knowledge and traditions to the next generations (Erikson, 1968). If this need is not realised, the individual becomes self-obsessed with his own development. The unsuccessful development of generativity can be traced to the unresolved crises of early stages, especially the lack of trust in society and the future of humanity (Erikson, 1963; Marcia, 2002).

At this stage of development individuals are confronted by two contradicting challenges, namely, the crisis of having the need and ability to participate meaningfully in the

development of humanity, while also being threatened by feelings of meaninglessness and stagnation (Erikson, 1963, 1982; Meyer et al., 2008). Individuals realise the need for meaningful participation in the development of humanity, mainly although not exclusively, through rearing their own children (Marcia, 2002). Another form of participation could be through participation in cultural activities, for example, by creative work such as arts and crafts or transmitting knowledge and values to others (Erikson, 1963). The basic strength of this stage is *care* – ‘the widening concern for what has been generated by love, necessity, or accident and as man’s love for his works and ideas as well as his children (Erikson, 1964, p. 131).

Erikson’s concept of generativity goes beyond the care for one’s children by recognising that care can be achieved without necessarily having procreated (Erikson, 1963, 1982; McAdams, 2006b; Meyer et al., 2008). Generativity embraces the concept of caring for the future, caring for the next generation and working for the betterment of the world. The core pathology of this stage is *self-absorption* or *stagnation*. The concept of generativity includes a sense of connectedness of one generation to another and in its broad sense, is a symbolic link to immortality through acts and works that will survive the individual. Research has also indicated that generativity is positively correlated with volunteerism, community involvement and voting. Schools, churches, universities and other social institutions depend on the generativity of adults (Marcia, 2002; McAdams, 2006b; Sokol, 2009).

Characteristic behaviours of individuals who have a strong sense of generativity might include feeling personally concerned about others, having an interest in producing and caring for children, focussing on what they can give rather than receive and being absorbed in a variety of activities outside of themselves. Individuals with a strong sense of stagnation might display behaviours such as being primarily concerned with themselves, having little

interest in producing or caring for children or in developing some unique talent and tending to be absorbed in activities that serve their own interests and needs (Hamachek, 1990).

During this stage, some individuals experience the ‘midlife crisis’, which sees individuals asking the inwardly directed question, ‘what am I doing all this for?’ The focus is on them, a focus more appropriate to a younger age and so the misplaced desire to recapture the individual’s youth emerges. The successful resolution of the developmental crisis of this stage results in the psychosocial virtue of ‘care’, described by Erikson (1964, p. 131), as “...man’s love for his works and ideas as well as his children”. It is “...the widening concern for what has been generated by love, necessity, or accident it overcomes the ambivalence adhering to irreversible obligation” (Erikson, 1964, p. 131). This care transcends the parental role and includes the care provided to the children of others, to those in the individual’s charge for whatever reasons, and very commonly also includes care for the individual’s own parents in their old age – illustrating the human strength of care as a generative function of the whole society (Capps, 2009).

4.4.8. Integrity versus despair. The final stage according to Erikson’s psychosocial theory is integrity versus despair and it approximates late adulthood with wisdom as the focus (Erikson, 1963, 1982; Meyer et al., 2008). At this stage the individual will be looking back at the life he has lived. It is the knowledge that the end is in sight that creates a crisis at this stage. Individuals who have successfully resolved their earlier crises are able to accept themselves and others fully without doubt, which implies that they have developed ego integrity (Erikson, 1963). Ego integrity is the feeling one has when one has lived a unique life and can look back with satisfaction and with the knowledge that they are ready to die, as they can accept the finality of life. Individuals have choices in life, everyone makes mistakes – some major and some even tragic, but to be fulfilled does not mean that one has lived a perfect life. It is just that one has managed life reasonably and practised meaningful

forgiveness and has taken into account both positive and negative factors from one's past, resulting in a sense of integrity (Fleming, 2008; Marcia, 2002; Sokol, 2009).

Individuals who have been unsuccessful in resolving earlier crises are unable to feel satisfied with their past and experience despair instead. According to Erikson (1968), despair is characterised by a fear of death and the desire to live life again. Despair is often disguised by an outward attitude of contempt towards others, which reflects contempt of the self, projected outwards (Marcia, 2002; Sokol, 2009). The basic strength of this stage is *wisdom* – the detached concern with life itself in the face of death, and *disdain* is the core pathology (Erikson, 1963; Meyer et al., 2008).

The suggested characteristic behaviours of individuals who have a strong sense of integrity might include reflecting on the positives of past experience and viewing themselves as a consequence of the positive and negative choices they have made and tending to be generally happy, optimistic individuals who can look back on their lives with a sense of gratitude, pleasure and appreciation. A person with a strong sense of despair, however, might be more pessimistic and dwell on past mistakes, blaming others for current circumstances and ultimately fearing the idea of death as they look back on their life with resentment, regret and depreciation (Hamachek, 1990).

If the individual is able to approach death without fear, Erikson (1963, 1978), it would suggest that the ego strength or psychosocial virtue referred to as 'wisdom' is present. Trust, a result of the very first developmental stage, returns to have significant importance – "healthy children will not fear life if their elders have integrity enough not to fear death" (Erikson, 1963, p. 269).

4.5. Lifespan Identity Development

The theory of psychosocial development has several characteristics related to Erikson's experience. His interest in the problem of identity can be linked to the fact that he himself had severe identity problems. His leading work was on adolescents' search for identity (Erikson, 1959, 1963, 1968, 1974), which was followed by psychohistories on the development of prominent people who struggled with their own identities: *Martin Luther* (Erikson, 1958), *Adolf Hitler* (Erikson, 1963), *George Bernard Shaw* (Erikson, 1968), *Mahatma Gandhi* (Erikson, 1969) and *Thomas Jefferson* (Erikson, 1974). He also wrote on the influence of society on human development (Erikson, 1959, 1963, 1974). Erikson's choice of words gives his work an interesting literary value, although sometimes at the expense of precise scientific definitions (Meyer et al., 2008). This is evident in the terms he gives to developmental crises like 'identity,' it suggests identification, identity in the sense of 'identical' and identity in the sense of 'recognition' (Sokol, 2009).

The theory of psychosocial development recognises the influence of culture and society on development (Hoare, 2002; Sokol, 2009). In so doing Erikson was the first to illustrate how the social world exists within the psychological makeup of each individual. He believed that the individual cannot be understood without understanding their social context (Erikson, 1959). This is evident in Erikson's stages of development and specifically relevant to the fifth stage (identity versus role confusion). Adolescence to Erikson meant a period of transition from childhood to adulthood. Unfortunately, he did not provide a chronological age of this stage or any of his stages (Marcia, 2002; Waterman, 1993).

Given that Erikson did not specify the age range of adolescence, it has been hypothesised that his version of adolescence relates to the middle to high school ages (Sokol, 2009). Other researchers have since proposed adolescence to be the developmental period of an emerging adult, which obviously includes years beyond high school (Arnett, 2000; Hoare,

2002). As identity development is an important component in the development of the emerging adult and overlaps the social tasks of what Erikson described as adolescence, it implies that the chronological age of adolescence ranges from 12 to 24 (Sokol, 2009). Erikson (1968) believed that identity formation is the focal point of adolescence and it is therefore logical to discuss its development from childhood and proceed through to adolescence and adulthood.

4.5.1. Identification in childhood. Erikson believed that identity development begins in childhood when the seeds of identity are planted (McLean & Pasupathi, 2012). It is during the childhood stage that a child recognises that he is an independent human being separated from parents. At the same time the child takes on the admired feature of the role models, be they parent or significant others (Kroger, 2007). Erikson referred to this process as the identification process (Erikson, 1963, 1982). It is through the identification process that the child builds a set of expectations about whom or what he wants to be. The process of identification ends when the child loses interest in merely adopting the personality of the role models, that is, when the process of identity formation begins (Meyer et al., 2008).

Although Erikson did not discuss identity development in childhood, he indicated that identity formation is only possible when the usefulness of the identification process ends (Erikson, 1963, 1982; Meyer et al., 2008). At that stage the child will realise that taking the characteristics of his significant others may no longer be as satisfying as it used to be and they desire to have an identity of their own (Al-Owidha et al., 2009). Thus, identity formation begins with the synthesis of the childhood skills, beliefs and identification into a coherent, unique character that provides continuity with the past and direction for the future (Marcia, 1993, 2002).

4.5.2. Identity formation in adolescence. The developmental crisis of the fifth stage of Erikson's psychosocial theory is the formation of identity in adolescence (Erikson, 1963, 1982; Fleming, 2008; Meyer et al., 2008). There are several factors that are attributed to the formation of identity at this stage. This stage marks the onset of puberty, which results in changes in both the physical and cognitive abilities of the adolescent (Kroger, 2004). The adolescent begins to experience increased independence and autonomy as he interacts within the community, neighbourhood and school. Through this the adolescent begins to explore vocations, ideologies and relationships (Fleming, 2008; Meyer et al., 2008). The adolescent begins experiencing adult responsibilities as he gradually matures (Sokol, 2009). According to Erikson (1963), when this happens identity has been formed and failure to manage these developmental tasks will lead to role confusion.

Erikson defined identity as the sense of who someone is and what that individual can contribute to society (Hoare, 2002). Its formation is an important event in the development of personality, as it is associated with positive outcomes (Marcia, 2002). Identity allows an individual to develop a sense of ideological commitment that enables the individual to know his place in the world (Hoare, 2002; Sokol, 2009). Identity formation provides a sense of being, a sense of direction and a sense of mattering to those who count (Erikson, 1968). Erikson believed that having a solid identity is crucial for future development. However, not all individuals successfully resolve this developmental crisis. Unsuccessful resolution leads an individual to a different experience of role confusion (Hoare, 2002; Meyer et al., 2009; Sokol, 2009).

Role confusion makes the individual question their essential personality characteristics, how they view themselves and their perceived view of others (Kroger, 2004, 2007). The individual experiences extreme doubt regarding the meaning of their existence, which leaves them with a sense of loss and confusion. Erikson (1963) observed that because

of the nature of changing physical, cognitive and social factors in adolescents' lives, they are likely to experience role confusion at some stage. Most people successfully resolve this crisis and progress towards later developmental crises (Kroger, 2004; Sokol, 2009). Research has indicated that adolescence is the time when identity becomes a focus for concern as it coincides with the school-going years when individuals make important decisions concerning careers, friendships, romantic relationships and religious and political choices (Marcia, 2002; McAdams, 2006b; McLean & Pasupathi, 2012; Sokol, 2009; Waterman, 1985). Although this may be the case, it is unrealistic to think that everyone will go to university and even with those who do go, it does not necessarily mean that their choices will not change, hence the reason that identity development goes beyond adolescence (Kroger, 2004, 2007).

Identity development concepts have been operationalised in a number of ways since Erikson first presented the concepts. Other researchers have examined the role of Erikson's fifth stage – identity versus role confusion in the eight stage model (Constantinople, 1969; Rosenthal, Gurney & Moore, 1981). Others have focused on the fifth stage alone and conceptualised it in bipolar terms – as something one 'has' to a greater or lesser degree (Simmons, 1970). Other researchers have attempted to study one or more dimensions of identity outlined by Erikson (Blasi & Milton, 1991). The result has been the emergence of an attempt to understand the relationship between exploration and commitment variables in the formation of identity (Al-Owidha et al., 2009; McLean & Pasupathi, 2012).

Through the identity-status model, Marcia (1966, 1967) developed four different styles that define the way in which adolescents approach identity-defining roles and values. These four styles are identity achieved, foreclosure, moratorium and diffusion. According to Marcia, the four styles are associated with various personality features, subjective experiences and styles of interpersonal interactions. Based on the issues that Erikson indicated as the foundations of an individual's identity, such as vocational decision making,

adopting various ideological values and a sense of sexual identity, Marcia (1993) found that individuals select meaningful personal directions regarding these issues through a process of exploration and commitment (Al-Owidha et al., 2009). Marcia (1967) reasoned that once an identity has been formed, the individual is expected to commit to certain areas that Erikson detailed; although he argued that commitment is arrived at in different ways and that the manner of non-commitment takes different forms.

Marcia (1966) originally conceptualised identity as topographical features underlying identity structure. Thus, the more areas in which identity has been achieved, the greater the probability of a certain type of identity structure being achieved. For an individual to reach identity achieved, he should have explored meaningful life directions prior to commitment. On the other hand, for an individual to achieve foreclosure they would have formed commitment without significant prior exploration. An adolescent usually adopts values and roles based on the roles and values of the parent or significant other with whom he strongly identifies, while adolescents within the moratorium status are in search of meaningful adult role models and are yet to form a firm commitment. Lastly, those in the diffusion status appear uninterested in finding personally expressive adult roles and values (Marcia, 2002).

4.5.2.1. Identity achieved. Research on the characteristics of each identity status has been undertaken to explore the broad range of personality features, interpersonal behaviour and family antecedents. The results indicate that identity achieved individuals have strong levels of achievement motivation and self-esteem, low neuroticism and strong conscientiousness and extroversion (McLean & Pasupathi, 2012; Montgomery, Hernandez & Ferrer-Wreder, 2008). The identity achieved individual also shows low use of defence mechanisms, low levels of shyness and strong levels of internal locus of control as compared to other identity statuses (Al-Owidha et al., 2009; Marcia, 2002).

When cognitive processes were taken into consideration, identity achieved individuals were found to have demonstrated the ability to function under stressful conditions (McAdams, 2006b). They were also found to be rational, orderly and logical in their decision making strategies when compared to other identity statuses (Marcia, 2002). This group of individuals also demonstrate the strongest level of moral reasoning regarding issues of both justice and care (Kroger, 2004). From an interpersonal perspective, identity achieved individuals demonstrate the strongest level of intimacy compared to other identity statuses (Kroger, 2004; Marcia, 2002). They can demonstrate mutual, interpersonal relationships with both close friends and a partner; above all, they are genuinely interested in others. Identity achieved individuals show great willingness to reveal themselves to others and show the most secure patterns of attachment to their families (McAdams, 2006b; Montgomery et al., 2008).

4.5.2.2. *Moratorium.* Individuals who are in the moratorium identity status are in the process of searching for identity defining commitments and are associated with strong levels of anxiety (Kroger, 2004). Their greatest anxiety is about death. Individuals in this identity status use a number of defence mechanisms, such as denial, projection and identification to help them keep general anxiety away (Marcia, 2002). In their study of students, Berzonsky and Kuk (2000) reported that the more self-exploration that students had engaged in, the more prepared they were to undertake tasks in a self-directed manner without needing to look to others for reassurance and emotional support.

At the cognitive level, Berzonsky and Kuk (2000) found students in the moratorium identity status to be sceptical about ever knowing anything with certainty. When compared with other statuses, the moratoriums and identity achieved statuses were found to be more experientially oriented than the foreclosures and the diffusions (Marcia, 2002). The moratoriums usually demonstrate an analytical style of cognitive functioning. They also use information-oriented styles to construct a sense of identity (Fleming, 2008). Generally,

adolescents with a moratorium status demonstrate the ability to reflect on diverse information in an analytical way (Kroger, 2004; Marcia, 2002).

On an interpersonal level, moratoriums are more likely to be pre-intimate in their style of intimacy (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000). Being pre-intimate implies that they are more likely to have established close friendship characterised by respect, integrity, openness and non-defensiveness, although not yet committed to the partner. When it comes to family, adolescent moratoriums tend to be ambivalent; boys' conflictual independence from parents has a predicted degree of identity exploration (Lucas, 1997), whereas parents of moratorium adolescents tend to emphasise independence in their child-rearing patterns (Campbell, Adams & Dobson, 1994; Marcia, 2002).

4.5.2.3. Foreclosure. Adolescents with this type of identity status tend to show characteristics such as high levels of conformity, authoritarianism and aspiration for change, coupled with low anxiety and narcissism (Marcia, 1966, 1967, 2002). Research has indicated that the foreclosed identity is associated with racial and homophobic tendencies (Fulton, 1997). Foreclosed individuals rely on an external locus of control, are generally not open to experience and use dependent strategies to make their decisions (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000; Clancy & Dollinger, 1993).

When it comes to interpersonal relationships, the foreclosed individuals are considered to be stereotypes in their style of intimacy (Fulton, 1997). Mutually identified best friends share distinct similarities in identity status and foreclosed adolescents are thus likely to have friends who are foreclosed (Marcia, 2002). In a study on the behaviour of foreclosed females towards their mothers, Perosa, Perosa and Tam (1996) reported that mothers were too close, involved and protective, while the daughters mirrored parental values instead of exploring their own identities. Families with foreclosed identity adolescents were reported to

have less conflict, although there was evidence of severe attachment anxiety in the event of family separation (Al-Owidha et al., 2009; Kroger, 1985).

Foreclosed identity adolescents are cognitively likely to not be able to integrate ideas and to think analytically. They are likely to make errors in judgment because of reduced attention (Boyes & Chandler, 1992). In addition, foreclosed individuals are likely to share the view that certainty is a possibility (Al-Owidha et al., 2009). Additional characteristics of foreclosed identity status include a normative orientation in the construction of identity, concern with preserving their existing identity structure and lastly, greater orientation toward others needs and their ability to care (Skoe & Marcia, 1991).

4.5.2.4. Diffusion. Adolescents with a diffused identity status show display low levels of autonomy, self-esteem and identity (Meeus, 2011). Diffusions do not have a firm identity or defining commitment or interest in making one; they are content with whatever circumstance presents itself (Fulton, 1997). Research has indicated that diffusions are likely to struggle with change and if they make it to university they are likely to be shy (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000; Montgomery et al., 2008). Diffusions are likely to be influenced by peer pressure towards conformity and at the same time they remain self-focused on a task that requires them to estimate being the focus of others' attention (Adams, Abraham & Markstrom, 1987; Kroger, Martinussen, & Marcia, 2010; Meeus, 2011). Some of the characteristics of diffusions include them being grandiose, self-expressive, disagreeable and neurotic, with low levels of conscientiousness. Put together, all this suggests an impaired psychosocial development for the late adolescent with diffused identity (McLean & Pasupathi, 2012).

Adolescents with a diffused identity status have an intuitive style of decision making. They may show an absence of a systematic approach to problem-solving (Blustein & Phillips,

1990). Avoidant orientation to identity construction has been associated with the diffused identity, while the psychosocial cognitive style of procrastination and defensive avoidance of issues and reliance on an external locus of control have been considered as some of the cognitive structures of diffusion (Kroger et al., 2010, Marcia, 2002; Meeus, 2011). Diffusions also demonstrate low levels of reasoning, conformist levels of ego development and strong levels of helplessness (Selles, Markstrom-Adams & Adams, 1994).

From an interpersonal relationship perspective, diffusions are regarded as distancing or rejecting caretakers with low attachment to parents (Campbell et al., 1984; Josselson, 1987; Marcia, 2002). Some of their characteristics include communication patterns that are inconsistent, memories of family that carry themes of regret, wishes for a stronger adult to care and give direction (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000; Meeus, 2011). Diffusions are likely to use bribes and deception on others and are most likely to be isolated or stereotyped in their style of intimacy with others. They have either established no close relationship or they have a relationship based on superficial values (Read, Adams & Dobson, 1984).

4.5.2.5. Identity and the social context. Research into the role of the social context on the development of identity structures is an area that continues to attract scholars. Some scholars have reported that the difference in the movement of identity status pathways can be found in many adult lifestyle contexts (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000; Meeus, 2011). Studies into the direction of the effect of identity status on social context remain inconclusive, as it is not clear whether certain environments steer certain kinds of identity structures or that certain identity structures are a result of certain environments, or a combination of both factors (Josselson, 1996; Kroger & Haslet, 1991). Social circumstances may set broad limits to likely behaviours, although individually, personality characteristics play an important role in influencing identity development over time (Kroger, et al., 2010; Meeus, 2011).

According to Adams and Marshall (1996), identity develops out of both the individual and social processes. The process of differentiation and integration underlies the relationship between individuals and context and how identity shapes and is shaped by the social context. Cote (1996) holds that to understand the relationship between identity development and the social context, it is important to delineate the levels of identity being explored in relation to the social context. Thus, identity development should take into account issues such as ethnicity, gender and the meaning of such issues in a given context.

4.5.2.6. Identity and gender. In a systematic review of the literature on identity and gender, Kroger (2000) asked three questions: Are there gender differences in the identity-status distribution of adolescents and adults to deal with identity-defining roles and values? Are there gender differences in the identity domains most important to self-definition? Are there gender differences in the developmental process of identity formation? The results showed no gender difference to all three questions. One exception was reported in a study that included both men and women in the content area of family/career priorities and/or sexual values, where women generally dominated men in moratorium and identity achieved statuses.

