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The Lived Experiences of Adult Children of Mid to Later-life Parental Divorce: An  
Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

By

Joan E. Collins-Ricketts

A Dissertation Presented to the  
Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences of Nova Southeastern University  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

**Nova Southeastern University**

**2015**

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By

Joan E. Collins-Ricketts

2015

**Nova Southeastern University  
Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences**

This dissertation was submitted by, Joan E. Collins-Ricketts, under the direction of the chair of the dissertation committee listed below. It was submitted to the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences and approved in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Family Therapy at Nova Southeastern University.

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## Dedication

This document is dedicated to my sons Raimundo R. Ricketts, and Andrew P. Ricketts. As difficult as it has been for me as your mother to watch you be affected by my divorce, it was this experience of being a divorced mid-life parent of ACDs that conceived this study. Your support throughout the divorce and beyond has been instrumental in my surviving this entire experience. To my daughters (in-law) Zannette and Aisha; you've been my steady source of courage, consistently reminding me of my strength and capabilities. To my grandchildren Rain, Zaiden, and Autumn; I pray that this legacy of divorce will not continue with you, or touch you.

This document is also dedicated to my mother Mrs. Madge Gregory. She is my rock, my mentor, my prayer warrior, and my source of encouragement. I credit her for her hard work and sacrifice in providing me with my primary education that has served as the foundation for where I am now. Mother, words are not adequate to express my love, and appreciation for the woman you have raised me to be. I will never be able to thank you enough for all you've done. I must also mention my father the late Zenfort Gregory who was instrumental in my upbringing and in my education. You will never be forgotten and your support, and love will always be appreciated.

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## Abstract

This study examined the lived experiences of adult children of mid-later life parental divorce. It was designed and conducted to address the gap in the current literature regarding this phenomenon. The experiences of 5 Adult Children of Divorce (ACD) ages 25 to 45, who experienced mid-later life parental divorce, were examined using in-depth semi-structured interviews. The researcher employed an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) of which the findings illustrated various outcomes for adults experiencing their parents' mid-later life divorce. The results of this study showed that parents' waiting until the children are "grown" does not mitigate potentially detrimental outcomes for these "adult children." Some of these concerns shared by the ACDs interviewed included: dealing with the shock of the divorce, the acrimonious parental relationships post divorce, feeling the need to choose sides, effects of the divorce on the ACDs children, among others. Future studies and implications for the field of marriage and family therapy were offered.

*Key words:* Adult children, ACD, Mid-later life parental, Divorce, Phenomenological Analysis, IPA, Effects

## Poem-Divorce

“But in the real world, you couldn’t really just split a family down the middle, mom on one side, dad the other, with the child equally divided between. It was like when you ripped a piece of paper into two: no matter how you tried, the seams never fit exactly right again. It was what you couldn’t see, those tiniest of pieces, that were lost in the severing, and their absence kept everything from being complete.”

— Sarah Dessen, *What Happened to Goodbye*

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Divorce can be a highly disruptive incident in the lives of families, and quite often more so for the children involved. When one thinks of children, however, it is automatic that the thought is of babies, toddlers, and teenagers. Several studies have found that the effects of divorce are often long-term and even trans-generational in nature for these children (Huurre, Junkkari, & Aro, 2006; Uphold-Carrier, & Utz, 2012). Researchers have drawn several conclusions about the effects of divorce, based on studying families over a period of time (Ahrons, 2007 & Abbas, 2004; Baker, 2005). Adult children however, are not the usual focus of such studies, except from a longitudinal stance. This study will examine the actual experiences of adults whose parents divorced after the children were “grown”.

Over the past several decades, divorce has become more widespread. Today’s aging population has not been exempt, with more and more couples ages 50 and older divorcing after many years of marriage (Amato, 2010). Marriages 25 years and beyond are increasingly ending with domino effects. Along with this growing trend comes a population of adult “children” who are not the usual children of divorce, as opposed to toddlers and teens. In the past, research studies on the effects of divorce on children meant infancy into the teen years.