4.5.2.7. Identity and ethnicity. For the ethnic minority groups living in majority cultures, questions regarding ethnic identity have prompted vital identity explorations. According to Phinney and Baldelomar (2011), self-esteem has been directly related to the extent to which individuals have thought about, and resolved, their identity issues among minority ethnic groups. Kroger (2000) concurred by suggesting that self-esteem is strongly related to one's ethnic identity. To a large extent, ethnic identity has been strongly related to the measure of coping abilities, mastery, self-esteem and optimism, and negatively related to loneliness and depression (Kroger, 2000; Phinney & Baldelomar, 2011). Among African

American adolescents, ethnic identity has been a predictor of fidelity but not with European Americans (Markstrom & Hunter, 1999).

4.5.3. Identity development in adulthood. Although Erikson considered identity formation to be the concern of the adolescence stage, he believed that its development is a lifelong process. Therefore, identity development is both a normative period of adolescence and an evolving aspect of adulthood (Al-Owidha et al., 2009; Marcia, 2002; McLean & Pasupathi, 2012). Although Erikson wrote extensively on the normative development of identity in adolescence (Erikson, 1958, 1963, 1968, 1974), he did not provide a detailed analysis of the evolving aspects of identity in adulthood (Kroger, 2007). Instead he argued that identity is ‘fixed’ in adolescence and fades away as the crises of intimacy, generativity and integrity become the focus in later life (Fleming, 2008; Sokol, 2009).

Erikson’s conceptualisation of identity and his focus on late adolescence as the stage specifically designated for an identity crisis, resulted in further research on what identity would mean beyond adolescence (Marcia, 2002). Erikson proposed that each psychosocial stage has both a precursor and a successor, which implies that there is an identity issue at each stage beyond the adolescence stage (Erikson, 1959, 1985). This leads to the question of what identity mean in the young adulthood stage, middle age and old age (Marcia, 2002). An evaluation of Erikson’s theory shows that although identity is first formed in adolescence, it is constructed consciously and unconsciously from identification in childhood in their socialised context and imagined future (Marcia, 2002; Sokol, 2009).

Erikson’s psychosocial theory has been found wanting as far as the development of identity beyond adolescence is concerned (Kroger et al., 2011). Identity defining factors such as the meaning of vocation, political, religious, sexual and interpersonal choices, remain fundamental to the young adult. Research has suggested that the young adulthood stage is the

time to form concrete goals, especially in the areas of family and career (McLean & Pasupati, 2012; Montgomery et al., 2008). Besides implementing career goals, the demands for parenting (and possibility of parenting), impose new challenges on the young adult. These challenges may challenge both men and women to reconsider their goals and values, what they strive for, and what is important in life (Harker & Solomon, 1996; McLean & Pasupati, 2012; Sokol, 2009).

New identity development challenges emerge in the middle adulthood ages, as individuals begin to reclaim opposite sex qualities. Men tend to take on feminine characteristics and women take on masculine characteristics (Huycke, 1990; James, Lewkowicz, Libhaber & Lachman, 1995) and the 'midlife crisis', although considered a myth, is associated with identity related issues (Beck, 2007). At this stage, an individual may begin to re-evaluate, refine and re-adjust social roles and vocational goals (Kroger, 2007). The midlife changes, like career changes, relocations, divorce, remarriage, resuming one's education, death of a loved one and adoption, may force the individual to reconsider their identity (Beck, 2007).

The two key processes that are synonymous with late adulthood identity development are examination and evaluation (McLean & Pasupati, 2012; Meeus, 2011). Late adulthood allows the individual the opportunity to examine and evaluate the life that was lived and to reflect upon choices made. If the evaluation is positive, the individual experiences satisfaction, while a negative result leaves the individual with a feeling of regret (Beck, 2007; Marcia, 2002). According to Kroger (2002), important identity processes for late adulthood include the reintegration of important identity elements from younger years, rebalancing relationships and other social roles, readjusting to loss and diminished physical capacities and finding meaning in life. Thus, identity development remains an issue in late adulthood as it is in earlier stages.

4.5.3.1. Identity reconstruction. Considering that in childhood there is no identity to deconstruct, the initial identity formation process is just a matter of construction. After this initial identity construction in late adolescence, subsequent identity construction involves the successive disequilibration of existing identity structures (Marcia, 2002). Events that can be considered to be disequilibrating are those associated with the succeeding life cycle stages. As the individual responds to the demands of each developmental stage, he is faced with the reformation of his identity (Kroger et al., 2010; McLean & Pasupati, 2012). The events that involve the reformation of identities work in partnership, for example, friendship at young adulthood and its demands for intimacy; mentorship in middle age and its generativity requirements and eldership at old age and its opportunities for integrity. These refer to the quality of self-awareness and psychosocial stance as one moves through the ages from young adulthood to middle age then old age (Al-Owidha et al., 2009; Marcia, 2002; McAdams, 2006b).

Although disequilibrating events can be in the form of job loss, death of a spouse, divorce, falling in love or job promotion, their effects on individuals differ. For example, a foreclosed adult is an individual who has developed a personality structure the purpose of which is to avoid disequilibration. When the foreclosed adult encounters disequilibration, it is likely to be a shattering experience (Marcia, 2002). As they lack a solid identity structure, the diffusions are likely to be resistant to disequilibration (Kroger, 2000, 2007). A disequilibration event may force the individual to regress to earlier identity modes. However, this regression is with a purpose, as it allows the previous identity structure to fall apart so that a new structure can emerge. In addition to experiencing a period of diffusion, the individual may return to previous identity contents or even to periods of pre-emptive commitment to them (McLean & Pasupati, 2012).

In the process of identity reconstruction one may cycle briefly in the foreclosure status, as this is part of the regressive process. Eventually when the disequilibrated identity falls within the identity achieved status, the individual will enter the active searching moratorium period (Berzonsky, 1989; Marcia, 2002). The searching period enables the individual to explore possibilities for tentative commitment and ultimately a new identity achieved status is reached (Al-Owidha et al., 2009; Sokol, 2009). The length of the cycle differs according to the individual's social context. It is difficult for one to relinquish a hard formed identity easily. The role of external pressure in the form of family, friends and colleagues is important in that process. The same is true for internal pressures such as one's expectations of oneself, the pressure to remain the same and consistent. It requires more courage and commitment for one to reformulate his identity at 40 or 50 than when one is 25 (Marcia, 2002).

A complete 'transformation' may be possible for a few individuals, as for others, the reformulated identity can occur to a certain extent, continuous of, or having similar qualities to the old one (Sokol, 2009). Thus, an identity change may look more like a gradual evolution of previous forms (Flum, 1998). The reformulated identity will accommodate a wider range of the individual's experience than did the previous one, hence, identity becomes broader and more inclusive and at the same time richer and deeper (Montgomery et al., 2008; Marcia, 2002). This is because through reformulation the individual moves more and more towards what he truly is, as previously undeveloped elements of the personality become realised and new ones are added (McLean & Pasupati, 2012).

The process of identity reformulation takes place each time there is a disequilibrium of the existing identity structures. This will result in recycling through the statuses every time this happens. This gives rise to the question whether identity status is a trait or state (Kroger, 2000). Marcia (2002) is of the opinion that it is both. Her explanation was that a status can be

a phase through which an individual passes or can be a relatively permanent condition. For example, an adolescent in the foreclosure status may be on his way to moratorium – making it both a state and trait. An adult at foreclosure temporarily as part of a creative regression may be on the way to a new level of identity achievement (state), or the foreclosed adult at the age of 60 may be at the same level as he was when he was 15 (trait).

4.5.3.2. Identity and adult psychosocial stage resolution. Identity can be described as a vertical development that permeates all adult domains of the life cycle. Thus, identity is important at every adult psychosocial stage in the successful resolution of that stage (Al-Owidha et al., 2009; Marcia, 2002; Sokol, 2009). For example, how much of generativity is accounted for by one's identity as a generative person vis-a-vis the amount of generativity accounted for by the generativity-stagnation resolution (Fleming, 2008). This implies that the progression of identity itself can be accounted for in intimacy, generativity and integrity resolution. For this to be possible, identity should be considered to be a structure of personality. Certainly there is an impact on identity as an individual struggles with issues of generativity, but there might be an even greater influence on generativity as the individual defines, evaluates and comes to experience oneself more as a generative person (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1993, 2002).

The other importance of identity resolution in adulthood is that the possibility of resolving, say, generativity versus stagnation, involves the incorporation of resolutions from earlier stages, trust, autonomy and initiative and their synthesis into a new sense of generativity. Thus, achieving generativity includes the re-resolutions and co-occurring of earlier stages (Fleming, 2008; Montgomery et al., 2008). In general, an individual is likely to experience a crisis in identity when confronted with one of the adult stages, rather than just the content of that particular stage (Marcia, 2002). For example, an identity crisis in an individual's self-definition of a parent may be threatened by the rebellious adolescent more

than the individual's diffused sense of generativity. As identity is a structure, it is more pervasive in its influence and is emotionally closer to the heart than a sense of intimacy, generativity or integrity (McLean & Pasupati, 2012; Sokol, 2009). In brief, identity defines the person while the adult psychosocial stages describe how one responds to a stage-specific issue, although it does not have the structural properties of identity (Kroger et al., 2010; Montgomery et al., 2008).

It can be said that it is the content of a given stage that sets up some of the disequilibrating events that threaten an identity structure at any given time. Thus, crises of identity are more likely to involve intimacy in the young adulthood, generative issues in early adulthood and integrity issues at late adulthood. These identity issues do not arise from cognitive dissonance alone, but also from emotional distress (Fleming, 2008; Meyer et al., 2008). Marcia posits that it is not role inconsistency that concerns people but rather the discomfort it causes when individuals find themselves divided between incompatible alternatives. Adulthood psychosocial stages are characterised by what Erikson referred to as 'crises of the ego growth,' as they are vulnerable growth points where things can go either way. Their content derives from issues to which individuals at a particular age would be especially sensitive (Montgomery et al., 2008).

4.6. Generativity and Adult Development

Generativity is the centre piece of Erikson's psychosocial theory of development stage seven in the eight stage model (McAdams, 2006b). Based on Erikson's conceptualisation, the adolescent constructs identity, the young adult finds intimacy in a long term relationship, and the middle adult seeks to make a positive contribution to the next generation through parenting, mentoring, teaching and leadership with the aim of leaving a positive self for the future. Thus, the midlife adult focuses time and energy on raising children, building communities and passing on traditions, among other things, for the next

generation (de St. Aubin et al., 2004). Generative adults become stakeholders and destiny-shapers of society (McAdams, 2006b). In contrast, individuals who are unable to rise to the challenge of generativity, experience stagnation or self-absorption. Their struggle to maintain themselves may be too demanding to the extent that they are not able to care for those who will eventually survive them (An & Cooney, 2006; McAdams, 2006b).

Erikson (1963) viewed generativity as a discrete stage in his psychosocial model, thereby recognising that it waxes and wanes within the stage and that it is sometimes unpredictable and not the same for all adults. Research into generativity has focused mainly on two aspects; firstly, the individual differences of achieving generativity (McAdams, 2006b) and secondly, the stage-like properties of generativity (Montgomery et al., 2008), that is, if generativity is mostly achieved during the midlife ages. Results from both cross sectional studies and longitudinal studies have provided mixed results, but the trend seems to suggest that there is an increase in generativity from early adulthood years to middle adulthood years and then decreasing thereafter (de St. Aubin et al., 2004; Keyes & Ryff, 1998; McAdams, 2001, 2006b). A thorough review of literature indicates that generativity cannot be viewed as a discrete stage but rather as a multifaceted developmental task for adults expressed unevenly across life and over time countered by a wide range of contextual variables (MacDermid, Franz & De Reus, 1998; McAdams, 2001, 2006b).

Adults may express constellations such as motivations, concerns, beliefs and commitments related to generativity at any given time during life. This is related to the individual differences that can predict a broad array of social consequential behaviours and outcomes (McAdams, 2006b). Research has indicated that parents with strong generative concern are more involved in their children's schooling, more likely to attend parents-teachers meetings and to monitor their children's homework (Nakagawa, 2000). Other studies has also indicated that generativity is associated with valuing trust and communication with

one's children and viewing parenting as an opportunity to pass on values and wisdom to the next generation (de St Aubin et al., 2004; Hart, McAdams, Hirsch & Bauer, 2001; McAdams, 2006b).

Research on generativity has found that high scores in generativity are associated with pro-social behaviour and productive societal engagement (McAdams, 2006b). Generative individuals have pro-social personality characteristics (de St Aubin et al., 2004), a strong social network (Hart et al., 2001), interest in political issues and are involved in the political process (McAdams, 2006b). Church attendance and involvement in religious and spiritual activities and community volunteerism are some of the characteristics associated with generative individuals (de St Aubin et al., 2004; Hart et al., 2001; McAdams, 2006b; Rossi, 2001). Hence, individual difference in generativity predicts outcomes such as civic engagement, volunteerism and subjective mental health support. In brief, generativity is a central developmental challenge for adults, especially in the midlife ages. Shaped by family, work, civic, religious and friendship roles, generativity can be expressed in, and through, a wide range of activities and commitments (de St Aubin et al., 2004; McAdams, 2006b).

4.7. Evaluation of Erikson's Psychosocial Theory

Erikson's introduction of artistic sensibilities into the theorisation of psychology brought a new way of thinking and approaching psychology (Fleming, 2008; Meyer et al., 2008; Sokol, 2009). Although it was considered modest and having literary value, it lacked precise scientific definition (Al-Owidha et al., 2009; Kroger, 2007). This is evident in the name he gives to the developmental crises, its either trust or mistrust, autonomy or shame and doubt and nothing in between. The concept of 'identity', which was Erikson's most enduring contribution to psychology, lacks a precise definition. According to Erikson, identity suggests identification, identity in the sense of 'identical' and identity in the sense of 'recognition' (Fleming, 2008).

On a positive note, Erikson is credited for not only having expanded Freud's theory to later stages of life, but also considerably broadening its conceptualisation by emphasising cultural differences and by stressing the development of the ego through identity challenges that were more psychosocial than strictly biological (Meyer et al., 2008). By focusing his theory on terms like identity crises, Erikson provided a broad, although artistic framework, for viewing development throughout the lifespan. His theory was based on his personal observations and intuition and to some extent through personal reflections. Many of these observations have been insightful and have led to new and fruitful research (de St Aubin et al., 2004; McAdams, 2006b; McLean & Pasupathi, 2012).

Erikson's view on identity and marriage has also received considerable attention from researchers. His belief that couples who marry younger are most likely to succeed if each has achieved a degree of self-identity before marriage has also received support in empirical studies (Helson & Pals, 2000; Montgomery et al., 2008; Pals, 1999). Kroger (2007); Marcia (2002) and Sokol (2009) have studied identity development from childhood to adulthood in line with Erikson's principles. While Waterman (1993) has been credited for expanding Marcia's (1966) concepts of identity development from adolescence to adulthood, it is based on Erikson's (1963, 1968) construct of identity.

A number of models using Erikson's principles have empirically proved the usefulness of the psychosocial theory. For example, a cross sectional study by Dignan (1965) into the development of identity during university, resulted in the Dignan Ego Identity Scale. The Inventory of Psychosocial Development (Constantinople, 1969) has been used in longitudinal studies to provide evidence of identity development in post school years. The Sense of Identity Inventory (O'Connell, 1976) was used to measure women's experienced identity development from adolescence through to the time they get married, have their first child, to the point where their children were school-going age.

4.8. Conclusion

This chapter introduced the psychosocial theory through a brief background of Erik Erikson's life. This was followed by the development of personality, looking at the principles of development, developmental crises, modes and rituals as some of the key tenets of the psychosocial theory. Although identity development is an adolescence task, its development does not end there. Identity continues to develop into adulthood through examination and evaluation. The next chapter discusses the research methodology from the research design, sample selection, data collection tools, procedure and analysis to the ethical considerations.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1. Chapter overview

The researcher attempted to understand participants in terms of their own definition and experiences of divorce from an interpretative research paradigm (Brocki & Wearden, 2004). The methodology of the study used an insider rather than an outsider perspective (Matthews & Ross, 2014). This chapter provides a methodological framework on which the study was crafted. In so doing the chapter describes the research design, selection of participants and data collection including the research procedure, data analysis and interpretation and the ethical considerations. The chapter also presents the way in which the divorce-stress-adjustment model was designed.

5.2. Research design

5.2.1. Qualitative methods in psychology. In general, qualitative methods are concerned with how individuals experience, describe and interpret a phenomenon (Matthew & Ross, 2014). They do so by ascribing meaning to the phenomenon. Thus, the focus of such methods is to produce a rich description of some aspects of experience (Langdridge, 2007). This is in direct contrast with quantitative methods that are concerned with counting the amount of a phenomenon or some aspect thereof.

As a brief history, the turn of the millennium witnessed a growing interest in qualitative methods, which was because of the huge criticism of predominantly experimental social cognitive perspectives that dominated psychology in most of continental Europe, Australia and North America (Barr, 2004). This shift in focus has become more vigorous and readily heard since the ‘crisis’ in social psychology in the mid-1970s (Langdridge, 2007). The increase in popularity of qualitative methods has been due to growing dissatisfaction

with the quantitative methods among sections of the psychology community. This is reflected in the number of qualitative research method books produced and the number of articles using qualitative methods that have been published recently (Matthews & Ross, 2014).

The growth of qualitative methods in psychology can be attributed to the sharp criticism of the cognitive perspective involving questions about the realism and essentialism at the heart of the cognitive approach in psychology (Langdridge, 2007). Another important criticism of quantitative methods is the failure to account for the way in which knowledge is a product of both history and culture (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2009). It provokes considerable doubt about the findings of many cognitive researchers (Langdridge, 2007). Thus, qualitative methods became an alternative way of producing knowledge and investigating human nature (Matthews & Ross, 2014). The qualitative methods take a critical stance towards knowledge production, as they recognise the influence of history and culture in making its claims, thereby appreciating the inter-subjectivity of how such knowledge is constructed through language (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2009).

5.2.1.1. Phenomenological psychology. Edmund Husserl (1859-1935) is regarded as the founder of the branch of philosophy now known as phenomenology (Sokolowski, 2000). His idea was to establish the meaning of the fundamental concepts employed in different sciences through identifying the essential structures of experience that distinguish the science and determine the concepts on which they rely. Husserl established the firm foundational concepts of each discipline through rigorous analysis of the way the object of study (such as psychological phenomenon) appears to the individual in their experience of them, thus laying the foundation for the phenomenological movement that followed.

According to Husserl, the specific focus of phenomenological psychology is the “return to the things themselves” (Langdridge, 2007, p. 4). This implies that the aim of a

phenomenological study is to focus on individuals' perception of the world and what it implies to them and it therefore focuses on the individuals' lived experiences.

Historically, phenomenology began as a philosophical movement in the early 1900's through the work of the German philosopher, Edmund Husserl and was later developed by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). Its arrival heralded the new bold and radical way of performing philosophy by placing lived experience at the centre stage (Sokolowski, 2000). It should however, be noted that phenomenology is not a consistent body of thought as there are many variations with different implications on which phenomenological psychology was created. Consequently, there is no one thing that can be called phenomenological psychology. Therefore, phenomenological psychology should be seen as a label for a family of approaches that are all informed by phenomenology but each with a different emphasis (Finlay, 2012).

The aim of phenomenological psychology research is to explore participants' experience and how the world appears to individuals. Thus, phenomenological psychology employs a set of methods to enable the researcher to elicit rich descriptions of concrete experiences and/or narratives of experience (Langdrige, 2007). The selected methods are designed to illuminate the lived world of the participants and also, possibly, the lived experiences of the researcher, along with others who have already, or may in the future, experience something similar (Finlay, 2012). To this end, phenomenological psychologists do not claim to produce the 'truth' nor do they think it is possible to do so, so it is upon the reader to determine the value of what is presented rather than to take it on trust as the product of the academic 'expert.'

The focus of phenomenological psychology is on individuals' perceptions of the world, that is, the individuals' perception of the things as they appear to them (Sokolowski, 2000). In phenomenological psychology research, the researcher is interested in describing the world as it appears to the individual and there are a number of processes involved to

achieve this. A variety of approaches will be discussed later. For now it is important to identify the philosophical foundations of these approaches. As already noted, not all phenomenological approaches to psychology engage equally with all the concepts. Suffice it to say that the focus on experience is key to all phenomenological approaches. Thus, the discussion of intentionality and the correlation between the way the world appears and the individual experience of it is relevant to all phenomenological psychology approaches (Langdridge, 2007).

Using Husserl's foundational concepts, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) took an existential turn, thereby making understanding existence the central focus of his phenomenology. Jean-Paul Sartre (1908-1961) later achieved this. The legacy of these philosophers has been part of the phenomenology literature (Finlay, 2012; Langdridge, 2007; Sokolowski, 2000). Recent literature has indicated that there is a (re)emergence of a hermeneutic turn in phenomenology where its concern is interpretation, that is IPA (Finlay, 2012; Smith, 2009).