Amato (2010), (as cited in Brown & Lin 2012) described the United States divorce rate as the highest in the world, with an alarming 45% of marriages expected to end. The authors further cited Amato, (2010); Cooney & Dunne, (2001); and Sweeney, (2010)), as discussing the fact that while divorce among younger adults has been extensively researched, divorce among the 50 and older age group has been largely

ignored. This exclusion is interesting, particularly because the United States is an aging population consisting of a large cluster of “Baby Boomers” who began the trend of divorcing and remarrying during adulthood in significant numbers (Brown & Fen Lin, 2012). Kreider and Ellis (2014) found that this group is the largest proportionately among persons aged 50 and older, who divorced, are currently divorced, and have been married twice or more.

Brown and Lin (2012) also hypothesized that among older adults, the prevalence of widowhood has decreased while that of divorce has increased. The marital status of this group of individuals over the past several decades has changed. Among men 65 and older, the rate of those claiming divorce doubled from 5% to 10% between 1980 and 2008. For women the rate tripled, accelerating from 4% to 12%. Widowhood in contrast was unchanged for men, and decreased in women (Brown & Lin, 2012).

Brown and Lin (2012) further discussed longevity as decreasing the probability of marriages ending through death, and increasing the possibility of divorce. Also noted was that the distinct swing culturally in the significance of marriage and divorce impacts all generations. The authors hypothesized that marriage as a lifelong commitment, combined with an increase in the notion that individuals should find contentment and gratification through marriage, is linked to an upsurge in divorce even in older adults (Brown & Lin, 2012). In other words, the increase in individualism and longevity has decreased the sustainability of marriages, discouraging the older adult from staying in marriages they see as meaningless and empty (Brown & Lin, 2012).

Furstenberg and Kiernan, (2001) examined delayed parental divorce and the impact that parents waiting for the children to “grow up” might have on these children.

They posed the question asking: what if parents who are in conflictual marriages decided to stay together and then divorce after the children are grown; how might this decision alleviate the effects of the divorce on children? They also assumed that such a study might consider the differences if any, between the impact on children in their late teens and early twenties when compared to those who experienced parental divorce in early childhood, the results will be discussed in chapter two. This researcher proposed to extend the study of children to include adult children of divorce (ACDs), between the ages of 25 to 45. As stated by Furstenberg and Kiernan (2001), studying the impact of divorce on children provides important information and will assist researchers and family therapists in understanding some of adult children's experience, when and why divorce might compromise the child's well-being, and how age might be an issue.

With divorce, when younger children are involved, the economic status of families typically changes because of the disruption of the distribution of income between parents. In addition, investment in children by the non-residential parent, as well as parental research, suggest that children leaving home is the precursor to later life divorce, as this can in fact produce a stressful transition for parents (Glenn, 1990). Furstenberg and Kiernan, (2001) found that a significant number of divorces occur when children reach late adolescence or early adulthood, and that one in three divorces took place post childhood. Considering these factors, this research study was shaped by the premise that there is a possibility that older children are also affected by the divorce of their parents.



Hence this study, an interpretative phenomenological analysis, was used to examine in depth the experience of an older cohort of children for whom parental divorce occurred later in adulthood. The process followed an in depth question and answer interview, bearing in mind that other questions would arise as the participants described their experience. Care was taken to ensure the participants comfort level and to stringently protect their privacy. Because there was a potential for issues to arise as a result of discussing their experience, referrals were provided for those who had not previously sought therapy and desired to do so, or appeared to need further therapy.

Chapter two consists of a comprehensive literature review, which includes an overview of studies about marital trends, divorce statistics, the impact of divorce on children and several longitudinal studies on the long-term effects of divorce on adult children for whom parental divorce occurred in childhood. In chapter three, the methodological process is described, including historical perspectives, the value of utilizing phenomenology, and a detailed description of IPA. Trustworthiness related to validity, reliability, ethics, and generalizability of the data is also discussed. The research findings and discussions are described in chapter four. The strengths, limitations, and implications for future studies, as well as closing remarks, are covered in chapter five. The document's conclusion includes the researcher's biographical sketch.

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature reviewed in this study focuses on previously conducted research on parental divorce and the impact it has on children. The beginning of the chapter focuses on the statistics of divorce and the family life cycle, the impact of divorce on children in general, and continues with a discussion on the researcher's area of interest; later life parental divorce and its impact on adult children. Although the available research on this topic was limited to date, the researcher provides a summary of as much relevant thematic data as possible to show the necessity for further research, as well as supportive data for the relevance of this study.

### **Marital trends**

According Peterson and Stienmetz (1999), during the second half of the twentieth century, "cohorts were identified by various catch phrases" (p. 4). The descriptive terms applied were used to characterize their attitudes, lifestyles, decision-making and beliefs. Those born prior to 1933, and who experienced World War III were labeled the "Silent Generation". These veterans returning to the United States enjoyed economic security, including low cost home loans, and increased educational opportunities. This group became the parents of the Baby Boomers; children who were born between 1946 and 1964, and according to the authors' hypothesis, were raised to rebel and to question values.

Teachman, Polonko, and Scanzoni, (1999, stated that marital age in the United States declined at a particularly sharp rate in the 1940s and the 1950s. However the trend reversed in the mid 1960s. Teachman et *al.* posited that the median age for marriage between 1970 and 1988 for men rose from 22.5 to 25.5, and from 20.6 to 23.7 for

women. The percentage of women never married between 1960 and 1994, increased from 28 percent to 66 percent.

Faust and McKibben (1999) postulated that although marriage has remained important in American life-style, cohabitation, later age at marriage, childbearing out of wedlock, divorce and remarriage, has changed the marital institution. Consequently, many people no longer view marriage as a lifelong commitment. According to the authors, there was a rapid acceleration of the number of divorces beginning in 1960, with a sharper rise in 1970 through 1980. They also hypothesized that the rationale for this dramatic increase hinged on a demographic shift, because the Baby Boomer generation had reached marital age. Further, against the religious and political influences attempting to stem the flow of what was labeled “moral decay” a changing society became more accepting of divorce (Faust & McKibben, 1999).

Amato, Johnson, Booth and Rogers, (2003) conducted a study examining the continuity and change in marital quality between 1980 and 2000. This study showed that according to the U.S Census Bureau 1998, the mean age at marriage increased between 1980 and 2000. For example males on average married at about age 24 in 1990, increasing to 26 in 1998. For women the average age was 22 and 25 respectively. Amato et al. also explored the notion that there has been a widespread decline in marriage as an institution. They hypothesized that the popularity of non-marital cohabitation and children born out of wedlock has increased. The increased age at marriage, higher divorce rates, and a decrease in remarriage, is indicative that unlike the recent past, marriage is considered less of a permanent part of adult life.

Generation X, or Gen Xers as they are known, are the children of the Baby Boomers, born between 1965 and 1980. This cohort has been described as the “forgotten middle child” that grew up in the era of burgeoning technology and political and institutional upheaval. This group was said to have spent less time with their parents than generations before them, giving them the name “latchkey kids”. As a result their mindset was toward being autonomous, self-reliant and less respectful of authority. Divorces in their families were also common. Also noted was the fact that this generation tended to wait to get married until their late twenties and thirties, increasing the average age at marriage exponentially to an all time high (Generation X [Born 1965-1980]). It would appear that this is the cohort who are now experiencing mid to later life parental divorce, of parents who remained married for 25 years and beyond ([http://www.valueoptions.com/spotlight\\_YIW/gen\\_x.htm](http://www.valueoptions.com/spotlight_YIW/gen_x.htm)).

**History of divorce statistics.** Kennedy and Steven, (2014) indicated that their research showed that past divorce records were much more reliable. In the 1800s data was compiled utilizing transcribed details on each divorce. Fifty years later funding for the collection of divorce statistics declined greatly thus leading to a sporadic practice of collecting data on divorce between 1907 and 1940, by utilizing estimates from a limited number of states. The late twentieth century showed a marked improvement in reporting divorces, although this did not last very long as in 1996, collection of detailed divorce statistics ceased.

The agency responsible for divorce data collection, known as the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), “determined that the quality of marriage and divorce statistics had deteriorated, and alternative information were readily available” (p. 589).

Consequently, the funds used for related data collection was redirected to “higher-priority” (p. 589) uses. NCHS continued to collect raw data of the number of divorces monthly from each state, recompensing them only \$1000 per year. This decline in funding precipitated a decline in the states’ compliance. While data collection per state continued through 1990, by 2005, six states stopped reporting completely. The authors determined that although the other 44 states still reported basic counts, the adequacy of the reporting was not known (Kennedy & Steven, 2014).