Just like the founding father of phenomenology, Husserl, Martin Heidegger was also profoundly against dualistic separation of egos from the world (Langdridge, 2007). According to Heidegger, what is real is not dependent on the researcher, but the exact meaning and nature of reality is. As a starting point, it should be acknowledged that the view of one individual is a collective, inclusive part of reality, a view that certainly cannot be restricted to Heidegger and his phenomenology (Finlay, 2012). The following are the foundational concepts introduced by Husserl and they still stand, albeit often in a more nuanced form.

5.2.1.1.1. Intentionality. This is regarded as the key feature of consciousness in Husserl's foundation concepts (Langdridge, 2007). Husserl used intentionality not in its usual sense of intending to do something, but he referred to the fact that whenever an individual is

conscious, that individual is conscious (or aware) of something. Thus, there is always an object of consciousness. Through this concept of intentionality, phenomenologists have concluded that no mind or spirit inhabits the individual and directs his/her actions. The focus of the phenomenologist is then on understanding how consciousness is turned out on to the world, as it intentionally relates to the objects in the world. This makes consciousness of the world, or more specifically, the relationship between an individual's consciousness of the world, an object of study by phenomenological psychologists, that is, the public realm of experience (Sokolowski, 2000).

To this end, phenomenological psychologists are not interested in understanding cognition, as is the tradition in mainstream psychology. They are interested in the intentional correlation that leads to the focus on the experience of things in their appearance and the way in which they appear to the individuals as they focus their attention on them in consciousness (Finlay, 2012; Langdrige, 2007). This will result in the mind being recognised as something intrinsically public instead of being private to the individual. Having said that, it makes the field of psychology focus more on what occurs between an individual and the world, including the relationship between individuals, rather than the search for thinking patterns in the brain (Sokolowski, 2000). From this, phenomenological psychology became the central concern for understanding experience and the way in which an individual perceives the world in which they live.

5.2.1.1.2. *Phenomenological reduction.* There are three elements to this process, namely, description, horizontalisation and verification (Langdrige, 2007). The first step in the process is to describe what the individual sees, not only in terms of consciousness. The idea is to capture and describe the total experience of consciousness in as much detail as possible. In so doing, the researcher excludes all elements that are not directly within conscious experience. This is achieved through repeated reflection on the phenomenon,

examination and elucidation, with the rule of horizontalisation in mind. The horizontalisation rule resists the temptation of producing hierarchies of meaning, as it treats all details with equal value.

In the natural attitude, researchers are likely to verticalise by thinking that one thing is more important than the other. This is strongly resisted in phenomenological psychology when attempting to understand the meaning of experience for the participant. The key to phenomenological reduction is repeated analysis, looking to uncover the layers of meaning inherent in the phenomenon being perceived. After completion of the process, the researcher formulates tentative hypotheses with regard to the hierarchies of meaning and engages in the process of verification. The verification process involves taking the analysis back to the text to check if it makes sense in that context. Once the verification is done, the next stage is to write a complete textual description of the experience (Langdrige, 2007).

5.2.1.1.3. Imaginative variation. Further to phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation may be employed to elucidate meaning from an experience (Langdrige, 2007). It is a process of approaching the phenomenon being experienced from a different perspective. The aim is to vary elements of the individual's experience imaginatively so that the essence may come into view and the bias fade away. Imaginative variation is a potentially powerful technique that can enable the researcher to uncover the layers of meaning and invariant properties of an experience (Sokolowski, 2000). In phenomenological psychology, demographic characteristics such as gender, age, educational qualifications and others, naturally lend themselves to this kind of work.

5.2.1.1.4. Essence. The concept of essence in phenomenological psychology represents a move from the description of individual experience to exploring the structure underlying such experience (Langdrige, 2007). Husserl believed that it is possible on the basis of a single experience to identify the universal structure(s) underlying the experience

(Sokolowski, 2000). The process of moving from the individual to the universal was termed eidetic intuition. According to Husserl, it is possible to discern the essence of experience from any individual experience. On the contrary, phenomenological psychologists have tended to attempt to discern essences through multiple descriptions from a number of participants. This is effectively a form of sampling through imaginative variation, where the true nature of the experience under investigation is described from different perspectives (Langdridge, 2007).

5.2.1.2. *Types of phenomenological psychology approaches.* Langdridge (2007) outlined the different approaches to phenomenological psychology commonly used today, namely, descriptive phenomenology, interpretative phenomenological analysis and critical narrative analysis. The approaches will be discussed briefly below. These approaches detail the similarities and differences between the schools of phenomenological psychology. These brief discussions on the approaches will provide information on firstly, how to select a particular approach based on the information provided, secondly, how to provide practical information that is more relevant to one approach rather than another and finally, how to emphasise the link between the different phenomenological psychologies and the different philosophical schools.

5.2.1.2.1 *Descriptive phenomenology.* This is the most traditional approach to phenomenology. Its focus is on identifying the essence of the phenomenon through epochal and psychological phenomenological reduction (Finlay, 2012). Langdridge (2007) argued that there is no single way of conducting descriptive phenomenological psychology research, although the approach by Giorgi (1989) and colleagues remains the dominant approach. There are a number of important figures that have continued to develop this approach theoretically. An attempt was made by Peter Ashworth and colleagues to build on the work of Giorgi by focusing on the existential aspects of the life world (Sokolowski, 2000). They did

so by incorporating into the analytic process an additional stage, where the researcher interrogates the description produced through a number of existential givens of the life world.

5.2.1.2.2. *Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach.* This approach is distinguished from descriptive phenomenological psychology because of its greater concern with hermeneutics and interpretation (Langdridge, 2007). IPA is probably the most widely known approach to phenomenological psychology used by psychologists in the UK today (Finlay, 2012). It was developed by Jonathan Smith in the 1990s at the University of London. It was informed by phenomenological philosophy with strong hermeneutic phenomenological roots (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The approach places less emphasis on description and greater emphasis on interpretation than does descriptive phenomenology, as well as greater engagement with mainstream psychological literature. The approach is popular in health psychology and other applied psychologies. It has been argued and correctly so, that its emphasis is on qualitative description and thereby lacks a great deal of theoretical work to ground in phenomenological philosophy (Finlay, 2012; Langdridge, 2007).

Another interpretative method is the hermeneutic phenomenology, which involves a thematic analysis of data and is built on the life world philosophy of Husserl along with existential and hermeneutic philosophy (Langdridge, 2007). The hermeneutic phenomenology approach has been growing in popularity among applied researchers in nursing and education (Finlay, 2012).

5.2.1.2.3. *Critical narrative analysis (CNA).* The increased interest in hermeneutics in phenomenology resulted in the development of phenomenological narrative methods of data analysis (Langdridge, 2007). CNA is designed to facilitate the exploration of experience through the critical analysis of narrative accounts. It has much in common with other forms of narrative analysis by Dan McAdams, Michael Murray and Donald Polkinghorne, but with some important differences (Finlay, 2012). The focus of CNA is to identify narratives and

examine the function and tone, as well as their thematic content. Crucial to CNA is the critical moment when the researcher employs imaginative hermeneutics of suspicion to interrogate his way of viewing the phenomenon and the narrative being employed by the participants (Finlay, 2012).

5.2.2. Phenomenology research methods. Phenomenology approaches fall under the qualitative research methods and they have four characteristics namely, descriptive, reductions, intentional and essences (Langdridge, 2007). Any phenomenological research should be rigorously descriptive, use reductions and explore the intentional relationships between individuals and situations while disclosing the essences of human experiences through the use of imaginative variation (Finlay, 2012; Giorgi, 1989). Giorgi (1997) states that these characteristics of phenomenological methods encompass three interrelated steps: the phenomenological reduction, the description and the search for essences.

A phenomenological methodology involves the collection of naturalistic, first person accounts of experience and recognises the need to account for the influence of the researcher on the data collection and analytical process (Langdridge, 2007). Phenomenological approaches have a number of methods that focus on rich descriptions of lived experiences and meaning but which do not explicitly use techniques such as phenomenological reduction and eidetic intuition variation (Finlay, 2012), for example, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) by Smith (2004). According to Smith, IPA is idiographic and inductive, as it seeks to explore participants' personal lived experiences. Although it focuses upon individuals' perceptions, it identifies more strongly with the hermeneutic tradition that recognises the central role played by the researcher (Finlay, 2012). The sensitivity and responsiveness of the phenomenological approach is fundamental to the view of the 'P' in IPA.

5.2.2.1. Interpretative phenomenological analysis. The present study used an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) that sought to understand the lived experiences and the meaning that the participants place on these experiences (Brocki & Wearden, 2004; Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Literature has indicated that IPA studies do not test a hypothesis but rely on participants being experts in their field (Brocki & Wearden, 2004; Flowers, 2007; Smith, 2015).

IPA was developed as a distinctive approach to conducting qualitative research in psychology, offering a theoretical foundation and a detailed procedural data analysis guide. As such, it has been utilised in a growing number of published studies (Chapman & Smith, 2002; Smith et al., 2009). It is important to note here that the approach has its origins in fields of inquiry such as phenomenology and symbolic interactionism, which hold that human beings are not passive perceivers of an objective reality, but rather come to interpret and understand their world by formulating their own biographical stories into a form that makes sense to them (Larkin et al., 2006; Smith 2009). It is from this that IPA can be said to be part of the relativist ontology and has a symbolic interactionist perspective (Murray & Holmes, 2014; Smith, 1996).

IPA uses the post-positivist approach as opposed to the positivist approach, as it rejects the objectivism of positivist epistemology (Clancy, 2013; Joseph, 2014). Its focus is on individual experiences, making the care and concern of their participants important. The participants are studied in their context – their world, within their relational self. Their viewpoint is taken only from their personal perspective. While IPA acknowledges that it tries to get closer to an ‘insider perspective,’ such acknowledgement appreciates that this cannot be achieved completely (Finlay, 2012; Smith et al., 1999), as it is impossible to enter the mind of the participant and see tangible experience. This implies that the researcher’s aim in

an IPA is to capture the participants' views through continual and critical questioning (Dowling & Cooney, 2012; Larkin & Thompson, 2012).

The goal of IPA is to explore in detail the processes through which participants make sense of their own realities, by looking at the participants' experience of the processes they have been through and seeking to utilise an assumed existing universal inclination towards self-reflection (Chapman & Smith, 2002; Griffin & May, 2012). Thus, IPA research focuses on the exploration of participants' experiences, understandings, perceptions and views (Brocki & Wearden, 2004; Smith et al., 2009). The processes referred to include all these aspects of self-reflection and to the way in which IPA assumes that participants seek to interpret their experiences into some form that is understandable to them (Chapman & Smith, 2002).

IPA is phenomenological in that it is concerned with individuals' subjective reports rather than the formulation of objective accounts (Brocki & Wearden, 2004; Smith, 2015) and recognises that research is a dynamic process (Matthews & Ross, 2014; Osborn & Smith, 1998). Whilst the researcher attempts to access "the participant's personal world" (p. 218) insofar as this is possible, IPA acknowledges that "access depends on and is complicated by the researcher's own conceptions.....required in order to make sense of that other personal world through a process of interpretative activity" (Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999, pp. 218-219). The term interpretative phenomenological analysis is therefore used to signal the double hermeneutic of the approach and the joint reflection of both participant and researcher from the analytic account produced (Finlay, 2012; Joseph, 2014; Smith, 1996).

Brocki and Wearden (2004) describe IPA as phenomenological in its principal focus on the individual's lived experiences and is strongly connected to the interpretative or hermeneutic tradition in its recognition of the researcher's centrality to the analysis and research. It was acknowledged in this research that interpretations were restricted by

participants' abilities to articulate their thoughts and experiences adequately (Baillie, Smith, Hewison & Mason, 2000; Larkin & Thompson, 2012) and this was followed by the researcher's ability to reflect and analyse.

As IPA's primary objective is personal meaning and sense-making made by a participant of a particular phenomenon, it was selected for the study firstly, because its goal is to capture the way in which participants interpret their experience. Secondly, it acknowledges that the analysis involves a dual facet; the interpretation made by the participant followed by the interpretation of the researcher. Thirdly, the analysis is transparent in its claims as it acknowledges that interpretations are bounded by participants' abilities to articulate their thoughts and experiences adequately and by the researcher's ability to analyse (Baillie et al., 2000; Brocki & Wearden, 2004; Griffin & May, 2012; Smith, 2015).

Through the use of IPA the researcher gained an understanding of how participants viewed and experienced divorce. The objective of the analysis was to obtain an insight into participants' thoughts and feelings about the divorce and post-divorce adjustment that informed the researcher about that particular experience. Willig (2008) holds that IPA could be said to take a realist approach to knowledge production. IPA does, at the same time, recognise that a researcher's understanding of a participant's thought is influenced by his own assumptions and conceptions. This was viewed as something that was necessary for making sense of another person's experience, rather than a 'bias' that needs to be eliminated. This implies that the knowledge produced by IPA is reflexive, as it acknowledges its dependence upon the researcher's position (Brocki & Wearden, 2004; Clancy, 2013; Smith, 2015).

5.2.2.2. Reflexivity. The issues surrounding reflexivity affect all qualitative approaches to research, not just IPA (Brocki & Wearden, 2004). Just as in the study, IPA does in fact, often go further than other approaches in addressing these issues. A focus on the

researcher's characteristics may not necessarily benefit a reader's interpretations of an analysis and might perhaps even represent a misleading diversion. However, it perhaps represents best practice for the researcher to present appropriate reflections on their role in the dynamic process of analysis where this might be argued to have had a significant impact on the final narrative presented and in the course of the research itself (Smith, 2004). Whilst reflexivity affects other approaches to qualitative research, the researcher acknowledges that IPA explicitly recognises the interpretative facet of the approach in its theoretical grounding. It can be argued that researchers who choose to utilise the IPA method are thus under a certain obligation to address this issue of reflexivity (Brocki & Wearden, 2004; Clancy, 2013).

Reflexivity has been defined as a process that involves questioning the researcher's attitudes, thoughts, reactions and habitual actions as he strives to understand his role in relation to others (Bolton, 2010; Clancy, 2013; Holloway & Biley, 2011). For the researcher to have been reflective, it implies he had to be able to examine his involvement, to become aware of his knowledge and how his behaviour may influence or affect others. This enabled the researcher to look more critically at circumstances and relationships and in the process helped review the ways of being and relating (Clancy, 2013).

The researcher understood that reflexivity is linked to the quality and credibility of the study, as it required him to acknowledge and take into account the many ways in which he could influence the findings. By so doing it afforded the researcher the ability to be introspective and to look at external forces that may shape the study, such as culture, history, politics, the researcher and participant and their social interactions (Sandelowski & Barroso 2002). Reflexivity does not consider the researcher to be a neutral, data-collecting machine. Rather, it allows the researcher to understand his impact on the research, as well as how this could be minimised where possible (Clancy, 2013). A reflexive approach does not limit bias

but brings it to the forefront, so that rather than attempting to hide or deny issues that arise, the researcher can tackle them and adapt interpretations to bring a more credible and realistic version of participants' accounts to light (Clancy, 2013; Frank, 1997; Kleinsasser 2000). Participants were able to see and review the researcher's interpretation of the data, which improved the credibility and trustworthiness of the research as overall conclusions are seen as being more accurately produced (Clancy, 2013).

5.3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To be included in the study, participants were required to be black South African males belonging to any ethnic group who could communicate in English. Secondly, participants should have been divorced for three or more years, as literature has indicated that it takes, on average, 2-3 years for men to remarry after divorce (Amato, 2010; Hawkins & Fackrell, 2011; Madhavan et al., 2014). Participants who had not been legally married before the divorce were excluded.

5.4. Selection of Participants

Sampling in IPA research tends to be purposive and broadly homogenous, as a small sample size can provide a sufficient perspective given adequate contextualisation (Chapman & Smith, 2002; Smith & Osborn, 2003). The goal is to select participants in order to illuminate a particular research question and to develop a full and interesting interpretation of the data, thus, IPA studies tend to be more concerned with examining differences and similarities in small samples (Matthews & Ross, 2014).

As it is a requirement for IPA, the researcher did not employ maximum variation sampling, that is, where the researcher seeks out participants who have a common experience but vary on as wide a variety of demographic characteristics as possible (Polkinghorne, 1989). Instead, the sampling was purposive and homogeneous. Thus, participants that were recruited shared the experience at the heart of the research and did not vary significantly

across demographic characteristics. The aim was to recruit individuals from whom the researcher could make claims about their shared experience. This makes IPA studies idiographic, as there is little attempt to generalise beyond this particular sample. The focus was therefore to develop a detailed description of the experience of a small number of individuals who share that experience.

The sample was purposive because the researcher purposively set out to recruit only those individuals who share the experience being researched. The sample was also fairly homogenous, as it was not really possible to garner a representative sample as the nature of the sample is dependent upon the topic being investigated, the interest of the researcher and the limitations of the study. It has been highlighted that student projects employing a phenomenological method are likely to have a small sample with no more than six participants (Langdridge, 2007). However, it is perfectly possible to carry out a worthwhile investigation with just one participant or indeed many participants. As always, a research process is driven by a combination of theoretical/methodological demands and practical constraints (Finlay, 2012).

In line with IPA sampling criteria, a sample of eight divorced, black South African men from the Eastern Cape was selected for the study. Seven of them were from Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality and one participant was from East London. The first two participants responded to an advertisement that was placed in a social newspaper on 22 June 2016. After failing to get a minimum of eight participants from the advertisement, the researcher then advertised on a church networking website (www.pechurchnet.co.za) on 4 July 2016 and two local commercial newspapers on 7 July 2016. Twelve respondents responded and the researcher selected eight participants who met the inclusion criteria, four were disqualified based on the exclusion criteria, as two were coloured and the other two were not legally married before the divorce.

Smith and Osborn (2003) emphasised that IPA researchers must be pragmatic in the selection of participants, especially where the phenomenon under investigation is unique and the issue of accessibility and willingness to participate is problematic, as was the case with divorced, black South Africa men's experience with divorce. Identifying black South African men who have openly disclosed their divorce and are willing to share their experiences in a research setting was not an easy matter. This made opportunism and convenience contributing factors in choosing purposive sampling for this study (Patton, 1990). The potential to develop new knowledge was therefore used as a superior criterion for representativeness in terms of either population or probability (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Considering that the sample was self-selected and therefore non-representative, generalisation can be made only sparingly and with caution. Thus, credibility and strength of the IPA sample selection rests on theoretical (rather than empirical) generalisability (Cope, 2011). Smith and Osborn (2003) addressed the matter of the lack of generalisability from IPA data by saying: "The issue is not of generalisability but that of access. The purpose of the qualitative interview is not to discuss how many people share a certain characteristic, it is to gain access to the cultural categories and assumptions according to which one culture construes the world" (p. 117). It is Smith and Osborn's (2003) view that IPA is not opposed to making general claims for larger populations, but is committed to the analysis of small numbers of cases that may subsequently lead to generalisations.

5.5. Research procedure

The proposal for the study was approved by the Nelson Mandela University Psychology Department Research Committee, the Faculty Postgraduate Studies Committee (FPGSC) and the Research Ethics Committee – Human (REC-H) ethics number H15-HEA-PSY-016, before the study was initiated. It was acknowledged that, while it was important to meet the ethical criteria set by the REC-H before conducting the study, qualitative research

also requires sustained reflection and review. The researcher maintained awareness of the extent to which talking about what could be a sensitive issue for the divorced men, might constitute 'harm.' A provision was made with the University Psychology Clinic for those who may have needed counselling although no one made use of the offer.

After an advertisement to call for participants was placed in local newspapers and a website, potential respondents contacted the researcher through email and *sms* and the researcher then contacted them telephonically to provide more details about the research and to assess if the respondent met the requisite selection criteria for the study. Following the initial selection of participants based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria, appointments for interviews were made between the researcher and each participant. Five interviews were conducted in an office at the university and were audio recorded. One was conducted in the Port Elizabeth town centre, another at a mall and in both cases the consent ensured confidentiality of the interview. Another interview was conducted telephonically as the participant was in East London. He was alone in his office at the time of the interview while the researcher was in an office at the university to ensure confidentiality of information. All the participants signed a consent form (Appendix A), which contained information regarding the purpose of the research study, prior to the interview and all interviews were audio recorded. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants and debriefing was provided for all the participants. Each participant was assured that anonymity would be maintained as only the researcher and the research supervisors would have access to the raw data. After a process of iteration the interviews were transcribed by the researcher and verified by an independent coder. Given that IPA is an interpretive process, it was considered good practice to meet with the participants again two weeks after the interviews and have them read through the transcriptions of their interviews to ensure that the nuances of meaning

were captured adequately. Following the transcription, and in accordance with phenomenological methodology, data analysis commenced.