As a result of the continued void in the data on marriages and divorce, in 2008 the American Census Survey (ACS) incorporated questions on marital history. Designed to substitute for the vital statistics, questions probed marital status, number of marriages, widowhood or divorce, in the past 12 months. The hope of the Census Bureau was to minimize the underreporting characteristic of previous marital history surveys, by focusing on recent events. Kennedy and Steven, (2014) postulated that the ACS reporting provides a more credible estimate of divorces, than does the vital statistics. Accordingly, they found that the vital statistics report of the refined divorce rate over the past 30 years showed a decline in divorces of 21% (from 22.6 to 17.8) between 1980 and 2008, while the ACS reported the decline at only 2% (from 22.6 % to 22.1).

This information did not however, consider the age composition of the married population. NCHS published age-specific divorce rates for the Divorce Registration Area (DRA), in 1970 and 1980 to 1990. This included data for approximately 30 states, and represented only half of the population. According to Kennedy and Steven, (2014), because of the close monitoring by the agency, this was likely the “highest-quality

divorce statistics” (p. 593). The authors also found that there have been significant changes in the divorce rate by age over the past three decades. They stated that there has been an increase in divorce of those 40 years and older, with a decrease in age of divorces for those in their twenties. The authors hypothesized that based on the shifts in the age makeup of the population the incidences of divorce have increased over the years. They found that the overall decline was offset by a significant increase in divorce for persons over the age of 50 (Kennedy & Steven, 2014).

### **Demographics of Divorce**

Divorce has been and continues to be a topic that holds high interest for research and scholarly writings. However, Amato (2012) found that determining how common divorce is has been challenging because of the inconsistencies in state-by-state reporting to the Federal Government. States such as Hawaii, Indiana, Louisiana, California and Georgia did not file divorce reports in 2004. This has hampered researchers’ ability to do an accurate count of the annual U.S divorce rate, as well as an official estimate of the number of children impacted by divorce. Notwithstanding, the U.S Census Bureau utilizes data from participating states to “publish a crude divorce rate” (p. 650) delineating the number of divorces per 1000 people in the country.

Amato (2012) hypothesized that because of the effects of the age structure of the population, coupled with the proportion of married adults, the measure being used to measure the divorce rate, is less accurate. He believed measuring the number of divorces per 1000 married women would be more optimal in providing the refined divorce rate. According to Schoen and Canudas-Romo (2006), the likelihood of divorce for women escalated linearly and plateaued between 1990 and 2000. They posited that

divorce risks in the United States during that era, were the highest among Western Countries. By the end of the twentieth century, 43% to 46% of marriages were predicted to end in divorce.

Brown and Lin (2010) posited that the divorce rate doubled since 1990 from 4.9 to 10.1 % per 1000 married persons, 50 and older. This trend showed that approximately 206,007 individuals aged 50 and older were divorced, while 643,152, experienced divorce in 2010. Contextually, this translated to less than one in ten divorces in 1990, and one in four in 2010. They further inferred that should this trend remain stable over the next two decades, one could conservatively expect the rate for this cohort to climb by a third, to more than 828,380, by 2030.

The most recent data found was for 2011, excluding data for California, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Louisiana, and Minnesota; California, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, and Louisiana; California, Hawaii, Indiana, and Oklahoma; California, Indiana, and Oklahoma; California, Indiana, Louisiana, and Oklahoma, between 2000 and 2011 (CDC/NCHS National Vital Statistics System). It is difficult to ascertain consistently updated data across states.

**The impact of divorce on children.** While there is a dearth of information on the impact of mid-later life parental divorce on adult children, the opposite is true of the impact of divorce on children in general. The literature reviewed indicated that children whose parents divorce when they are younger appear to be impacted in various ways. According to Amato, (2000), studies conducted in the 1990s and earlier decades (Amato & Keith, 1990; Astone & McLanahan, 1991; & Downey, 1994) have shown that children whose parents divorced have an increased risk of a number of problems

including conduct disorders, emotional disturbances, social relationship difficulties, as well as academic failure. Further, Amato hypothesized that more than half of the divorces in the United States involve children under the age of 18, with more than a million children affected each year. Concurrently, the study unmasked awareness that there is a correlation between economic privation post-divorce, and negative outcomes for children.

Amato and Cheadle (2008) focused on six specific behavioral problems; “repeating a grade, getting in trouble at school, being suspended or expelled from school, having trouble with the police, seeing a doctor or therapist about an emotional or behavioral problem, and being particularly difficult to raise” (p.16). The study, which looked at biological as well as adopted children garnered results that showed a significant association between divorce and behavioral problems in children (Amato & Cheadle).