The researcher considered it good practice to revisit the issue of consent orally at the beginning of the interview and explained to the participants that anonymity would be maintained at every stage of the study. The right to withdraw at any time up to the point of the end of the interview was explained at the beginning of the interview. The participants were offered a gift voucher worth R100 each for taking part in the research. This seems appropriate as it was felt that the remuneration was not high enough to be seen as coercive (Ensign & Ammermann, 2008), yet represented an acknowledgement of gratitude that participants had given their time to the study. All intimate knowledge that was obtained was documented accurately and objectively and its relevance carefully assessed to accord the participants relevant respect. Subjective responses were managed in a way that preserved scientific rigour.

5.6. Data Collection

The most common interviews used in phenomenological research and indeed in all qualitative research, is the semi-structured interview. This approach to interviewing has a long history in psychology and represents a trade-off between consistency and flexibility that best meets the needs of many qualitative researchers (Lingridge, 2007). Consistency was maintained through the use of an interview schedule consisting of a series of questions and prompts designed to elicit the maximum possible information (see Appendix B). As can be seen from the interview guide, the questions tap into different aspects of the experience being explored. The questions were not too rigid as it was important for the researcher to work with the questions in light of the conversation that occurred with the participant.

The aim was always to develop a rapport that enabled joint exploration of the participant's world view concerning the phenomenon. The schedule was merely a guide to

enable the researcher to do this as effectively as possible given the constraints of time and money that the researcher (and participants), inevitably faced.

The researcher gathered data through ‘phenomenological interviewing’, which Thompson, Locander & Pollio (1989) described as “the most powerful means of attaining an in-depth understanding of another person’s experiences” (p. 138). The goal in phenomenological interviewing is to gain a first person description of some specific domain of experience, where the participant largely sets the course of the dialogue (Cope, 2011). Although the researcher used a printed hand-out (Appendix B & Appendix C), of questions, it was used as a guide. Most of the questions were loosely structured with the exception of the first question, as suggested by Thompson et al. (1989) that a phenomenological researcher must not have priori questions regarding the phenomenon. The interview began with the broad question: *Can you tell me about your experience of divorce?* Subsequent questions were derived from the dialogue.

5.7. Data Analysis

The derived data was analysed using the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). This approach is dual faceted, in that it is both interpretative and phenomenological, which implies it is concerned with the individual’s subjective report about an experience and it views the analytical outcome as being based on the joint reflections and frameworks of both participant and researcher (Brocki & Wearden, 2004; Cope, 2011). Whilst the researcher attempted to access the participant’s personal world insofar as this was feasible, IPA acknowledges that “access depends on, and is complicated by, the researcher’s own conceptions.....required in order to make sense of the other personal world through a process of interpretative activity” (Brocki & Wearden, 2004, p. 81). IPA acknowledges that interpretations are bounded by participants’ abilities to articulate their thoughts and experiences adequately and, this is followed by the researcher’s ability to reflect and analyse.

As the researcher drew from his interpretative resources to make sense of what the participants were saying, he also reflected on his values, interests, experiences, preoccupations, and assumptions that may have been brought into the process. It is therefore acknowledged by the researcher that it was not possible to remain outside of the research phenomenon (Brocki & Wearden, 2004). To abide by this standard of reflexivity, the researcher kept a diary of self-reflective notes and had debriefing sessions with his research supervisors, in order to acknowledge pre-existing assumptions that may have shaped his interpretative framework (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

The principal objective of the analysis was to understand the lived experiences and the meanings that the participants placed on their experience of divorce and divorce adjustment. The findings are an interpretation of what the researcher thinks the participants experienced. The dual facet implies that the analysis involves a high degree of subjectivity and is shaped by the researcher's interpretative frameworks. Thus, this study acknowledges that the truth claims of an IPA are tentative and subjective (Brocki & Wearden, 2004).

Based on the IPA guidelines (Smith et al., 1999), interview transcripts were read many times to infer recurrent themes in the narrative accounts. Brief descriptive codes were annotated on each transcript and, after much immersion in the data, the themes were grouped into broader interpretative themes. The themes were checked and expanded during the subsequent analysis by an independent coder. Greater attention was given to the themes that the participants, validated through the process of iteration. These themes formed the framework of the divorce-stress-adjustment model.

IPA uses thematic analysis as its principal analytical approach (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The researcher as the analyst was concerned with making sense of the participant's world and therefore spent a considerable amount of time working through the transcripts (and

listening to the audio recordings), in order to identify the major themes. The analysis began with a single case and proceeded through a number of phases (Brocki & Wearden, 2004).

Stage 1 involved reading and re-reading the transcript and adding comments in the left hand margin about the meaning of a particular section of the transcript. Not all elements warranted comments. Comments were summaries, associations or interpretations (based on knowledge of the extant of psychological literature). The aim here was to simply state what is going on in the text, that is, staying close to the meaning inherent in the text and less frequently making more interpretative remarks. This stage was repeated more than once in order to maximise the likelihood of the researcher capturing the correct meaning in the text.

In stage 2 emerging themes were noted in the right hand margin. Initial statements were then transformed into more meaningful statements, reflecting a broader level of meaning in a particular section of the text. These comments reflected the broader, more theoretical concerns. At this stage terms were not fixed as they changed in the next stage when examined in a global context.

The themes were listed separately on paper in stage 3 in their original chronological order. The researcher and analyst then identified common links between themes and re-ordered them into a more analytical sequence. Some themes were clustered together and others were broken down further. While reordering and restructuring the themes, the researcher had to continually return to the text to check the emerging analysis.

In stage 4, the researcher produced a table of themes in a coherent order. The themes were linked to the originating text through reference to specific quotes. At this stage some of the themes were dropped, as they did not fit into the superordinate themes and/or because they did not add a great deal to the analysis.

After completing these stages for one case, the researcher then moved on to the other cases. The researcher had to adapt and amend the table of themes during the analysis of the

subsequent cases, checking these amendments with the transcripts of the first case, then the second until the eighth. This procedure was repeated on all the cases until the final table of themes that represented the study was produced. Flexibility was important when moving from one case to another, as there were times when it was necessary to start again and completely rework themes or abandon those that appeared relevant with one case and not others. The process was cyclical and iterative, continually returning to the data to check meaning and confirm interpretations.

Weed's (2008) recommendations for the interpretive synthesis interview data were used. The interpretive synthesis is guided by seven fundamental principles. Firstly, the role of the synthesiser as an active, interpretive agent; secondly, a recognition that the synthesis will be '*an* interpretation' rather than '*the* interpretation' of the interviews; thirdly, an idiographic (rather than pre-determined) approach to the development of exclusion criteria; fourthly, an iterative approach to theoretical sampling; fifthly, a focus on 'meaning in context'; sixthly, interpretations as the 'raw data' for synthesis and lastly, a transparent audit trail as a guarantor of the integrity and trustworthiness of the synthesis. The interpretation was illustrated by extracts from the transcripts in order for the reader to assess the persuasiveness of the analysis.

According to Reynolds (2003), it is the detail of the analysis, its flexibility, the positive experience of being able to respond creatively to the narratives, the devotion of attention to respondents' meanings rather than to pre-existing theory and the sensitisation to the linguistic features of the text as well as to the content that help to heighten understanding of the participants' frames of reference. Many intriguing clues were inferred about the personal, social, economic and cultural resources of the respondents that enabled them to reconstruct life and identity after the divorce.

The study incorporated Guba and Lincoln's model of trustworthiness (de Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2011). The model has four principles that ensure trustworthiness of the study, namely credibility, dependability, transferability and conformability. Credibility refers to the internal validity of the study and requires the researcher to accurately describe the topic within the relevant theoretical framework. Transferability relates to the generalisability of the study and requires the researcher to use acceptable concepts or models. Dependability refers to efforts by the researcher to account for any changes in the topic or study design. Conformability is used to determine if the current study could be replicated and confirmed by future studies (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

The researcher implemented the following guidelines to ensure trustworthiness and credibility of this study: firstly, the researcher established prolonged engagement with the participants before data collection as the researcher made several calls to the participants and met seven of them weeks before data collection began, giving them brief questions that they could expect. Secondly, the researcher used triangulation, that is, theory triangulation – symbolic interaction and Erikson's psychosocial theory – to compensate for these theories' individual limitations and to exploit their respective benefits. The use of a number of participants (eight) was another form of triangulation. It was one way of triangulation via data sources. Individual viewpoints and experiences were verified against others and, ultimately a thick narrative of the attitudes, needs and behaviour of the participants was constructed based on the contributions from a range of individuals.

Thirdly, the participants' selection – each individual who responded to the advertisement was given an opportunity to refuse to participate in the study so as to ensure that data collection sessions involved only those who were genuinely willing to take part and prepared to offer data freely. Fourthly, the researcher used probes to elicit detailed data and iterative questioning during which the researcher returned to matters previously raised by the

participant and extracts related data through rephrased questions. Fifthly, frequent debriefing sessions between the researcher and his research promoters – these meetings provided a platform for the researcher to test his developing ideas and interpretations and probing by the supervisors helped the researcher to recognise his own biases and preferences. Sixthly, opportunities for scrutiny of the research by colleagues, peers and academics was welcomed through the research workshops and conferences that the researcher attended, as were comments offered to the researcher at conference presentations and workshops. Finally, a reflective commentary in the form of a research diary – part of which was devoted to the effectiveness of the techniques that were used.

5.7.1. Development of the divorce-stress-adjustment model. The model was premised on the interlinking among the superordinate themes (pre-divorce experience, experiencing the divorce, adjustment process and the post-divorce experience). The pre-divorce experience with family attachments, length of the marriage, level of investment - in terms of having children, family resources (both movable and non-movable assets), created the stress that influenced how the participants experienced the actual divorce process, which in turn affected the adjustment process and the subsequent post-divorce experience. The adjustment challenges included the severity and duration of psychological and behavioural functioning in the new role and developing an identity and lifestyle not tied to the former marriage. These defined whether the effects were short term (crisis model), or long term (chronic strain model). In between the stress and adjustment there are protective factors these included resources (individual, interpersonal, and structural), definition and meaning of the divorce, whether one received professional help or not and biographical characteristics.

5.8. Ethical Considerations

The study followed the Health Professions Council of South Africa's (HPCSA, 2008) research guidelines. These include the principle of best interest or well-being, which is the

principle of non-maleficence. This principle highlights that risks and harm to participants must be minimised and the principle of beneficence, which indicates that the benefits of research must not outweigh the risks to the research participants. Secondly, the principle of respect for the person, that is, the principle of autonomy. Participants that are capable of deliberation about personal choices should be treated with respect for their capacity of self-determination and should be afforded the opportunity to make informed decisions with regard to their participation in the research. The principle of confidentiality is the protection of a participant's right to both privacy and confidentiality. Thirdly, the principle of justice, which imposes an ethical obligation to treat each person in a manner that is right and proper.

5.8.1. Consent. It is the most fundamental of all ethical principles, although it is not something that is generally a problem with phenomenological research, as phenomenological research provides the participants with full knowledge about the nature of the research in the process of securing their agreement to participate. Once an individual has consented it does not mean that the consent is granted for eternity. Participants retain the right to withdraw their consent at any stage of the research process (even once the data collection phase has ended and the analysis is being written up). It was important that this was made clear to the participants and that they felt enabled to choose not to consent in the first place and then to withdraw their consent if they no longer felt able to participate in the study.

Although this was difficult for the researcher, who found it challenging to recruit participants, it was important to take into consideration that individuals who volunteer their time and effort are doing the researcher an enormous favour and it was vital that the researcher did not forget this in his efforts to develop his research study.

5.8.2. Confidentiality and anonymity. In general, all information gathered from a participant should remain confidential unless it is absolutely necessary to break this rule. This position was made clear to all participants who agreed to participate in the research project.

There was also the possibility for participants to remain anonymous. This was very unlikely to be the case with phenomenological research, where close and often continuing contact with participants is invariably the norm. Even here it was important that the identities of the participants are not made obvious when publishing the findings (in whatever form). All efforts were made to maintain confidentiality within the research team (the researcher, promoters and independent coder) and to protect the participants by anonymising the information they provide when it is made public. The audio recordings were saved by the researcher in a password-protected file and will be stored for five years after the conclusion of this research study.

5.8.3. Discomfort and harm. It is the prime responsibility of the researcher to protect participants from physical and mental harm in any research study. Although physical harm is unlikely to be an issue for phenomenological research, mental harm is something that was considered. As the guideline states, the risk of harm must not be greater than that which an individual may experience in everyday life. This is difficult to quantify, but all efforts were made to minimise the risk of participation in the study. In general, this is not a problem for phenomenological research. However, it was the primary responsibility of the researcher to protect the participants from any discomfort or harm and so care was taken during the research, as divorce can be considered a topic that individuals may find embarrassing or difficult to talk about. One method the researcher used, which is commonly used in phenomenological research, was to discuss the questions that will be asked of the participant before the interview. The participant was then able to judge whether the issue is too sensitive for them to participate (or not), after being fully informed about the nature of the study.

5.8.4. Deception. While deception remains common in psychology research, it is not the norm in phenomenological research, where it is usual for the researcher and participant(s) to work openly and honestly towards a common goal. It was not necessary to deceive

participants about the true nature of the research; therefore there were no strong grounds for such deception and no full debriefing.

5.8.5. Invasion of privacy. This is an ethical issue worthy of consideration for some phenomenological research. The right to privacy is generally very important and the researcher needed to think long and hard about the invasion of privacy. There was the potential for invasion of privacy to occur during interviewing and the interviewer was sufficiently sensitive to a participant's desire not to talk about particular issues. Consent is no defence in such circumstances, especially given that it was unusual to provide participants with interview questions in advance of the interview, although it is common practice in phenomenology. It was therefore important that the interviewer was sensitive to the needs of participants to not answer certain questions and maintain privacy around particular aspects of their life.

5.9. Conclusion

How black South African men experience divorce can be adequately explored using a qualitative interpretive phenomenological analysis paradigm, which focuses on the individual participant's lived experience. This is an acknowledgement that the divorce phenomenon can only be understood from an insider perspective rather than an outsider perspective. The outcomes of this study of eight black South African men will be developed in the next chapter, which will present the three broad themes of the mediators, adjustment outcomes and moderators. Each section is followed by a theoretical analysis and interpretation, examining the stages and process individuals go through after divorce.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

6.1. Chapter overview

In this chapter the researcher presents the findings of the study by first providing a brief description of each participant. This is followed by a detailed analysis and interpretation of the themes that were extracted from the data after coding, verification by an independent coder and confirmation by the participants in line with the IPA paradigm. The chapter revisits the research questions and objectives of the study, which were to explore black South African men's experience of and adjustment to divorce and to explore why black South African men experience divorce in the manner in which they do. Finally, the findings of the study as discussed, outline the framework for the divorce-stress-adjustment model.

6.2. Biographical Data of Participants

Eight participants with ranging in age from 28 to 45 and a mean age of 37 years were interviewed. Seven of the participants were from the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan area and one was from East London. The post-divorce period ranged from between 6 months and 10 years. Pseudonyms were used throughout the chapter to protect the identities of the participants.

Sihle (32)—A graduate engineer from one of the top universities in South Africa, who works for a large engineering company in Port Elizabeth. He was married for four years before his divorce six months before data collection, after his wife had *cheated on him* with his best friend. His ex-wife was pregnant at the time of data collection and he was not sure if he is the father or not. He is not currently in any romantic relationship as he still feels *weak*, trying to understand what happened and why.

Themba (37)—Had been married for five years when he divorced. He met his ex-wife at university and they decided to get married upon graduation. They could not have a child and *Themba* had to divorce her because his family advised him to do so. He stayed single for a year before remarrying a family-recommended wife. Although he has been married for a year now, he still does not have a child. He regrets divorcing his ex-wife.

Thulani (40) —A graduate in psychology who works for a government department in East London. After spending a year in a long-distance relationship with his girlfriend, he decided to get married. The couple were married for ten years but they continued to live in separate towns, although they acquired a house in which the wife was living. They have two children, a girl aged eight and a boy aged five. The wife began *cheating on him* with a local medical doctor. Upon catching her cheating twice, *Thulani* filed for divorce. He lost custody of the children but still pays the bond for the house and for the maintenance of the two children. *Thulani* has been divorced for three years. Although he did not disclose in the biographical section of the interview if he is currently in any romantic relationship or not, he mentioned that he has very good close friends.

Anele (35)—Works as a petrol attendant. He began cohabiting when his ex-wife fell pregnant with their first child. Two years later, they got married formally. They were married for eight years and had two children, a boy now aged ten and a girl now aged six. The wife began abusing alcohol and drugs after she lost her job and this affected their marriage and children. *Anele* then filed for divorce and was awarded custody of the children. He plans to remarry soon.

Fikile (28) - Was forced to marry his childhood sweetheart when he had just finished Matric after she had fallen pregnant. The parents of the girl are local pastors and could not accept their daughter being impregnated out of wedlock. The couple have a baby boy. *Fikile*

had to look for a job to support the family and his wife opted to continue her studies at university. He felt disempowered as he had to take care of all the household chores while his wife was concentrating on her studies. Five years later the marriage broke down due to perceived irreconcilable differences. *Fikile* filed for divorce and went back to his parents' house. The ex-wife now lives alone with their son.

Bongani (42)—Works in the automobile industry and has been divorced for five years. He is a very religious person and attends church regularly. He was married and has two children, a 12-year-old boy and a 9-year-old girl. Tension in the marriage began to develop when the ex-wife stopped going to church. The tension escalated to a point where the wife filed for divorce. They had to sell the house and share the property as part of the divorce settlement. *Bongani* pays for the maintenance of his two children. He is also in the process of remarrying. He mentioned that he would have opted to remain single but his religious beliefs forced him to find a partner with similar religious values.

Jabu (39)—A truck driver who divorced his wife of ten years in 2011. *Jabu* never remarried, although he has had several women in his life. He rarely sees his three children, two girls aged 14 and 8 and a boy aged 11. His ex-wife does not want him to have any contact with the children because she claims that he is a bad influence. He began abusing alcohol after the divorce and lost his job. He only started working a year ago and according to him there have been significant changes in his life, both physically and financially. He can now afford to rent a flat in town, has managed to clear all his debts and contributes to his children's welfare.

Akhona (45)—Worked as a supervisor at one of the leading supermarkets in South Africa. He was married for fifteen years and has three children, a boy aged sixteen and two girls aged thirteen and nine years old. After being retrenched in 2010, the marital situation

changed as his wife was then the sole breadwinner. She became abusive, refusing sexual intimacy. A year later she filed for divorce on the grounds of domestic violence. He lost everything, the house, property and the children. He now lives with his brother.

6.3. Findings and Discussion

The aim of this research was to answer the following questions: ‘How do black South African men experience and adjust to divorce?’ ‘What are the factors that contribute to this adjustment?’ ‘Do black South African men require professional help to adjust positively to divorce?’ The answers to these questions were gathered through in-depth interviews that were conducted with a sample of eight black South African men in order to understand their experience of, and adjustment to divorce. Thereafter, these findings were compared to existing literature on the subject.

Participants were asked to talk as widely as possible about their divorce experience, the impact on their lives and adjustment thereafter. The narratives cluster around four superordinate themes: pre-divorce experience, divorce experience, adjustment process and post-divorce experience. The following section provides a detailed analysis of the identified themes and evidence of both the process and content dimension of the participants’ experience and then illustrates the key objects of concern in the participant’s world and the experiential claims made by the participants in line with the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) goal (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006). As the aims of this study were to understand black South African men’s experience of, and adjustment to divorce, and to explore the factors that influence their experience of it, a detailed analysis of *why they divorced* and *what love implies to them* is beyond the scope of this study.

The researcher used the data from the participants’ experiences to infer a particular position in relation to the world of objects as defined by Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer,

1986), which constitutes and defines the black South African men's experience of love, marriage and divorce. It should however, be noted that the experiences of the participants were revealed to the researcher through retrospective cross-sectional interviews as they voluntarily offered to participate and therefore their experiences were not accessed directly (that is, being observed), which implies that the researcher had to rely solely on the participants' narratives to make an analysis. Below is a table summarising the superordinate themes as well as the subordinate themes and subthemes that emerged from the participants' narratives. The themes focus on the immediate impact of the divorce, its stressful effects on the divorced participant, and how the participant managed to adjust and ultimately regain normal functioning.