Kim (2011) conducted a study to assess the effect of parental divorce on the development of children within “three analytically distinct divorce stages: pre-, in-, and post-divorce” (p.506). Findings exposed declines in interpersonal skills during the in-divorce period and in self-expression of ideas, feelings, and opinions in positive ways. Kim’s research also indicated that children of divorce in comparison to those in intact families had higher incidences of anxiety, loneliness, low self-esteem, and sadness, during the divorce phase. Examination of the post-divorce phase indicated neither a heightening nor a decrease of these concerns (Kim, 2011).

Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee (2000) described divorce as being more than the dissolution of a marriage, but a course that is fraught with instability and changes.



Such changes, the author hypothesized, often alter the lives of the children involved.

Multiple changes in family functioning result from divorce including economic resources, increased parental conflict, decrease in parenting quality, and disruption to the parent-child relationship. This study focused on the psychosocial well being of children of divorce, utilizing reading and math scores to measure the academic achievement of the study children, from kindergarten through the fifth grade (Wallerstein, et al.).

In order to separate the impact of the variable-psychosocial well-being, the researchers (Wallerstein, et al.), included other divorce variants, such as parental conflict, family economic resources, and parent/child relationships in the study. Notwithstanding the covariant included, the findings indicated that divorce decreases the psychosocial well-being of the child of divorce, and that this decline can explain potentially poorer school related performances by these children. The research showed academic decline in children of divorce in comparison to children from intact families, with a difference of as much as 5 points by the fifth grade.

According to Portnoy, (2006), at least half of all divorces involve minor children, and forty percent of children in the United States will experience their parents divorcing. At least half of those children will live at least temporarily with a single parent, and one in three with a stepparent prior to turning 19. Portnoy also postulated that children of divorce experience conduct problems, and are two to three times more at risk for engaging in delinquent behavior in adolescence than their peers from intact families. They also have a higher risk factor for alcohol and drug use. Portnoy also found lower academic performance; sexual activity at an early age in female children of divorce; and earlier sexual activities in boys living with single mothers, when compared to their

counterparts from non-divorced families. Adolescents were also noted to experience their fathers as less caring (Portnoy).

The study done by Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee (2000), chronicled the experiences of children of divorce interviewed over several years. Experiences of these children of divorce included taking on the role of caregiver to younger siblings; sitting up with an insomniac parent; and quitting school to undertake household responsibilities of grocery shopping, cooking, cleaning and caring for the parent diminished by the experienced divorce; among other experiences. Accordingly, the role of the child in the post divorce family changes as parenting by the adults often diminishes (Wallerstein et al.). One young girl interviewed about future aspirations, spoke of potentially getting married and having children. She ended her statement by saying; “But you never know, you might get divorced. I don’t ever want that” (Wallerstein et al., p.10).

According to Wallerstein et al., their 1980s studies found that the idea that divorce automatically rescues children from an unhappy marriage is a myth. They stated that many of the children they interviewed were from moderately unhappy marriages that ended in divorce. One response they often received was: “The day my parents divorced is the day my childhood ended” (p. 26). The researchers also postulated that, most children of divorce had no indication that their parents’ marriage was in trouble. “For children, divorce is a watershed that permanently alters their lives. The world is newly perceived as a far less reliable, more dangerous place because the closest relationships in their lives can no longer be expected to hold firm” (p. 27). Wallerstein et al. found confirmation of this hypothesis in several of their research interviews.

Amato and Booth (1996) studied parent/child relationships pre- and post-divorce. They evaluated whether or not there were problems pre-divorce with the parent-child relationships of parents who ended up divorcing. Parents who divorced between 1990 and 1983; 1983 and 1988; and 1988 and 1992 were interviewed. Also incorporated in the study were parents who never divorced as a comparison group. Their analysis showed overall consistency toward the influence of divorce on fathers', more than mothers' affection toward children post-divorce. Divorce, they found, did not appear to weaken mothers' affection for their children.

Low marital quality prior to divorce was, however, indicated in problematic parent/child relationship for both parents. According to Amato and Booth (1996), problems previously attributed to divorce may be less likely caused by it, and more attributable to the marital quality pre-divorce. Results of this study also indicated that some problems solely attributed to divorce might be less when considering pre-divorce variables.