Table 1. Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Themes

Superordinate themes	Subordinate themes	Subthemes
Pre-divorce experience	<p>Family attachment</p> <p>Length of the marriage</p> <p>Level of investment</p> <p>Marital strain</p>	<p>Staying in different towns</p> <p>Dedicated Christian family</p> <p>Raising children together</p> <p>Married for a very long time and have teenage children</p> <p>Having children</p> <p>Family resources (movable and non-movable assets)</p> <p>Extra marital affair</p> <p>Loss of a job</p> <p>Failure to conceive</p> <p>Educated spouse</p>
Experiencing divorce	<p>Perceptions about divorce</p> <p>Feelings of stress</p> <p>Feelings of pain</p>	<p>Spiritual understanding of marriage/divorce</p> <p>Cultural expectations</p> <p>Divorced others</p> <p>Temporary stress</p> <p>Persistent stress</p> <p>Initiator of the divorce</p> <p>Emotional pain</p> <p>Physical pain</p>
Adjustment process	<p>Supportive networks</p> <p>New relationships/marriage</p> <p>Professional assistance</p>	<p>The role of family and friends, work, church and the community</p> <p>Initiating dating again</p> <p>Getting a new job</p> <p>Initiating new social activities</p> <p>Employee workplace wellness programmes</p>
Post-divorce experience	<p>Social impact</p> <p>Learning from the divorce</p>	<p>Real or perceived stigma</p> <p>Developing a model for solving problems</p> <p>Importance of relationship networks</p>

	Personal growth Developing a new personality Professional networks	Broken social and professional relationships
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6.3.1. Pre-divorce experience. All the participants related the state of their marital lifestyle before the divorce. Considering that the study was conducted after the participants had experienced the divorce meant that their pre-divorce experience was a reflection on their part of how their marriage was before the divorce, which made their experience a reflective process. The type of marital lifestyle they lived and the understanding they had of marriage made them experience divorce the way they did. For most of the participants, marriage meant considering the amount of investment they had made both financially and emotionally. Even the participant who was living in a different town from his family had also invested significantly in his marriage with the hope of lifelong happiness. The experiences of these participants indicates that divorce is a complex phenomenon that has a serious and detrimental effect on the life of black South African men. This section explores these multifaceted and interdependent themes of the pre-divorce experience in detail.

6.3.1.1. Family attachment. This was a common theme among six of the participants. *Sihle*, who had lived with his wife happily for four years before the divorce, felt as if his dignity had been lost, considering that he was a well-respected family man who had a very close attachment with his wife. After realising that his wife had slept with his best friend it was a shock for him and later he considered it as the highest level of betrayal by both his wife and his friend. He admitted that: *I don't know who to trust anymore. I thought we were a happy family.* For *Thulani* and *Bongani*, family meant everything, as was seen by the kind of commitment that they had shown in their marriages. *Thulani* had invested a great deal into

the marriage in terms of time and resources. He had bought a house using a bond that he is still paying off and they already had three children:

We were a wonderful family and I wouldn't have guessed that one day I would be single again.

Bongani said:

I was a committed and loving husband to my wife, and a great father to my two children and never considered divorce as I was very happy.

Losing their life partners to other men was something that they could not take lightly. *Fikile* had to abandon his wish of enrolling for accountancy at university in order to take care of the family while his wife was studying, only for her to divorce him a year after she graduated:

When we moved into our own flat life was great. I would take care of the child and sometimes cook while she studied. We were a small loving family.

Akhona thought he would grow old with his wife, as they had been married for fifteen years and had teenage children, but after he lost his job, she changed. He sums it up by saying:

After fifteen years of marriage and three children who would have ever thought I would be divorced. Up to now, I don't even know why she felt I became less of a man because I lost my job.

6.3.1.2. Marital strain. Family attachment had an influence on the marital strain of the participants. Participants who had close family attachments like *Sihle*, *Thulani* and *Bongani*, whose marriages ended due to extramarital affairs, reported severe strain on their

marriages before the divorce. *Thulani* became distant as he began avoiding going home every weekend like he used to do once he started suspecting that his ex-wife was having an affair with the family doctor after seeing an ‘I love you’ message in his ex-wife’s phone:

I then did some investigations on my own at the hospital and was told they are a couple as she visits almost every day. That’s when I confronted her again and she admitted it.

Sihle reflected on how his ex-wife began acting out of character months before she told him that she was pregnant:

She would come home late or just decide to take leave during the week saying she was tired and wanted to rest. She was no longer the usual bubbly person that I was so close to and could talk about anything with. Then I thought it was the stress of failure to conceive. It’s only now that I can connect the dots. She was having an affair.

Fikile believed that when his wife graduated she thought she was now more educated than he and that meant she had attained a superior social economic status:

We started to argue regularly even over small things like who is going to take the child to crèche. If I came home late she would be mad at me, but when she was late, I was not supposed to ask. I didn’t like being controlled by a wife. That’s not what I had signed up for!

The marital strain could have contributed to the divorce as *Fikile* thought the marriage was not working as he had lost control of his wife. After *Akhona* lost his job his ex-wife became distant to the extent of refusing to be intimate with him. This strained their marriage, although he was willing to stay in the marriage considering that it was all he had:

After I lost my job, family was all that had remained. I loved my wife and children but my ex-wife had other ideas. I will never forgive her.

For *Themba*, the involvement of his family, especially his mother, had caused a lot of strain upon his marriage. He stopped being affectionate to his ex-wife because she had failed to conceive after five years of marriage:

My family was complaining that after all these years she didn't have a child which meant she was bewitched or something and that I had to leave her. At that time, I didn't know what to believe, I was confused and decided to side with my family. That's when I started dating another lady who is my wife now.

These narratives from the participants offer a particular interpretation of the pre-divorce experience of rationalisation. It was a masculinity rationalisation that drew from two preferred resources of making sense of marital dissolution, namely, power and control (Madhavan & Hosegood, 2012). This interpretation is based on insights into the participants' life and world and the range of experiential claims that they made to support the reliability of their explanations. Elsewhere during the interviews, physical and emotional experiences are described as they reflect on the personal consequences in terms of power and control of marital dissolution.

Attachment to the former spouse was one of the findings of the present study, specifically amongst the participants who had children. These findings may be attributed to the strongly patriarchal society that black South African men find themselves in as providers and protectors of the family (Hunter, 2006). Another reason for this sort of insecure attachment may be a reflection of religiosity and the traditional orientation of the participants. Divorce was more difficult to accept for participants, as it removed them from the opportunity to perform their roles and responsibilities as providers and protectors. The

cultural expectations of the participants allowed these findings to differ from previous findings by Kulik and Kasa (2014); Gaffal (2006) and Cohen and Finzi-Dottan (2012). The cultural expectations and coping resources of most participants from Western countries make them better able to cope with divorce. Such resources include levels of education that correlate with higher incomes, which enables them to remain involved in their children's lives post-divorce.

The attitude of participants towards divorce has been reported frequently in the divorce literature as a contributing factor to the adjustment process (Baum, 2003; Locker et al., 2010; Steiner et al., 2015; Lin & Raghurir, 2005; Waite et al., 2002). Some of the participants in the study who indicated that they were committed to their marriages, struggled with adjusting to divorce. They indicated that they could not trust a remarriage, as they are not yet over the first one. This was compounded by the fact that most of the divorces involved infidelity, resulting in the participants holding negative feelings towards their former spouses and losing trust in new relationships.

The age of the participants, as a personal factor that influences adjustment, has had contradictory findings in the present study and in the literature (Gaffal, 2010; Kitson & Morgan, 1990). Parenting challenges rather than age are key factors mediating the adjustment process. The participants who had children struggled with adjustment regardless of the participant's age.

The findings of the present study share similar findings with Gahler (2006) in that the individual's psychological disposition is important to the adjustment process. That is, the way the participants interpreted marriage influenced their post-divorce adjustment process. Some participants interpreted marriage as a covenant and life time commitment and as a result they struggled to come to terms with the divorce, which resulted in poor or negative adjustment.

6.3.2. Experiencing divorce. The findings indicate that the experience of divorce represents a painful process of disengagement in which a measure of temporary and psychological distancing is required to overcome the stressful nature of divorce. The subordinate themes of experiencing divorce included perceptions about divorce, which is mainly influenced by a spiritual understanding of marriage/divorce and cultural expectation, including seeing how one's significant other, who has also gone through the divorce, had handled it. The feelings of stress, which can either be temporary or persistent and which depends upon the initiator of the divorce, and feelings of pain, which manifested either emotionally or physically, were the main themes regarding how the participants experienced the divorce. *Thulani's* account captured much of the participants' emphasis that time is a healer:

At first you are shocked and don't even understand what is going on around you.....you are just heartbroken.....then a month goes by and you say, what was I so upset about?

Jabu dramatically expressed the physical nature of the divorce experience in the following manner:

At first it will look like a mountain and as time goes on it becomes a molehill. I didn't think there was such a thing as a broken heart but surely there is!

The above statements reflect that the participants naturally experienced a mourning period. The same was true for other participants as they took different time periods to mourn their divorce before moving on. The responses from these two participants do not necessarily mean that the participants did not proceed to think about their situation and try to come to terms with the divorce. They did, but the following response by *Sihle*, highlights the very personal and challenging questions that he needed to resolve in his mind:

Did I make the right choice in the first place? Was she the right person for me? What wrong thing did I do? Could I have done something different? What could that have been?

There is an interesting subordinate theme from the findings that seems to significantly shape how the participants experienced divorce. This is the wider perceived attitude towards divorce that was expressed by the participants in the form of a spiritual understanding of divorce and marriage and cultural expectations or previous divorce experiences from significant others. Four participants felt that divorce is an acceptable aspect of family life:

Marriages fail; people divorce every day in my community. Two of my brothers divorced and they went on to remarry. So, I was not the first and obviously not the last (Themba).

Bongani saw marriage as a sacred covenant that should never be broken. He quoted the Bible when he said:

Malachi 2v16 says "For the Lord God of Israel says, that he hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts." What God put together no man shall separate it. God brings two people together in a marriage for life and no man should separate them. To me it was the darkest phase in my life. It took time for me to forgive myself. I prayed day and night.

Themba had this to say:

My parents said to me, 'if she can't give you a child, why keep her? You can always find someone who will give us grandchildren.' And I agreed with them.

The other participants seemed to hold a preconceived societal view that there is stigma attached to divorce, even though none among them had experienced any appreciable

stigma at a personal level. *Anele* saw the ineffectiveness of disclosing that he is divorced when he said: *people are not really helpful*, but fortunately he is now able to make the vital distinction that:

You can divorce, but that does not make you a failure in life, it can actually give you a second chance at life.

Akhona felt that:

As a culture we like to see people fall off their perches, and I do think we are an envious culture.....we build people up to knock them down.

Anele holds a similar view:

I suspect there is a general assumption around that if a marriage fails; it's because the husband is abusing the wife. Or that he has found someone else to marry that's why he wants the divorce.

These participants' narratives provide one example of the cultural resources that may be utilised to account for the relationship dissolution, that is, the experience is not unique to black South Africans. Some of the participants had seen how others from their community had gone through divorce. Others saw divorce as an inevitable progressive consequence of marriage and parenthood. This expresses the participants' unconscious conflicts and desires. However, it is the researcher's belief that moral rules must be obeyed when accounting for marital dissolution.

6.3.2.1. Feelings of stress. The reason *Thulani* found the divorce difficult to deal with was due to a:

Strong commitment to my wife, which made it difficult for me to accept that she was having an affair with the family doctor.

The feelings of hurt experienced by *Thulani*, although temporary, may have aggravated a sense of loneliness, heightened anxiety and increased withdrawal due to his inability to share his concerns with others when he said:

I had no one to talk to, no one understood what I was going through.

Anele felt that:

...in the end you are alone, very lonely, no one to talk to, after all those years in marriage.

Fikile reinforced this point by saying that he did not receive any support from either family or friends during these difficult and trying times. For *Themba*, the feelings of shame and embarrassment meant that he increasingly alienated himself from those around him: *I was pretty ashamed of the whole thing. I just couldn't explain to anyone what was going on.* The reason most of the participants had never confided in someone about what they were going through prior to being interviewed for this study may reflect the cultural beliefs that most black South African men share, as indicated by *Thulani* when he said that: *it probably isn't very helpful if you tell people that you have marital problems.* *Sihle* experienced difficulties in coming to terms with the social disengagement and isolation associated with the divorce experience when he said:

There was nobody around me to tell me any different.....no one who could kind of say to me; look, you are not a failure, you tried but it didn't work out.

The experiences of the participants reinforces previous studies on the impact divorce stress has on the individual that initiated the divorce. It can include a loss of self-esteem, a

sudden reduction in social stature and a decline in status in the individual's own eyes as well as those of other people (Cohen & Finzi-Dottan, 2012; Davies et al., 2003; Frisby et al., 2012). While being unable to engage with affected relational actors is one thing, *Jabu* and *Sihle's* cases highlight a more healthy process of social regression and self-stigmatised detachment. This led to severe psychological symptoms of depression that reflect an insecure attachment style (Gaffal, 2010). Participants who displayed the insecure attachment style produced negative divorce adjustment outcomes as was indicated in the case of *Jabu* and *Sihle*.

Akhona's case highlights that even the last citadel of support, that is, the individual's workplace, can suffer the emotional consequences of divorce. This may be due to the acute stress and feelings of impotence radically affecting the participants' performance in the workplace. The severe strain that divorce stress can place on work relationships to the extent of being dismissed, as in the case of *Jabu*, appears to be a common feature in the post-divorce period for black South African men.

An important concern in the divorce experience then becomes who the divorced individual can and does turn to during their descent into the immediate aftermath of divorce. Research has consistently highlighted the importance of embracing change after divorce (Amato, 2010; Gaffal, 2010; Hawkins & Fackrell, 2009). The factors that enhance the individual's ability to embrace change that the findings of the present study reported, include the availability and use of personal resources, such as income or educational qualifications, as was the case with *Thulani*, *Sihle* and *Themba* who are graduates. Not having these resources may make it difficult for the individual to think and plan ahead (Amato, 2010; Wang & Amato, 2000). Amato (2010) maintains that the ability of the individual to interact socially is an important factor in understanding why some individuals adjust more quickly than others and that they may seek out friends, family and even professionals to talk about the grief.

Participants in the present study experienced some level of stress due to the betrayal, hurt and loneliness as a result of the divorce. This created parenting stress, anxiety and depression in the participants who had children from their marriages, thus inhibiting effective parenting (Hosegood et al., 2015). Most of the participants had to change homes, redefine their parental roles, and had reduced contact with their children. The way in which the participants handled these immediate post-divorce phases influenced how successfully adjusted they became in the post-divorce phase.

The individual's ability to accept change influences their adjustment processes (Amato, 2010; Hawkins & Fackrell, 2009; Lin & Raghurir, 2005). In the present study participants struggled with accepting the divorce. One participant lost his job because he had become an alcoholic and was always absent from work. Other participants began to perform poorly at work, although they managed to recover well and are now performing better.

6.3.2.2. Feelings of pain. Although betrayal was clearly detrimental to the participants, there was a strong sense that betrayal led to deep hurt, as is reflected by *Sihle*, *Thulani* and *Akhona*, whose former spouses were involved in extra marital affairs. *Bongani* saw marriage as a sacred covenant between two people and did not expect anyone committing to it to break that covenant when he said:

God brings two people together in a marriage for life and no man should separate them.

Initially, the participants did not think of the divorce experience in physical terms, but later in the discussion they began talking about the physical manifestations of the divorce experience. A statement by *Sihle* that: *I didn't think there was such a thing as a broken heart, but surely there is!* is an example of how he never anticipated that divorce could be so painful, both physically and emotionally. The participants felt the pain in the heart, although

they never consulted a physician for that, possibly because of the fear of being called weak. It could presumably be the belief that 'real men don't cry'. They discussed their feelings regarding the divorce experience in terms of pain and distress and offered powerful accounts on somatised emotions.

Thulani was: deeply hurt and could feel the pain in my heart when he discovered that his wife of ten years was cheating with the family doctor:

The children used to call him uncle, and now I don't know what they call him anymore. You know each time I think about it, I feel like it happened yesterday. I can see every step that I went through to get the divorce. It was a painful and very slow process. Every time we go to court something comes up. If it's not about the children, it's about properties, and then the cost of lawyers.

What hurt *Thulani* most was that when he suspected that his ex-wife was having an affair and he confronted her, she had denied it and only on the second encounter did she admit it. *Sihle* felt:

...less of a man and it's like everyone knew what that I was a failure because I failed to make her pregnant (using his hand to indicate a bulge stomach). I couldn't sleep or eat. All I could do was lie in bed the whole day. It was painful. ...I was also irritated by the idea that my wife was having an affair with my best friend, of all the people!

when he discovered that his wife was cheating with his best friend. As they had been trying for a child for three years with no success, he suspects that his friend could be the father of the child his ex-wife is carrying. *Fikile* said:

....after putting everything into the marriage.....this is how she paid me back (smiling and wanting to cry at the same time). I was angry with her, in fact it was more than just anger....it was rage.

He went on to say:

I sacrificed my career so that she could have a life.....then she dumps me because she is now educated. Yes.....she now has a degree from NMMU and I don't.

For all the participants the feelings of pain were either emotional or physical. *Thulani* and *Sihle* described the divorce as *heart-breaking*. *Akhona* put it this way:

.....although we were both working, I was always the one paying accounts (home loan, furniture and clothing) but when we divorced she took everything.....It's like I never worked. Each time I think about it, I become very angry and loss my cool. It was a horrible experience.

Jabu was more concerned with the welfare of his children:

Now my children are now calling someone else dad.....that's not the way I wanted to raise them.

The hurt from the experience of being divorced could have led *Jabu* to abuse alcohol and ultimately lose his job. Although for some of the participants (*Sihle*, *Thulani*, and *Akhona*), the pain was a direct result of infidelity by former spouses. The other participants (*Themba*, *Anele*, *Fikile*, *Bongani* and *Jabu*), also reported being hurt by the divorce itself. To them divorce was a loss of family, a loss of children and a loss of the protection and provision role that they had to play as husbands and fathers.

For some of the participants, the major concerns were betrayal, separation and pain that were experienced in the pre-divorce phase. All these objects were threatening to the participants and they indicated their feelings in practical, concrete and even emotive ways. As discussed above, all objects are interlinked and saturate the concern about marriage, love and divorce to such an extent that they must be acknowledged as important elements in the black South African men's culture and life.

It was through a rich and detailed description of the participants' divorce experience that seemed central in the understanding of their adjustment to marital dissolution. From a symbolic interaction perspective the objects of concern, namely betrayal, pain and separation, have been understood as potentially dubious objects in some claims, but have been verifiably real in these circumstances as a source of stress, panic, confusion and depression. The participants expressed these objects in both their intensity and their physical embodiment, through the experiential claim – that the participants suffered emotional pain due to the marital dissolution. It also shows that the pain was severe and real, even when compared to other more visibly distressing events such as death and that the pain required medical help.

Several conceptual studies have highlighted the obvious divorce experience and the associated consequences (Amato, 2010; Amoateng et al., 2007; Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009; Madhavan et al., 2014; Lamb, 2010). The obvious loss that is associated with black South African men after divorce is the loss of the nurturing function through the loss of custody, social disengagement and isolation. The findings of the present study suggest that a divorce experience not only impacts upon the personal self, but also impacts upon the personal life of the individual as it is interconnected with other spheres of the participants' life, including the church, the community and the workplace. In adding weight to the available literature, the emotionality of divorce is clear and obvious in the present study. Divorce experience highlights an exceptional demand in terms of physical and emotional commitment, as the

participants are faced with the complex interrelationships between the emotional and societal expectation of divorce. The emotionality of divorce therefore provides a more socialised view of loss than has hitherto been articulated. These become the fundamental and inextricable social characteristics of divorce that define the features of the experience that are capable of fostering high levels of positive post-divorce adjustment (Kulik & Kasa, 2014; Moore & Govender, 2013).

The widespread impact of divorce experiences observed in the present study includes personal, social, relational and cultural factors (Amato, 2010; Steiner et al., 2015). This implies that the divorce experience is both internal and external to the individual. Divorce, just like marriage, is a public event in that it is observed by the respective families, friends and the network of contacts. This can lead to stress and feelings of humiliation and remorse. The comments by *Bongani* clearly highlight this in that he felt he had *failed* the whole family and had withdrawn from social interaction.

Findings from the present study indicate that there are immediate post-divorce events that have a potential impact upon the behavioural, emotional and health outcomes of the individual. These include legal costs, custody battles, including conflict over child support, division of property and change of homes or schools. As divorce is a process and not an event, the findings of the present study indicate that there are moderating factors that introduce variability in the way in which mediating events influence the divorce adjustment process (Gaffal, 2010; Wang & Amato, 2000). These moderating factors take the form of intrapersonal, interpersonal or structural roles and settings such as, age, education, employment status and income.

The theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism and psychosocial theory offers a better understanding than general stress theories, of how individuals view and explain

marriage and divorce. These theoretical frameworks were used to explore divorced men's experiences and personal outcomes of the adjustment process (Blumer, 1986; Erikson, 1963). The interaction between the mediating factors (mainly pre-divorce factors) and the moderating factors (the adjustment factors), in the individual's divorced life predicts the adjustment outcomes. This explains why some participants were more resilient than others. Although post-divorce adjustment outcomes have been criticised for exclusively focusing on the negative outcomes (Ahrons, 1994; Barber & Eccles, 1992; Halford & Sweeper, 2013; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002), recent studies have reported positive outcomes (Amato 2010; Gaffal, 2010; Kulik & Kasa, 2014; Steiner et al., 2015). The present study can indicate that most divorce stress occurs before the actual divorce, although it is temporary and may be accompanied by positive outcomes (Amato, 2010).

In the post-divorce experience of three of the participants (*Thulani, Sihle and Fikile*) they appear to have developed mild symptoms of what Ortman (2005) described as PISD. Its primary symptom is rage, as the individual becomes more impatient, irritable, and angrier than usual. The participants described how they needed time to come to terms with the divorce before they attempted to adjust. Within the context of this study restoration orientated dynamics played an important role in the immediate post-divorce experience. A restoration orientation, which involves therapeutic activities such as walking along the beach, was clearly important in *Bongani's* adjustment. Engaging in a more directed therapeutic process through an employee wellness programme can be conceptualised as actively working through the divorce in order to construct meaning. This was not possible for most of the participants due to the painful emotions and psychological and cultural barriers that they faced, as seeking professional help is considered to be a weakness in black communities. However, comments by *Bongani* and *Thulani* provide confirmation that this meaning-making process is vital to adjustment.

The oscillation between the loss orientation and the restoration orientation may indeed be the best strategy for dealing with the divorce (Erikson, 1963). The present researcher suggests that loss orientation is more effective once initial restoration dynamics have eased the contaminating trauma and hurt generated by the divorce. As a process of adjusting to divorce, the researcher argues that a loss orientation is delicately intertwined with a cogent from the critical reflection. This important reflection challenged the participants' assumptions and behaviour, as it is concerned with the *why* rather than the *how to* of action, examining the reason for and consequences of what participants do (Sokol, 2009). According to McAdams (2006b), such critical reflection revolves around paying attention to surprising results and inquiring into their meaning. The findings clearly indicate the way in which *Fikile* and *Sihle* asked themselves deeply probing questions in order to understand why the divorce occurred and what their role in the marital dissolution was. It is therefore clear that divorced black South African men can engage in mindfulness when processing divorce. This involves attempting to garner as much information as possible on the causes and focusing on the process rather than the outcome, ultimately leading to a better self-concept and more considered future activity.

6.3.3. Adjustment process. What emerged from the data is a purposeful and necessary stepping back from the divorce before meaningful introspection and new activity could begin. *Bongani* described how he began taking long walks along the beach, recognising that: *I needed that.....I needed just to heal and get over it because it was very hurtful*. For the other participants, the avoidance of confronting the divorce became apparent in how it affected their adjustment, as it emotionality impeded logical thinking. As *Anele* put it, it took him two years to overcome what can be described as a highly emotive loss transition. It seems that the damage experienced in the immediate aftermath of a divorce – emotional,

physiological and psychological, left little energy for the participants to actively deal with the divorce, as *Akhona* reflects:

It is something you don't want to think too much about for a year or so. It becomes real after two years or so, that's when I started thinking rationally about what I should have done, how I should have done it.... It affects you physically and psychologically. It does take time for the pain to diminish.

The themes linked to the adjustment process include the role of the family and friends, church and the community. Those participants who had witnessed divorce in the family or among friends (*Sihle, Themba, Thulani* and *Anele*), seemed to have been able to extricate themselves from the emotional shackles that divorce causes more easily than those for whom their divorce was their first encounter with marital separation (*Fikile, Bongani, Jabu* and *Akhona*). It seems there is a complex self-reflection process at work in adjustment after divorce that involves both avoidance and confrontation. The importance of initiating a new relationship, getting a new job, starting new social activities and professional assistance were emphasised by the participants as enablers to restore self-confidence, provide renewed focus, and enable the divorce to be put into perspective.

The findings of the present study indicate that adjustment to the divorce process appears to take place at three interconnected experiential components; (1) the immediate phase experience – where the participant psychologically removes himself from the other party in order to begin healing, (2) critical reflection – where the participant engages in a determined and mindful attempt to make sense of the divorce and (3) reflective action – where the participant attempts to move on from the divorce and pursue other relationships. These three components are interlinked, as they contributed to the adjustment process of the

participants and facilitated constructive closure of this painful chapter in their lives. At each level, the moderating factors always influence the outcome of the adjustment process.

6.3.3.1. Supportive networks. In understanding that adjustment is linked to the social context in which the individual lives, the following comment by *Jabu* particularly illustrates that the adjustment process can be assisted by social reparation:

I just needed to sit back and evaluate what is it I wanted to do? What could I have done differently?...but after a couple of years I kind of realised that every single day in my marriage from the first to the last I did the best I could.....I probably came to that realisation through my personal and professional networks. Friends who had deserted me initially, started to come back. I stopped drinking (being alcoholic) and got a new job and got back on a more stable footing, and this 'thing' is now in my past.

It is interesting how *Jabu* talks about the divorce being a *thing* and in *my past*. It implies that the relational ripple effects of divorce extend in many directions and adjustment is not a process confined to two individuals (Amato, 2010). Rather, the interpretation is that the individual's experience of divorce is a function of observing the adjustment of significant others. Of interest is the fact that retrospective analysis and self-blame is unproductive and that actively moving away from the ex-spouse is a vital part of the adjustment process. This need for expediency is expressed by *Anele*:

It's just one of those things that happens..... you have to become more mature - obviously with the support of family and friends - and you have to grow andyou have to move on.....the quicker you do that the better it is for everyone involved. I didn't think 'oh my God my life has ended because I am part of a failed marriage.' At least I had a shoulder to cry on.

Similar pragmatic views were expressed by *Bongani*, in which he ultimately indicates that there is no opportunity for remorse, the past cannot be undone and so it is important to look ahead rather than continue mourning:

...and when it happened, it happened, so what? I would rather it had not happened, absolutely. If I had a chance to go back I would undo several things but I don't have the chance to do that. It happened, get over it and you have got to move forward and find someone else to marry, otherwise give up, give everything up. It is during these times that you need all your family and friends, but some will desert you as they are not willing to be associated with a 'failure.'

The findings of the present study indicate that it is not easy for the individuals undergoing divorce to relate problems and anxieties to those for whom the divorce has a significant negative impact, for example children. *Thulani* summed it up by saying:

I couldn't tell my children what was going on. I had to lie to them, even though they saw significant changes in the way I was behaving. They kept calling me to ask when I will be coming home and I had to give excuses every time until the divorce was finalised. The uncertainties were just too many; I kept asking myself; how much will it cost me, in terms of legal fees? Am I going to lose my house, my pension, custody of the children? If I lose custody of the children, how much will I pay as child support? Will I be able to see my children when we divorce? How will I tell my family and friends? How will my work colleagues react? There were just too many questions that I couldn't find answers to. It looked like the end of my life.

Although research has indicated that there are several relational contacts that provide advice, support and assistance during and after divorce (Bouchard & Doucet, 2011; Hogerbrugge et al., 2012), data from the present study suggests that the core component of a

divorce experience lies in the ability of the divorced individual to perceive divorce as a family transition and a second chance for happiness. It is therefore not surprising that the extreme levels of anxiety created by the divorce area reflection not only of the physical separation of the participants but also of the social isolation that divorced individuals experience as they feel unable to confide in others for fear of being judged (Lin & Raghubir, 2005; Gaffal, 2010; Hetherington et al., 1997).

Asked about seeking professional help, only two participants (*Thulani* and *Bongani*) had sought professional assistance through an employee wellness programme. *Jabu's* reaction was that: *Black people don't talk about their problems with a stranger. It's unheard of. You toughen up like a real man.* This generalised view seems to be true among black South Africans, as even those who had consulted professionals for assistance seem to have done so, not voluntarily, but because of the availability of such a service from their employers.

6.3.3.2. New relationship/marriage. A new relationship in the form of remarriage or cohabitation (*Themba, Thulani* and *Bongani*), may aid an adjustment trajectory by distracting the divorced individuals from what is happening and helping them to adjust positively. Although *Themba* acknowledged that divorce is a painful process, he had this to say:

For me it was not like that. Before I even divorced, I had moved in with my new girlfriend. We used to talk and laugh about my previous marriage and how my ex-wife was a loser. It was like moving from one house to another.

This appears to be at odds with the findings from the other participants, although reflecting on Amato's (2010) findings, the researcher surmises that the social process associated with divorce is one of regression and gradual re-emergence (Erikson, 1963). The divorced individual goes through a process of rebuilding the damage done to relationships.

Consequently, the need for social affirmation in support of psychotherapy facilitates a quicker adjustment process.

A positive post-divorce adjustment outcome is a process and not only a function of managing the emotional, relational and financial costs of divorce (Amato, 2010; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). These include managing the level of post-divorce attachment to the former spouse, the maintenance of relationships with children and the quality of a new relationship or marriage.

Level of education was reported to be a positive contributor to adjustment to divorce (Wang & Amato, 2000). The findings of the present study indicate mixed findings. Some of the participants who had a university education struggled in similar ways to those who did not and some who had no university education adjusted very well. A possible explanation for this could be the availability of a strong support system and the way that the individual views marriage and divorce. The identity development of the participant could also have had an impact on the adjustment process (Erikson, 1963).

Personal resources have been identified as another factor that influences the adjustment process. The present study indicates that the participants incurred not just loss of companionship but also huge financial losses because of the divorce. The degree of loss determines the level of stress that participants go through in adjusting to the divorce. In addition to the legal costs, some participants lost property and still pay bond loans that they took out as a couple and furthermore, pay maintenance for the children. Fisher (2007) concluded that individuals with reduced income may refrain from committing to a new relationship out of fear of avoiding further financial obligations. This could be a plausible explanation for why some of the participants have not remarried or are not in a serious relationship.

Initiator status is another important factor that has been reported in the divorce literature (Steiner et al., 2015). This has been confirmed in the present study. The individual who initiates the divorce is likely to have weighed the likely costs and benefits of continuing the marriage and concluded that it is not worth it. The reason why initiator status has been important to divorce researchers is because of its influence on the adjustment process. The initiator will usually have finished mourning the dissolution of the relationship by the time he communicates his decision to divorce (Baum, 2003). In the present study, a number of participants initiated the divorce and based on the conclusion by Baum (2003), they should have adjusted successfully. This was not entirely the same for all the participants who initiated divorce as they continued to mourn the loss of their marriages even though they were in new relationships. Being an initiator for men should reflect feelings of mastery, control and positive mental health (Hewitt & Turrell, 2011; Symoens et al., 2013). The findings of the present study suggest that the participants lacked mastery and control as they felt betrayed and hurt by their former spouses. The researcher posits that men would want to avoid divorce because of the social status that comes with the title 'husband' (Lin & Roghubir, 2005; Steiner et al., 2015).

Infidelity has been regarded as the 'final straw' in the divorce literature (Steiner et al., 2015). Ortman (2005) reported that victims of infidelity suffer similar symptoms as those with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and they may develop post infidelity stress disorder (PISD). Although this may be true, there was little evidence in the present study that supports the PISD diagnosis among the participants. Some participants did indicate that they had mild symptoms of PISD, as they were angered by the discovery that their former wives were having an affair with people they thought were family.

Steiner et al., (2015) indicated that victims of infidelity have to forgive the offender for healing to begin. This may explain why participants in the present study have struggled to

adjust, as they have failed to forgive their former spouses. Rey et al. (2004) indicated that being part of a religious group promotes forgiveness that could lead to healing. Only one participant from the present study was actively involved in a religious congregation but was still struggling to forgive his former wife as he strongly believed that she should apologise in order for him to forgive her.

The role of social support in moderating the effects of divorce is well documented (Amato, 2010; Gaffal, 2010; Gähler, 2006; Thoits, 1995). Divorce occurs with the loss of social support from mutual friends as they take sides. The network of friends, family and colleagues is also divided, as the divorced individual loses not just the support of the partner but also the social network that was attached to the marriage. In the present study indications are that the participants lost their social networks and became isolated and lonely. One participant had to stay with his parents as he could not face the world alone. Another had to stay with his brother. Thus, for them, family and work place became the only source of social support.

Cultural factors have been another moderating factor in the divorce adjustment process (Gaffal, 2010; Gähler, 2006). These cultural factors can be in the form of the stigma and discrimination associated with divorce. The role of divorced individuals in the present study indicate that divorce is no longer stigmatised, as society has transformed among most black South African communities to the extent that such family structures are now accepting of divorce. What remains is the role of the former daughter-in-law or son-in-law at family functions if the couple had children. Children make the attachment to the former spouse permanent in one way or another.

Finding meaning is another important factor that moderates the effects of divorce. Divorce, just like the death of a spouse or the loss of a job, is a traumatic experience but may

be an opportunity for personal growth (Bevvino & Sharkin, 2003). The post-divorce psychological functioning of the individual finds meaning in the mishap. This understanding has clearly been expressed by the participants. One participant started walking along the beach, exercising as a first step towards personal growth. Although most of the participants have not remarried, they reported finding meaning in the divorce, as was seen by them agreeing to participate in the study the learning outcomes gained as a result of the divorce, and their being better prepared for any loss in general.

Through comparative studies, divorce adjustment has been seen to be determined by social causation or social selection (Overbeek et al., 2006; Wang & Amato, 2000). This has been based on the two most common theoretical perspectives, namely, the causation theory and the selection theory on divorce. Divorce has a causal effect on the behavioural, emotional and health outcomes of the individual who experiences it. This theoretical understanding assumes that the individual must deal with issues to do with anger, sadness, change in residence and a decline in standard of living, all of which are as a result of the divorce (Gähler, 2006; Pearlin et al., 2005). While this is true theoretically, this study did not find sufficient evidence to support these assumptions.

Some scholars have argued that individuals who divorce have poor mental health prior to the divorce (Overbeek et al., 2006; Wade & Pevalin, 2004). *Themba* attributed his marital dissolution to the stress that was caused by their failure to conceive. It was clear that the stress from their failure to conceive and the pressure from family, friends and societal expectations had weighed heavily on his mental health. He had low self-esteem prior to the divorce, which contributed to his poor mental wellness.

6.3.4. Post-divorce experience. The factors that influence how individuals adjust to divorce include personal, relational and cultural factors (Amato, 2010; Gaffal, 2010; Steiner

et al., 2015). These factors have been confirmed by the present study and were discussed earlier. The researcher considers it appropriate to re-emphasise what successful post-divorce adjustment is. Basically, successful adjustment implies that the individual has returned to the pre-divorce level of emotional and behavioural functioning. Remarriage or a stable, serious relationship on its own does not necessarily indicate successful adjustment.

Although Amato (2010) holds that remarriage or a new relationship is not a reflection of having successfully adjusted, it has a great influence on the adjustment process. The participants in the present study who are in new relationships seem to be happy and looking forward to remarrying. The only participant who is remarried seems to still be struggling to come to terms with the divorce, as he regrets having succumbed to family pressure to divorce his ex-wife. He is typically what Hetherington and Kelly (2003) considered to be a seeker, as he seems to have low self-esteem as reflected by the fact that he was influenced to divorce his ex-wife by the family, for having failed to conceive.

Interestingly, there was no perceived or tangible stigmatisation from friends and family raised by the participants, except for *Bongani*, who perceived a modest condescension from his church colleagues. He points out:

I have noticed that slight difference in some of the church people, just so lightly like I am in marriage and I am OK! You were in marriage and failed. So, I am slightly better than you are now.....it's just that they have become slightly patronising.

This comment is suggestive of the complexity of the divorce experience in terms of its impact on one's social relationships and standing in the community. *Thulani* emphasised the amount of strain that divorce placed on his personal friendships as well as *professional relationships that needed to be repaired*. Two participants were very open about the severe strain that divorce can stimulate in terms of work relationships. *Jabu* lost his job soon after

his messy divorce, iterating that the divorce *cost me my job as well as everything else I had*.

Whilst the divorce did not deliver a fatal blow to *Sihle's* job, he admits that:

I almost had a mental breakdown..... I felt particularly impotent.....I would arrive at work late, tired, because I would have slept late. Sometimes I would be sleepwalking; reports would not get submitted on time, I spent endless time just looking at the computer. I had to take a week off. I couldn't cope.

These findings indicate that the immediate experience of divorce can create a diminishing social environment for the participants. It is evident from the participants' narrative that what frustrated them most in trying to adjust positively was a sense of distance and divide they felt when they were unable to turn to certain associates (community, church or work) and extant social support systems (family and friends), into a normal relationship. Taking the theme of the impact of social relations further, a more positive result is that none of the participants indicated its long-term effects.

The experiences of the participants indicate that the negative outcomes associated with divorce can be linked to the complex social responsibility that marriage carries in the black South African communities. The reason that *Bongani* felt hurt by the divorce was because of his religious standing. He was used to going to church with his family and was a well-respected family man in the community. When his wife stopped going to church and subsequently initiated the divorce, he *lost everything* that made him a man. His expression of the emotional intensity of the divorce was linked to feelings of social responsibility and the associated pressures that it creates. This comes from a range of sources including family, friends, church members and colleagues at work, which he summed up by saying:

In the end the hardest part is to feel responsible.....to the family, children and the people you go to church with, your friends and the community at large.

As often propounded in popular family studies literature (Amato, 2010; Amoateng et al., 2007; Bojuwoye & Akpan 2009; Madhavan et al., 2014; Lamb, 2010), *Fikile* felt that one must treat divorce as an opportunity for learning and try to take the positive lessons that reside within this valuable life experience:

I kind of have an issue with the whole idea of the negative effects of divorce..... The fact is I lived through that and I saw the set of reasons why marriages end and now I am more prepared to handle whatever life gives me. You have to look at it and say ok, what is the lesson to be taken?

Although the participants did not indicate directly that money was an object of concern, its effects were marginally felt in their experiences. They lost assets that they had accumulated during their marriages, some are paying maintenance for the children and one (*Akhona*), is still paying a bond loan that is not benefiting him directly. The unwillingness to speak directly about their loss in financial terms does not necessarily mean that they are happy with how things have turned out financially, and neither does it mean that they were unwilling to discuss their feelings about the divorce in more emotional terms. It might be that they were less comfortable in doing so to someone with whom they are unfamiliar. That may explain why most of the participants did not make it a defining feature in their divorce, although it appears to be a recurring concern.

6.3.4.1. Learning from the divorce. Some of the reasons the participants offered as their post-divorce experiences are the learning outcomes from the failed marriage. As *Sihle* put it:

I have never had such self confidence that I have now to confront her than during those days of divorce.

For *Fikile* it was an issue of age and the circumstances on which his marriage was founded:

I think we were ahead of time.... other than that, it was crazy love.....fundamentally it was not a bad experience because we enjoyed the marriage. I am very proud of what we did.....it was good.... for me to realise the lessons.

For *Thulani* it was the distance that he felt cost his marriage:

It's easy to say now with hindsight but what I wouldn't probably do again is to have a commuter marriage because the chances of success are very, very small, not that they don't succeed, but the rate of failure is actually very high.

Themba attributes the lack of children to the failure of his marriage. He acknowledged that the marriage was not about children, as he has no children:

I thought once I have children all my problems will disappear. I was totally wrong....I was obviously trying out an idea.....that was out of time.

Anele gave an insightful comment on why marriages fail. He said a catastrophic marriage is not necessarily an isolated event but is often the result of a series of minor crises, the cumulative effect of which can lead to marital dissolution:

I compare a marriage in trouble with the death of Julius Caesar, it is not a very good analogy but it comes with a series of daggers, some bigger than others, some more deep than others.... There is no one fatal blow but cumulatively they will take effect. I think that is what happened to us.

As a way of developing a more detailed understanding of the post-divorce adjustment experience, the combination of a number of factors drawn from literature makes sense of the

need for psychotherapy as a high-level learning experience (Amato, 2010; Gähler, 2006; Pearlin et al., 2005). Although this could be true, an interpretation of the participants' stories reflects a different understanding. Only *Thulani* and *Bongani* sought professional help via their employer's workplace wellness programme. The other participants had to learn to be resilient, thereby reflecting the trajectory of their adjustment process.

6.3.4.2. Personal growth. This theme came strongly from participants when looking at the post-divorce experience. The comments by *Thulani* and *Themba* highlight the valuable experience of divorce, such as fostering renewed strength, resilience and self-assurance.

The reason why I have become a responsible father is because of what I been through, I have earned the right to decide my future and the future of my children.....I have seen what suspecting that your wife is cheating does to your soul. Each time the phone rings you suspect that she is talking to him. I have seen what pain does to a person. I have seen the good and bad side of marriage. I kind of have an issue with the whole notion that divorce has a negative outcome, yes, it's painful, but I am now a better person. I have made peace with my ex-wife for the sake of the children (Thulani).

Themba commented that:

I am not afraid of relationships anymore; I am not scared of marriage.....in fact I am stronger now from the experience.

This suggests that some of the participants have adjusted positively or are adjusting positively to the divorce. As *Anele* put it: *I have learned that my instincts were pretty good.* These findings indicate that important changes to personal self-awareness took place because of divorce. *Fikile* and *Bongani* recognised that divorce had made them *grow up*, with *Jabu*

admitting that he *has never been the same again.* Akhona gave a more articulate statement on how deeply the post-divorce experience can extend, engendering a transformative revision of self-perceptions:

I am much more confident in myself and I think am now very resilient. I have been through many difficult things and so many good things and bad things have happened in my life. But I now have a better sense of myself in terms of what I can do and what I cannot do, what I am comfortable with and what I am not.....I think my personal skills have broadened so much.....I guess it was a steep learning curve and it has transformed my life.....I personally feel stronger and more mature now.