**The long-term effects of divorce on adult children.** Beyond studying the effects of divorce on children, it appeared that examining the long-term effect of divorce on children might have been useful. This idea considered not only the impact of divorce on younger children, but how, if at all, parental divorce affects the child of divorce into adulthood. Several studies have evaluated the phenomena from various perspectives such as college students who grew up as children of divorce, follow-up on adolescents into adulthood, and relationship issues for adults from divorced homes to name a few.

**Longitudinal research.** Wallerstien and Kelly (1996) conducted a study from 1971 to 1977, tracking 60 divorcing families and the 131 children of these families, ages

three through eighteen at the time the marriages ended. The researchers' intent was to have ended the study a year after beginning. They found however, that eighteen months later, there still remained several unresolved issues for these families. Many children in this study were noted to have not yet regained their usual level of pre-divorce functioning, and developmentally, they were declining. Because of these variables, the researchers chose to extend the study to adjust for what they described as, "a more extended and realistic view of the post-divorce transition period" (p.5).

Ahrons (2007) described three pivotal studies; The Marin County Project, The Virginia Project, and The Binuclear Family Study, as exceptions to other studies that had been conducted. Her reason for choosing these studies stemmed from the fact that, unlike these studies, other research samples did not include both parents and children and was not conducted over an extended time period. According to Ahrons, in the Marin County Project 60 families were the focus of a detailed clinical study beginning in 1971. The sample was derived from couples that were incentivized into participation by being offered divorce counseling with the exclusion of children already in therapy. Two thirds of the parents also had a history of moderate to severe psychopathology, (Ahrons, 2007). Because of these issues, Ahrons stated that the results were not applicable across populations. Ahrons therefore described the major strength of this project as also being its weakness, citing substantial flaws in the methodology.

The Virginia Project was a series of longitudinal studies of marriage, divorce and remarriage, involving 900 young persons from all three categories as well as non-divorced families, while The Binuclear Family Study consisted of 89 families, with a total of 204 children. The sample population of mainly white, middle class families was

derived from the public divorce records of Dane County, Wisconsin, utilizing a random sampling methodology (Ahrons, 2007). Ahrons noted that the conclusions of both studies were more similar than not. Their reports indicated the distress experienced immediately after parental divorce would lessen over time for a great majority of adult children. The author postulated, however, that the researchers' underlying beliefs might have been influential in the interpretation of the findings.

Ahrons, (2007) based her research primarily on data drawn from the Binuclear Family Project. Utilizing a semi-structured interview method involving 173 of the original 204 children, she queried, "how adult children perceived and attached meaning to the events surrounding parental divorce, rather than whether such perceptions represented some absolute truth" (Ahrons, p. 58). They were encouraged to tell their stories in their own words. Twenty years after the divorce, and even after having families of their own, the adult children were found to maintain the desire for their parents to relate amicably. The findings revealed that parents whose relationship remained amicable tended to produce optimistic self-report in their offspring. They also experienced continued positive relationships with their parents, grandparents, stepparents, and siblings. Children whose parents were hostile to each other were most likely to report loyalty issues to one parent or the other, and a less than positive relationship with the father (Ahrons).

A study undertaken by Duran-Aydintug (1997) examined 60 adult participants at a large Southern university. These adult children of divorce included 27 women and 23 men, all of whom experienced parental divorce between the ages of five and 18. According to Duran-Aydintug, participants whose parents divorced when they were

between six and eleven years old recounted detailed memories, and stated that they took the side of one parent (usually the mother) while blaming the other. Childhood fantasies of their parents reuniting, was also experienced. The author quoted one respondent as stating:

“I would go to bed and pray to God that they would get together. I kept asking my mother all the time why they couldn’t. Her answers never made any sense to me. Didn’t she love him? Why wasn’t he living with us anymore? Wouldn’t everything be just perfect if he did? Then I would go to his apartment and ask him the same questions. Night after night, in my dreams they are getting together” (p.76).

The respondents in this study varied in their attitudes towards marriage. According to Duran-Aydintug, more than half of the participants had less than favorable attitudes towards marriage, experienced conflictual parental marriages pre and post-divorce, and continued to remain distant from one parent, typically the father. Also noted was the variable of their parents having changed partners, or remarried more than once. This group included those eighteen or older when their parents divorced (Duran-Aydintug).