From what has already been indicated by *Sihle*, divorce can affect the individual's self-efficacy and naïve optimism. It suggests that a loss of a confidence can be both good and bad, thereby illustrating the complex, interwoven, positive and negative dimension of this self-discovery experience of divorce. Although divorce can have negative outcomes, *Bongani* took a positive stance as he recognised that the divorce had taught him the need for self-belief:

So, what I learned is that, you have to have a holistic approach.... You have to be able to look in the mirror and say to yourself 'I can overcome this' and you will.

6.3.4.3. Professional networks. The findings indicate several social learning outcomes as far as relationships and networks are concerned. As *Fikile* indicated, childhood romance does not necessarily lead to a successful marriage; *I would never recommend marrying young and (to someone) from the neighbourhood.* *Bongani* learnt the value of investing in the marriage, building a strong support structure in church, at home, in the family or in the community:

What I learnt is how to focus on my marriage.....how to build friendships, who to network with, be it in church, work, or community. You will need these networks when in crisis.

Thulani only realised the importance of the Employee Wellness Programme when he was going through the divorce. He had never consulted a lawyer and it was his first time in court:

I had never been to the employee wellness office, I didn't know where to find a lawyer or a therapist after I was served with the divorce papers. It was new to me, for the first time I was in a court and before a judge. I have learnt a lot from that process. I now know the importance of networks. Now I know who to call, who to approach, and what I am expected to do....

6.3.4.4. Developing a new personality. While the need for relationships and networks cannot be overemphasised, Jabu was cautious and remarked that, *social networks come with costs*. Therefore, there was a need for him to develop a *thick skin* when he realised that he would be confronted with the fact that he may be judged either well or badly by different people.

So, that's one thing I have learned, not to worry too much about what other people think. When you do bad people talk, when you do good people still talk, so sometimes it's not worth paying attention to what they say (Akhona).

Anele's experience has taught him that divorce is not entirely negative in social terms. He recognised that even though the marriage failed, he became immersed in social networks, making useful contacts that have led him into another relationship with plans to remarry at a later stage.

The responses of the participants indicate that generalizable divorce experiential outcomes can transcend the participants' specific divorce context. This suggests that for some of the participants, the divorce left them with an intact self-esteem and better equipped to manage other aspects of personal loss, such as the loss of a job or the death of a loved one. *Anele* and *Bongani* were clear that the divorce had left them with an enhanced awareness of the *stress and strains* and the *pressure points* that it comes with. *Anele* commented:

I now have a model of what I need to do and how I go about doing certain things, so I can pretty much accept any loss.

I think the biggest lesson that I learned is to take care of the here and now. No matter how good your marriage is if you cannot provide the 'daily bread' your love will not be enough. I am now much more aware of the stress and strain of marriage.(Bongani)

Anele talked about having a *model* of how to handle any stressful life event, indicating the beneficial outcomes of the divorce experience. *Bongani* shared a similar view:

I disagree with the word, it's not a 'failed marriage,' it's an experiment. To me there is no such thing as a 'failed marriage;' to me it was about learning. You learn things that work and things that don't work.....so the fact is you are growing and learning by doing. You can't have experience without paying your dues.

It seems that through the trial and error experience of marriage, participants have refined their 'mental models' of how to have a successful marriage. Like *Anele* and *Bongani*, *Thulani* felt that by bringing forward his learning from the divorce he is now able to see *warning signs* more clearly. This improved ability to anticipate challenges has taught him to put corrective measures in place to ensure that problems do not become critical:

I now know a lot about the things that you don't do. A lot more about the warning signs to see when the communication breaks down, to handle the daily pressures of marriage....how to work out what the warning signs mean and to correct them before I go too far down the road.

To account for the participants' experience of marital dissolutions and the ways in which they have come to understand divorce, the researcher, the world and the unique social interaction between the participant and the researcher in an iterative process, the researcher is reminded that interviews are a complex social event. The use of language as an object of symbolic interaction highlighted the meaning participants attached to marriage and divorce. While the participants used *you* or *your* in somewhat normal conversation when they were referring to themselves, it can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, the participants were trying to distance themselves from the divorce. This could be a consequence of the social stigma that is attached to divorce in South Africa. An alternative interpretation is that the participants wanted to seek empathy from the researcher, who is also an adult male of similar age.

Another plausible interpretation regarding the use of language could be the collectivist culture of the participants who believe in collective shared responsibility. The participants used the interviews as an opportunity to express their shared values as a collective people with the assumption that the researcher is part of that. For them ownership of the problem or event was not an individual responsibility but a collective one, of which the researcher is a part. The fact that most of the participants had not consulted a therapist and were sharing their story with the researcher for the first time, suggests that they have finally come to the realisation that they can talk openly about their experiences without the fear of being judged or being considered a failure.

Accepting change has been described as an important relational factor in the post-divorce adjustment process. Accepting change comes in the form of change in the family living arrangement, a change in responsibilities and a change in the parenting roles and functions as these occur because of divorce (Bouchard & Docucent, 2011; Hogerbrugge et al., 2012). Accepting change, just like the adjustment to divorce, is a process. This implies that participants in the present study had to take each step at a time. Most of the participants struggled with taking the first step.

When an individual accepts these changes the route to adjustment will be positive. The experience of participants in the present study suggests that they were quick to accept the changes in roles and functions that came with the divorce. This could be attributed to their role as the initiators of the divorce. They took the necessary steps and prepared themselves well before they initiated divorce proceedings. This suggests that they had positive self-esteem, self-discipline and the requisite social skills needed to cope with the divorce (Lin & Roghubir, 2005).

While the mourning period has been identified as a critical process in how men adjust to divorce, the present study has indicated varied findings. Only one participant has remarried and two are in stable relationships after more than two years post-divorce, indicating that time is not a real factor in the adjustment process as Lucas (2005) suggested. In fact, the findings of the present study concur with Halford and Sweeper's (2013) study, which measured attachment to former spouses, loneliness and psychological distress overtime. They reported that attachment, loneliness and psychological distress all declined at varying rates after divorce. This suggests that post-divorce stresses decrease and different people go through different trajectories of adjustment.

The post-divorce stress emphasises the influence of personal learning in the outcomes of successful adjustment (Amato, 2010; Halford & Sweeper, 2013). The findings from the present study indicate that there are several factors that influence this experience based on self-reflection. These factors include (a) personal – beliefs and attitudes, attributions, personal resources, initiator status, infidelity during the marriage, spiritual wellbeing of the individual, their view on gender roles and the effects of forgiveness (b) relational factors – attachment style, attachment to former spouse, new relationships (either remarriage or cohabiting) and child custody and (c) social support.

The possible divorce outcomes on children are beyond the scope of the present study but suffice it to say that children will always have a role to play in the post-divorce adjustment of their parents. They can offer relational support to the grieving parent (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999), or they can be a source of post-divorce stress. Findings from the present study indicate that children have been a source of post-divorce stress. Children have been used to settle scores by their parents, through custody battles, maintenance payments and claims disputes. One participant confirmed that he is regularly in court for maintenance variation hearings. He indicated that his ex-wife always plays the role of an innocent daughter-in-law at his family gatherings while going to court the following week for maintenance variations even if there is no justification for such a claim.

6.4. Psychosocial Theory and Divorce

Erikson's (1963) definition of developmental crises like identity, resonates strongly with the experience of the participants in the present study. The participants identified with the influence of culture and society. They saw themselves as being identical and developed a sense of recognition that goes with the role of being a husband, father and community leader (Hoare, 2002; Sokol, 2009). Participants could not be understood without understanding the social context from which they come.

Based on Erikson's (1959) psychosocial theory, identity has been characterised by a broad range of personality features, interpersonal behaviour and family antecedents. The participants in the present study, although they displayed positive self-reflection, cannot be said to have reached *identity achieved*, because of the fact that they had divorced which suggests a low level of achievement motivation (McLean & Pasupathi, 2012, Montgomery et al., 2008). Individuals who have *identity achieved* show less use of defence mechanisms and higher levels of internal control (Al-Owidha et al., 2009).

Being divorced may be regarded as a sign of failure, regardless of who is to blame. Individuals who have no *identity achieved* struggle with the post-divorce adjustment process, as they do not have the ability to function under stressful conditions (McAdams, 2006b). Based on the characteristics of the *identity achieved*, the participants in the present study could be best suited for other *identity statuses*. They did not exercise rationality, order and logic in their decision-making strategies, which are requirements for *identity achieved* (Marcia, 2007). Additionally, the *identity achieved* individuals show the most secure patterns of attachment to their families (McAdams, 2006b; Montgomery et al., 2008). Thus, divorce is not a possibility for these individuals.

The midlife crisis is one of the most over-used concepts in psychosocial theory. Although some scholars have considered it to be a myth, it remains associated with identity-related issues (Al-Owidha et al., 2009; Beck, 2007). The participants in the present study could equally be in their mid-lives and the fact that they are going through a divorce makes the midlife crisis a reality for them and not a myth. They are going through a process of re-evaluating and re-adjusting their social roles and must therefore reconsider their identity (Beck, 2009).

Adult identity development is closely linked to the post-divorce adjustment process in the sense that it involves two important processes, namely, examination and evaluation (McLean & Pasupathi, 2012; Montgomery et al., 2008; Meeus, 2011). As was experienced by the participants in the present study, divorce gave them the opportunity to examine and evaluate the life they had lived and reflect upon the choices they had made. Through this evaluation some of the participants saw a positive outcome. They experienced satisfaction and therefore positive adjustment to divorce. Those participants who realised negative outcomes of the examination and evaluation process are struggling with the post-divorce adjustment process.

Participants in the present study have reflected that divorce can be an opportunity for identity reconstruction. Divorce as a life event involves a process of disequilibria of the existing identity structure (Marcia, 2002). Depending on the identity status of the participants, its effects differ from one participant to the other. For *foreclosed* participants, like *Jabu*, (those who have developed a personality structure the purpose of which is to avoid disequilibria), the divorce experience was shattering. For those with *identity diffusion status*, they managed to resist disequilibria. *Fikile* had to regress, allowing the previous identity structure to fall apart and allow a new structure to emerge.

The process of identity reconstruction resonates strongly with the process of divorce-stress-adjustment as reflected by the participants in the present study. Identity reconstruction involves a process through which divorced participants cycled briefly in the foreclosure status and when the disequilibrium identity falls within the identity achieved status. The participants then began the active searching moratorium period (Berzonsky, 1989; Marcia, 2002). The length of the cycle and the social context differs from participant to participant. The role of relational factors is important in the adjustment process. Thus, family, friends and colleagues

make the external influence that moderates divorce stress and one's expectation of oneself, part of the internal influence.

For an individual to have successfully adjusted to the divorce, a complete transformation may be possible. For others, a reformed identity can, to a certain extent, be like a pre-crisis identity (Sokol, 2009). The same can be said about the post-divorce identity of the participants in the present study. Successful adjustment does not necessarily mean a complete transformation. Through transformation the participants could move to what they truly were as previously underdeveloped elements are realised and new ones added (McLean & Pasupathi, 2012; Montgomery et al., 2008; Meeus, 2011).

6.5. Masculinity and Divorce

The researcher posits that the feeling of betrayal by all the participants could be because of feeling emasculated. Marriage is still a highly respectable union in most black families and divorce resembles failure by the men to be in control of their families (Hosegood & Madhavan, 2012; Madhavan & Roy, 2012). Black South African men achieve the status of a respectable family man and community leader when they marry. In the event of a divorce, they lose all that and it affects their masculinity (Hunter, 2006).

The current status of men in South Africa has changed drastically (Amoateng et al., 2007; Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009; Madhavan et al., 2014). Men used to hold power, in both the public and political spheres and the same applied to families. Changes in the socio-political and economic situation have brought with them a threat to the masculinity of both black and white South African men. The situation is even worse for those black South African men whose marriages end in divorce, as was reflected by the participants in the present study. These men have lost both their power and privileges that had been part of the patriarchal system since time immemorial. Findings from the present study have also

indicated that divorced South African men perceived that they have become *less of men* because of divorce (Ramaphele & Richter, 2006).

Masculinity has been popularly conceptualised in both black and white cultures as a man being both a provider and protector (Kulik & Kasa, 2014). The change in the socio-economic situation has resulted in high levels of unemployment among black South African men and has resulted in a significant threat to the men's self-esteem and manhood. This is reflected in one of the participants who was divorced because he had lost his job and whose wife became abusive towards him and refused to be sexually intimate with him. The researcher can posit that the inability of a man to support a family financially, may result in the failure of his marriage. The conceptualisation of masculinity has little support in men being homemakers. With high levels of unemployment among black South African men, they find little self-esteem in doing the domestic chores and this may lead to divorce.

6.6. Conclusion

The fact that the findings of the present study reported both successful and unsuccessful post-divorce stress adjustment outcomes reflects the varied experiences black South African men go through. The findings have indicated several objects of concern for the participants and these objects have been supported by the experiential claims of the participants. The objects included betrayal, hurt, loneliness and trust. While the participants acknowledged that they had gone through a stressful process, they also accepted that they had learnt a lot from the divorce. Their successful adjustment, as reflected by their voluntary participation and honest discussion with the researcher, was a result of learning from the loss and an eagerness to share their experiences for the benefit of others. In general, the findings have indicated that black South African men have a limited range of coping behaviours. They either drop out (withdrawal), numb out (became alcoholic), or punch out (become violent and aggressive). In summary, what black South African men experience because of divorce and

how they adjust to the divorce can be integrated into a divorce-stress-adjustment model which is discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7

THE DIVORCE STRESS ADJUSTMENT MODEL

7.1. Chapter Overview

This chapter provides an outline of the divorce-stress-adjustment model developed from the findings of the study discussed in the previous chapter. It provides an analysis of the South African context and divorce before discussing the structure and components of the model and how they interconnect. It concludes by stating the implication of the model on the community and in clinical and counselling settings.

7.2. South African Context and Divorce

Given the background, history and socioeconomic status of the participants, the researcher expected to find significant differences in how black South African men experience and adjust to divorce compared to existing literature. Previous research conducted on the topic was based on participants from Europe and the United States of America and those studies contained limited samples of black men. After integrating the findings that were obtained from the interviews, which were based on the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and a symbolic interaction and psychosocial theoretical perspective, several similarities have been observed regarding how black South African men experience divorce and the adjustment process they go through.

The nature and history of the family institution in South Africa has always had an impact on how black men view and understand marriage and divorce (Hunter, 2006; Madhavan et al., 2014). From a symbolic interactionist perspective, human social behaviour is guided by symbols and involves language and thought (Denzin, 2004; Hier, 2005). Thus, the meaning black South African men attach to marriage and divorce depends on the cultural

learning that they have with regard to marriage, hence the feeling of hurt and betrayal that can make divorce such a stressful experience.

The reason the participants saw divorce as a loss that required them to grieve is because of the investment – both financial and emotional, that they had put into the relationship and marriage. Divorce resulted in the participants experiencing significant pain and having to undergo a grieving process before they could adjust. This reflects Baum's (2003) findings that divorce is a loss and like other losses, it is accompanied by protracted pain, sorrow and grief. Mourning the loss is part of the adjustment process. The participants in the present study had to go through a mourning process.

The role of women in modern day South Africa has an impact on the role of a man in the family. Women have become strong contenders in the labour market, as reflected by the status of all the former spouses of the participants in the present study, who were employed during the time of the marriage. Thus, they were not strongly dependent on their husbands for provision and protection. This confirms similar findings by Hosegood et al. (2009) and more recently, Hosegood and Madhavan (2012). The challenge with the change in the role of women has resulted in more women taking up the role of providers, thereby emasculating men (Hunter, 2007; Morrell, 2006).

The researcher posits that women's status in today's society has created secondary challenges for the participants in the present study, as all of them were married to working women. This naturally robbed the men of their role as sole providers, indirectly influencing the type of identities that they expected from their children who will grow up without a resident father. One participant made it clear that he was not happy with the way his son was being raised and another was denied access to his children. The comments by the participants confirm that the acceptable definition of a male adult who has achieved success is based on

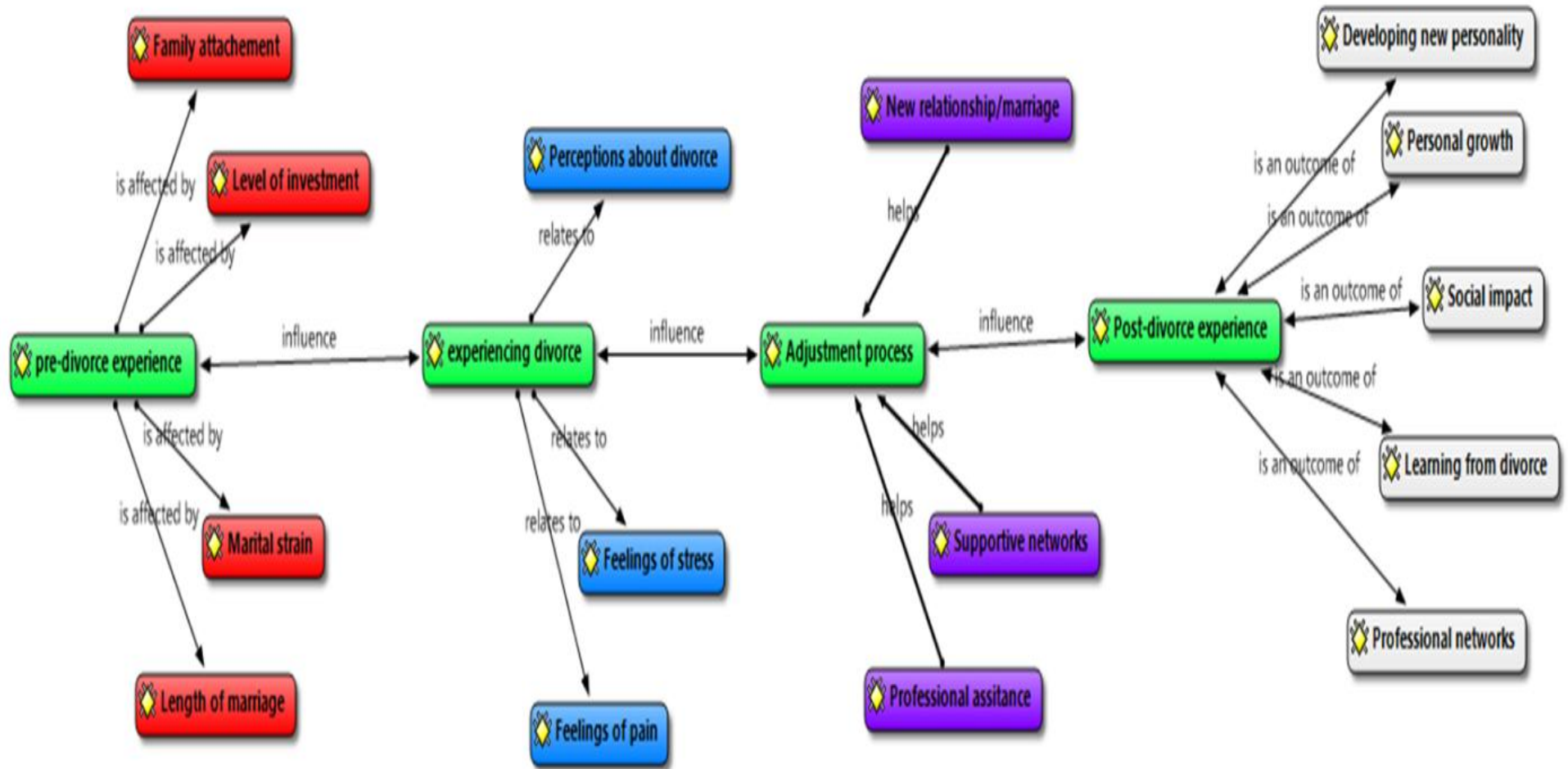
hegemonic masculinity (Connel, 1995; Madhavan & Roy, 2012). The participants felt powerless as providers and caregivers, thus reflecting the difficulty black South African men are facing as they try to solidify their position in the family (Amoetenget al., 2007; Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009).

7.3. Structure of the Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Model

Through the analysis of the participants' responses, the findings of the study indicate a number of emerging themes that are a critical contribution in the divorce-stress-adjustment process for black South African men. Both internal and external factors were identified as contributors to this process. Internal factors included learning from the divorce, developing a new personality and personal growth – as part of a self-reflection process. These have been identified as important themes that could contribute to positive adjustment to the divorce. External factors such as seeking professional assistance, the role of the family, friends, the church and the community and initiating dating/starting a new romantic relationship, provided participants with additional insight into how they managed the stress of divorce and the adjustment thereafter.

Through the divorce-stress-adjustment model the researcher sought to predict the possible trajectory of stress and possible adjustment outcomes of the divorce stress that is experienced by black South African men. The model depicts the graphical representation of the divorce process over the four critical periods (pre-divorce, divorce, adjustment and post-divorce period). This model extends the knowledge on divorce by specifically focusing on the divorce process of black South African men, its impact, the experience and the adjustment outcomes.

Figure 1: Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Model



Family attachment, length of the marriage, level of investment and marital strain were found to be triggers of stress in the divorce process as was discussed in the previous chapter and illustrated in the diagram above. Their influence on the divorcing individuals is linked to the level of stress that the individual experiences as a result of the divorce. The factors that can be regarded as mediators of the divorce experience include perception about divorce, feelings of stress, (which can be temporary or persistent depending on the individual), and feelings of pain.

Once the individual has been through the mediators and the predictors, the moderators, such as a new relationship/marriage, supportive networks and professional assistance help to reduce the length of the adjustment period. After the mediators and predictors have been moderated in the adjustment period, it is then possible that adjustment outcomes may be determined. These could be in the form of learning from the divorce by developing a *model* for problem solving, personal growth and mending personal and professional networks and (negotiating) managing the parental role. Although such outcomes may reflect positive adjustment that resulted in the participants going back to their normal functioning from before the divorce, fully achieving that is not an easy process. It requires individuals to make a phased approach to the divorce-stress adjustment. Each phase had to be successfully dealt with before the individual could move to the next phase.

Control in a marriage can be a predictor in the divorce-stress-adjustment process because of two reasons. Firstly, control in a marriage determines control in the divorce process and the adjustment thereafter. Control is linked to initiator status, infidelity and willingness or ability to seek professional help in the form of consulting lawyers, psychologists, pastors/marriage counsellors and even investment advisors. Secondly, control reflects the perception about past relationships that will influence the perception of current relationships and any potential future relationships. The findings from the study reported that

individuals whose former spouses were involved in infidelity ultimately initiated divorce. By so doing the individuals lost faith in any potential relationships because of the devastating experience. Given the nature of the status of black South African men in society, where they are providers and protectors of the family, control in a marriage or lack thereof, is a strong predictor of divorce adjustment. Individuals who lose control of their marriage are more likely to take more time to adjust than those who had control. One participant who had control has since remarried.

This model uses a path analysis that presents the divorce process graphically over the four main time phases. Thus, the model indicates how factors in the pre-divorce phase brought about by demographic and personality variables influenced the stress and problems during the actual divorce phase. The same can be said regarding how the factors in the divorce phase, such as perceptions and feelings towards divorce influence the adjustment phase. Considering that these factors in the adjustment phase are responsible for moderating the outcomes of the post-divorce experience, they need to be understood in helping black South African men's adjustment process.

The role of children in the adjustment process is visible across all stages of the model. In the pre-divorce phase, children are seen as a symbol of investment in the marriage that needs to be protected. Children also reflect the longevity of the marriage. For example, marriages with teenage children may be longer than the age of the first child, while those with younger children or no children, may be shorter. The longer the marriage the more difficult it was for the individuals to accept the divorce. In the divorce phase, children are used as leverage in the bargaining for the divorce decree. Individuals lose properties that they had accumulated together because the former spouse has been granted custody of the children. In the adjustment phase the individuals have to negotiate with former spouses for visiting opportunities while others can be denied access to their children. In the post-divorce

phase children maybe used as a way to continue the attachment to fathers through child support, which may impact on the individual's capacity to move on.

The identity development of the individual reflects how they negotiate the different phases of the divorce-stress-adjustment model. Firstly, identity development is seen in the way the individual experiences the pre-divorce phase, as identity has everything to do with family attachment. The type of identity one develops in adolescence is reflected in the type of attachment one will have in any future relationships; marriage and family included. The researcher posits that there is a strong correlation between identity development and pre-divorce experience.

Level of investment is another construct that is closely related to identity. Attachment style in the model relates to the level of investment the individual can make during the marriage. Level of investment is seen in the pre-divorce experience through the number of children, as the ages of the children correspond with the longevity of the marriage. Divorce is thus seen as a dissolution of the investment.

From a symbolic interactionism perspective, objects of concern such as the hurt or pain that accompanies divorce stress may have been a result of marital strain that was caused by infidelity, loss of a job or a failure to conceive, which has an impact on the individual's experience in the pre-divorce phase. While some individuals may see these objects as an opportunity for family transition, others may see it as a failure on their part. Either way the pre-divorce experience is considered as a disequilibrating experience that should be followed by a reformation (adjustment) process before one is able to regain the pre-divorce functioning.

7.4. Learning through Divorce

The concept of reflective action defines action resulting from a stronger order learning process predicated on the insights resulting from critical reflection, thereby influencing positive adjustment by the participants. There is evidence from the findings that moving forward rather than continuing to look back was essential for successful adjustment to divorce. Such findings provide support for McAdams' (2006b) suggestion that extended use of a loss orientation will diminish the ability to harm and act. This is consistent with the premise that challenging forms of reflection resulting from crises have a strong future orientated element and are better linked to, and supported by, affirmative future actions. Ultimately, the findings are indicative that successful adjustment results not only from learning from the divorce but also learning how to live with it.

To achieve successful divorce adjustment, the researcher proposes a lower order restoration orientation, which involves distraction and suppression characterised by an initial hiatus. Reflective action involves more future orientated and progressive stronger-order restoration dynamics that are not based solely on avoidance and suppression. The participants could take new, positive steps in light of the divorce, as it helped them bring an end to the negative emotional responses characteristic of mourning (Baum, 2003).

Although learning from a divorce experience is considered a critical source of learning, an exploration of the specific forms of learning experiences associated with divorce is conspicuous by its absence from the literature. The researcher sought to draw on three coherent types of experiential learning that together establish divorce as a vital stronger-order marriage learning experience. It is these distinctive forms of learning that foster the learning outcomes of divorce articulated above. All in all, the findings indicate that marriage is the ultimate form of trial and error.

The analysis of the findings from the participants' divorce experiences suggest that divorce is a powerful learning experience because of its distinctly personal dimension, chiming with other qualitative studies on the subject (Amato, 2010; Gähler, 2006; Gaffal, 2010). *Fikile* explicitly stated that the divorce experience was a transformative and life changing experience. Transformative learning often involves profound changes in the self in relation to personal understanding and self-awareness. The participants had to reassess the way they had posed problems and reassess their own orientation to perceive, to know, to believe, to feel and to act. Learning became a significant force in the participants' lives, giving rise to strong emotions and entering their sense of identity. These findings illustrate that the participants have learnt important lessons about their strengths, weaknesses, skills, abilities and conduct during their pre-divorce and divorce phases. They now articulate a more masterful reaction to their post-divorce adjustment.

The findings seem to suggest an inextricable link between learning about relationships, learning about why marriages fail and predicting post-divorce life. This creates a fluid overlap between stronger order learning experience and processes. The findings also suggest the way in which divorce has forced the participants to critically examine the underlying circumstances that guided their decision to marry in the first place. These findings also provide confirmation that the importance of learning from divorce lies in the ability of the participants to challenge current practices. Thus, the findings draw attention to previously overlooked inconsistencies fuelling the unfreezing process, in which old ways of perceiving, thinking and acting are shaken and new ways are accommodated (Erikson, 1963). Both *Sihle* and *Themba* demonstrated a revitalised appreciation of how important it is to look after the here and now and getting into a new relationship rather than merely trying to change past circumstances.

The key feature that accompanied stronger order learning was that the participants' adjustment outcomes were not situation specific, rather that they can be applied to, or adapted across, settings other than marriage and divorce. It is fundamental that such learning was reflected in the statements by the participants, that they now have a better awareness of *stress and strains* and *warning signals* during marriage and have developed a new *model* of how to relate in the marriage or elsewhere. *Thulani* is now more aware how long-distance relationships can lead to failure of a marriage or a close relationship. In this respect the findings confirm that divorce is the ultimate price that one has to pay for taking marriage for granted. *Akhona's* comments are illustrative of the belief that years of marriage can lead to over confidence, complacency and insularity, when he said: *...we become myopic and ignore changes that do not suit us.*

In summary, for participants to have successfully adjusted to divorce they should have learnt something from the divorce. They should also be able to apply what they had learnt in future relationships or marriages. Those who have positively adjusted to divorce will be able to use their unique position for the success of their future marriages or relationships. These findings led the researcher to a slightly different conclusion. Considering that most of the participants have not remarried, the researcher can surmise that the participants' continued engagement with the community may possibly allow them to apply their knowledge of divorce to these settings. The researcher can argue that there are several ways in which successful adjustment to divorce can be usefully applied for the benefit of other couples in the community who wish to experience success in their marriage, and more importantly avoid divorce.

7.5. Implication of the Model

The model has considered both the unique strengths and weaknesses of the divorce-stress adjustment experience by highlighting the discretion of negative coping with stress that

intensifies depression symptoms during the divorce process. Stress is a major public health issue that can cause substantial suffering for those affected and may lead to increased morbidity and impaired social and work functioning. Experiencing strong levels of stress is associated with negative adjustment and may distract the individual from the emotional and mental ability required for the person to effectively adapt to the multitude of life changes that follow the divorce.

In addition, the dysfunctional interaction with a former spouse complicates the process of establishing a new autonomous life after divorce, thereby undermining co-parenting children from the marriage. Engaging in positive adjustment predicts stronger post-traumatic growth, learning from the divorce, appreciating life, openness to new possibilities and positive interaction with others. This is because positive adjustment qualities equip individuals with a more effective way of handling the stress and challenges embedded in the divorce process.

7.5.1. Divorce adjustment on the community response. This model can be useful for the introduction of psycho-educational interventions for families of divorce. These will include topics such as managing the child of divorce, co-parenting, communication, conflict management, court process, separation and custody procedure and changes occurring in family, finances, work and social interactions. The promotion of positive well-being among divorced individuals through the use of spiritual symbols, religious language, forgiveness and faith systems that involve the use of concepts such as repentance, guilt, grace, communion and an awareness of the sacredness of marriage, cannot be overemphasised.

7.5.2. Clinical and counselling. This model is consistent with the core assumptions of cognitive behaviour therapy. This makes it important for clinical and counselling settings, as cognition and behaviours related to divorce are more responsive to change than many other

circumstances. Insights gained from this model may help clinicians and counsellors fully explore divorcing clients' symbolic interpretation of divorce and the cultural response. Culturally sensitive clinicians may assist clients to explore and access positive post-divorce adjustment methods as a potential source of support. Regardless of the person's cultural background, clinicians can respectfully work with clients' core cultural beliefs and practices, taking the posture of a learner rather than a teacher.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1. Chapter overview

This chapter summarises the study and highlights the study's limitations and makes recommendations for future research.

8.2. Conclusion

It is clear from the findings of the study that it has contributed to the knowledge and practices of the way in which black South African men experience and respond to issues related to divorce. The findings indicate that black South African men's experience of divorce is divided into four significant phases, with emerging themes in each phase. The themes relate to the factors that influence black South African men to experience divorce the way they do. These findings, and the divorce-stress-adjustment model to a certain extent, mirror similar findings of studies conducted in Europe and the United States of America, although there are other unique themes that appear more related to the culture, milieu and socio-economic history of the South African black men.

The findings of the study provide an important insight into a number of themes and factors that appear to dictate the extent to which divorce among black South African men could eventuate into a strong and positive personal growth experience rather than a long term negative experience. Knowledge of these factors and themes might assist clinical and counselling service providers as well as other mental health providers in helping not just black South African men, but also women, to respond positively, for the benefit of the children, to the challenges and stress that often accompany divorce.

It is important for clinicians and counsellors to understand the lived experience of divorced black South African men so that their adjustment can be understood from those unique perspectives. Clinicians and counsellors should advocate for their divorcing black South African male clients in a way that facilitates positive adjustment. Clinicians and counsellors should therefore strive to assist clients to explore areas that enhance positive adjustment through finding meaning in the experience.

8.3. Limitations of the Study

Although the sample may appear small, it conforms to the recommended sample size for an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) study. The sample cannot be viewed as representative of divorced black South African men. The aim is to produce an in-depth analysis of the experience of a small number of participants. Any conclusions reached are therefore specific to that group. Although the aim of the study was not to generalise the findings to all black South African men, the findings' capacity to be generalised is limited by the lack of diversity of ethnicity and socio-economic status. All the participants were from an urban community and the Xhosa culture, which does not sufficiently represent the black South African male community.

Methodological limitations affect the generalizability of the findings of this study. The main notable limitation was the qualitative phenomenological design of the study, which focuses on the lived experience of the individuals. Although it was important considering the nature of the study, narratives of the participants depended on memory of events and they may have chosen to focus on those that were most significant and disregard other events. Thus a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies may be required to unearth the complexities and nuances of their experiences.

The data collected from the participants was thick and detailed as they were able to reflect on their experiences. This does however, mean that they relied on memory when

recalling their experiences, which could have affected the credibility of their narratives. A good IPA is dependent on the quality of the narrative from which it is derived and limitations to the study were recognised in terms of the difficulties that were encountered in capturing the depth of all the divorced men's experiences.

IPA as an approach suffers from several conceptual and practical limitations directly linked to the role of language. It has already been acknowledged that an IPA can only be as good as the data collected. The role of language in IPA is central to the approach, yet this requires the assumption that language provides the necessary platform to capture the experiences. The researcher holds that the narratives and subsequent analysis informed the researcher about the way in which the participants spoke about their particular experience within a particular context, rather than the experience itself.

Language constructs rather than describes reality and the same event can be described in many different ways and may be described in another way within a different context. This implies that language precedes and therefore shapes experience, as the availability of words to describe a particular phenomenon also provides the categories of experience. This is particularly relevant when asking a person to describe their emotional experiences in a manner that captures the subtleties of that experience, as was the focus of this research.

Another limitation of this study is making a casual inference on the basis of a single, non-randomised divorce study. Although a repeated measures study would have offered insight into the directionality between divorce and stress, there is a probability that unasked questions may produce an effect. In this study, findings regarding post-divorce experience were collected at the last point, and it would therefore be particularly useful to add additional data points to assess how the various factors relate to the long term divorce stress adjustment.

8.4. Recommendations for Future Research

It would be worthwhile to assess the post-divorce experience in a larger, nationally representative sample. The study reported valuable information on the divorce experiences of black South African men and their adjustment afterwards, however, it should be noted that although the target population was divorced black South African men, the men who participated in the study were not a true representation of the population. The researcher used a convenient sampling and the participants were from Port Elizabeth and East London. This makes the study a more isolated depiction rather than a generalised reflection of the black South African male population.

The study offers initial support for the notion that the stress of divorcing, coupled with the cultural perceptions/expectations, socio-economic history of black South African families and negative divorce-stress adjustment, may increase the risk of psychological difficulties, whereas positive divorce stress adjustment may promote personal growth. This seems to be a fruitful area in which to pursue further research and clinical intervention.

Due to the limitation of generalisability to individuals of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, more research is needed to explore the cross-cultural aspects of divorce. The use of a self-report method may be prone to a response set such as social desirability. Future research into this phenomenon would benefit from methodologies other than self-reporting.

8.5. Conclusion

This chapter concluded the study by providing a brief summary of the major outcomes of the research, its limitations and recommendations for future research. It is important to note that the study cannot be generalised to a different cultural background than that of the participants.

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APPENDIX A. Participant information and consent form



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Dear Participant

In accordance with the requirements of my degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Psychology), I am conducting a study on men and their post-divorce experience. The study is entitled **“Black South African men’s adjustment to divorce: a divorce-stress-adjustment model.”**

A review of literature on divorce reveals that regardless of who initiated the divorce there are emotional ramifications for both partners.

Black South African men’s experiences of, actions in, and adjustments to divorce have been relatively neglected in divorce research, yet it is significant for understanding contemporary social arrangements and processes, as well as for broadening understanding of black South African men’s lives. How Black South African men define their situations and respond to divorce points to their positions in a gender-structured society and to their interpretations of the nature of social practices, relationships, and their position in society.

The aim of the proposed study is to explore black South African men’s post-divorce experience. More specifically, the study intends to develop a divorce-stress-adjustment model that will contribute to the knowledge base of post-divorce adjustment for black South African men.

As a participant you will be asked to participate in an individual 2 hour face-to-face interview with the researcher (Kuda), with the possibility of a follow up interview. Each interview will be audio tape recorded. Only the researcher and the supervisors will have access to these audio tape recordings. At each stage of the research you will be reminded of the voluntary nature of the research and you will be given the option of withdrawing from the study at any point.

Feedback regarding the findings of the study will be made available to you. Counselling will be made available to all the participants in the study should it be required. Your participation is both voluntary and confidential. If at any time during this study you wish to withdraw, you

are free to do so without discrimination. The information you share will be used in a research report but all identifying details will be removed.

Should you be willing to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent form.

Your participation will be much appreciated.

If you have any questions prior to your participation, or at any time during the study, please do not hesitate to contact me on 061 863 2545.

Yours sincerely

Mr K. C. Muchena

Researcher

Prof G. Howcroft

Promoter

Prof L. Stroud

Co-Promoter

INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT FORM

<u>RESEARCHER'S DETAILS</u>	
Title of the research project	Black South African men's adjustment to divorce: a divorce-stress-adjustment model.
Reference number	
Principal investigator	Kudakwashe Muchena
Address	Psychology Department, PO Box 77000 Port Elizabeth
Postal Code	6031
Contact telephone number (private numbers not advisable)	041 504 4542

<u>DECLARATION BY OR ON BEHALF OF PARTICIPANT</u>		Initial
I, the participant and the undersigned	(full names)	
ID number		
I, in my capacity as	(parent or guardian)	
of the participant	(full names)	
ID number		
Address (of participant)		

<u>HEREBY CONFIRM AS FOLLOWS:</u>		Initial
I, the participant, was invited to participate in the above-mentioned research project		
that is being undertaken by	Kudakwashe Muchena	
From	Faculty of Health Science, Psychology Department.	

THE FOLLOWING ASPECTS HAVE BEEN EXPLAINED TO ME, THE PARTICIPANT:				Initial	
2.1	Aim:	To explore black South African men's experience and adjustment to divorce The information will be used to develop a divorce-stress-adjustment model for black South African men			
2.2	Procedures:	I understand that it will be a confidential 2 hour one-on-one interview and that I can withdraw at any stage of the interview.			
2.3	Risks:	There are no known risks involved.			
2.4	Possible benefits:	As a result of my participation in this study I will contribute to the body of knowledge on black South African men and post-divorce experiences.			
2.5	Confidentiality:	My identity will not be revealed in any discussion, description or scientific publications by the investigators.			
2.6	Access to findings:	Any new information or benefit that develops during the course of the study will be shared.			
2.6	Voluntary participation /refusal/discontinuation:	My participation is voluntary	YES	NO	
		My decision whether or not to participate will in no way affect my present or future care / employment / lifestyle	TRUE	FALSE	

THE INFORMATION ABOVE WAS EXPLAINED TO ME/THE PARTICIPANT BY:							Initial
(name of relevant person)							
	Afrikaans		English		Xhosa	Other	
and I am in command of this language.							
(name of translator)							
I was given the opportunity to ask questions and all these questions were answered satisfactorily.							

4.	No pressure was exerted on me to consent to participation and I understand that I may withdraw at any stage without penalisation.	
-----------	---	--

5.	Participation in this study will not result in any additional cost to myself.	
-----------	---	--

I HEREBY VOLUNTARILY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ABOVE-MENTIONED PROJECT:

Signed/confirmed	on	20	
at			
Signature of participant	Signature of witness:		
	Full name of witness:		

STATEMENT BY OR ON BEHALF OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

I,	Kudakwashe Muchena	declare that:	
1	I have explained the information given in this document to	(name of patient/participant)	
	and / or his / her representative	(name of representative)	
2	He / she was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions;		
3	This conversation was conducted in	Afrikaans	English X Xhosa Other
	And no translator was used <u>OR</u> this conversation was translated into		
	(language)	By	(name of translator)
4	I have detached Section D and handed it to the participant	YES	NO
Signed/confirmed at		O n	20
Signature of interviewer		Signature of witness:	
		Full name of witness:	

APPENDIX B. Biographical questionnaire



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Name and surname: _____

Date of birth: _____

Month and year of divorce: _____

Current relationship status:

_____ single

_____ remarried

_____ in a relationship

_____ living with a partner

Number of children with ex-spouse _____

Age of children _____

What is your level of education?

Specify _____

APPENDIX C. Semi-structured interview guide



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Participants will be engaged in a 2 hour interview consisting of five open-ended questions.

1. Can you tell me about your experience of divorce?
2. What is your view of marriage and divorce?
3. Tell me about your post-divorce experience.
4. What has been helpful in coping with the divorce?
5. What has changed from the time you divorced until now?