When looking at the dating behavior of the respondents, Duran-Aydintug, (1997) discovered similarities to previous research. The young adults in this study who experienced high conflict parental marriages as well as post-divorce conflict, tended to link intimacy and commitment to possible conflict. The participants’ age at the time of the divorce was significant, as those who were older were more likely to report being less committed in their present dating relationships, and were more active in their dating

practices. The respondents reported having heightened standards and a greater desire to “play the field” (p. 79).

Baker (2005) studied a sample of 38 adults on the variable of parental alienation post-parental divorce. Participants’ ages were between 19 and 67 years of age, with 75% having experienced parental divorce in childhood. The participants’ relationship pre-divorce to each parent, as well as how visitations were established post-divorce, was explored. Results showed that participants’ experiences fell within seven categories. While they each did not report all symptoms, the seven issues reported were self-esteem/self-hatred, depression, drug/alcohol abuse, lack of trust, alienation from their own children, divorce, and one classified as “other.” Participants’ expression of self-hatred was described as an outcome “of the guilt they experienced from betraying the targeted parent” (p.295). The majority (70%) reported periods of severe depression during adulthood, and made a direct correlation to their parents’ divorce. In addition, their inability to mourn the loss of the alienated parent and the effects of the divorce, having to call the parents’ new significant other mommy or daddy; not knowing how to language the biological parent, exacerbated the depression (Baker).

In addition, one third dealt with their feelings of loss and pain by turning to drugs/alcohol. A particularly recurrent theme was the experience of the lack of trust. Also, repeated divorce plagued two-thirds of the sample participants. Baker cited Wallerstien, Lewis, & Blakeslee, (2001) as stating, “this heightened rate of divorce is consistent with the general statistics of children of divorce...” (p.300). The findings further showed that parental alienation from their own children would not be unexpected post their own divorce, and was actually the experience of half of the 28 participants

who were parents. According to Baker, a positive occurrence for the sample population was that they came to understand that their alienation from the parent they lost had been the result of manipulation. She also found that although the awareness of manipulation was painful, it was the beginning of reclaiming the lost parent.

Similar findings were established by Crowell, Dominique, and Brockmeyer (2009). The research focused on adult attachment issues related to intergenerational divorce. The authors discussed findings that parental divorce is life altering and poses a number of risks to the children, and that several theories address the occurrence of intergenerational divorce. The study indicated, however, that parental divorce does not always lead to offspring divorce in the early marital years, but was a precursor to issues of “adult insecurity attachment” (Crowell *et al.* p.96)

Jacquet and Surra (2001) studied commitment and other relationship characteristics of young adults from divorced families. The study mentioned several ways in which parental divorce impacts children, however, the focus was on “whether the experience of parental divorce relates to the heterosexual premarital relationships of young adults” (p. 627). Major factors discovered in this study on how parental divorce impacted premarital couples, their commitments and relationship characteristics, and issues of trust, love and commitment. The offspring of divorce interviewees also reported ambivalence about involvement, conflict, and satisfaction.

Concomitantly, Jacquet and Surra (2001) stated that in relationships, trust refers to one’s mate being considered compassionate and honest. They hypothesized that “young adults who perceive parental divorce as a breach of trust may be [more] cautious about trusting their dating partners” (p.628) than their counterparts from non-divorced



families. Jacquet and Surra described findings which, they stated, showed that young adults from divorced families are more hesitant to commit to relationships and tend to express less interest in marriage.

According to Jacquet and Surra (2001), their hypotheses that individuals from divorced families would report more ambivalence, conflict and negativity, and less relationship satisfaction, were supported only in the female sample population who were separated from their fathers by divorce. Along lines of trust the authors hypothesized that those subjects whose parents were divorced and who were in advanced stages of a relationship would more likely have less trust with future partners. Also suggested by Jacquet and Surra's findings was that while parental divorce plays a significant part in formulating the experiences of young adults' heterosexual relationships, the link is clearer in women than in men. Interestingly, the reverse was seen in the commitment issue of men versus women. Their fear of commitment appeared to stem from their perception of the economic pressure divorce puts on families, and their desire to not lose their investments should they commit (Jacquet & Surra).

Tied to all these points discussed so far was often the matter of infidelity. Attachment also appeared to be a focal point in all the research studies examined by this researcher. Walker and Ehrenberg (1998) stated that adult children, who viewed infidelity and overt expressions of anger as reasons for parental divorce, were more likely to have an insecure attachment style. Platt, Nalbone, Casanova, and Wetchler (2008) formed hypotheses on seven points for this study, comparing adult children from conflictual and non-conflictual homes, then adult children who knew of a parents' infidelity to those who did not. The first set of participants was studied for (1) negative

view of self, (2) negative view of others and (3) fearful attachment style. The second sample set was looked at for (4) negative view of self, (5) negative view of others, (6) fearful attachment style, and (7) more likely to engage in infidelity.

In discussing the results of their research, Platt et al. (2008) concluded that respondents who reported feeling threatened during parental conflict had a more negative view of self than others, but did not always experience self-blame. Additionally, children who perceived greater threat during parental conflict appeared to develop a fearful attachment style, while adult children who knew of their fathers' infidelity were more likely to engage in such practices than those who did not. The opposite was true in the case of maternal infidelity; male, rather than female adult children with knowledge of their fathers' infidelity, were more likely to follow suit (father being the sons' role model).

**The effects of mid to later-life parental divorce on adult children.** Review of the research on the long-term effects of parental divorce on children has identified a gap in the literature. Several studies have been conducted examining specific aspects of the phenomena (Brown & Lin, 2012; Cooney, 1994; Cooper- Sumner, 2013; & Furstenberg & Kiernan, 2001). Self help books on this topic have also been a recent phenomenon (Foster, 2006). What the current researcher found lacking was an academic, experiential study giving voice to the 'lived experiences' of children whose parents divorced after they became adults. The subject of this inquiry of Adult Children of Divorce examines this phenomenon.

It is a widespread notion that a number of parents stay together for the sake of the children only to divorce after the child has reached perceived adulthood; age 18

onward. Perhaps that decision was based on the notion that the children are ‘grown’, and will be unaffected. However, Furstenberg and Kiernan (2001) asked us to consider “how much, if at all, would such a strategy of postponement mitigate the effects of divorce on children?” (p. 447). Furstenberg and Kiernan thought that in order to answer this question such an experiment would be out of the question. They therefore decided to conduct a study comparing children of divorce in their late teens and early twenties, to those whose parents divorced during their childhood. Based on the growing divorce rate among parents in their mid-later years, this researcher conducted a study of Adult Children of Divorce, and how they are impacted by this experience.

Furstenberg and Kiernan (2001) found that the majority of harmful effects of divorce share the premise that issues such as economic instability, lack of adequate role models, and less parental contact, for example, result only in childhood. Some, they stated, may assume that since they devoted time and money to their children, couples that wait to divorce later in life, would have alleviated the typical impact of divorce on their children. The researchers postulated that while families who divorce when the children are adults are not the same as those who remained together for life, it is not unreasonable to assume that their union offered similar stability (Furstenberg & Kiernan).

The afore-mentioned researchers attempted to assess whether the consequences of divorce to adult children of divorce were less severe than for those whose parents divorced during their childhood. They hypothesized that later life parental divorce should be more beneficial to adult children of divorce. However, they concluded that it is plausible that these parents may still have an impact on the adult children’s lives.

Accordingly, the impact may be attributed to pre-divorce marital issues, as well as the after-effect of parental separation; and that these antecedents may have an adverse effect creating doubt and instability in the relationships of young adults (Furstenberg & Kiernan, 2001).

**Significance of later life divorce.** While divorce of younger adults has been a much-studied topic, Amato (2010) and Cooney and Dunne (2001) concluded that research of divorce among those 50 and older has been effectively ignored. America is an aging populace consisting of Baby Boomers who are now aging into their fifties and sixties, and many of whom were the first to divorce and remarry in high numbers in young adulthood. It is almost a natural progression that they would now be the ones experiencing divorce, since second marriages are at greater risk of ending than are first marriages (Brown & Lin, 2012). The authors also hypothesized that the growing occurrence of divorce implies that the divorce rate among older adults may be on the rise.

Brown and Lin (2012) revealed that as early as 30 years ago, researchers theorized that divorce among the older population would be trending upward. Among the explanations speculated were:

- 1) The number of remarried older adults.
- 2) Divorce in the United States becoming more common and therefore more acceptable to everyone including older adults.
- 3) The rise in the number of females joining the workforce, providing them with increased autonomy and economic independence and;

4) Longevity, which reduces the probability of marriages terminating by widowhood versus divorce.

Wu and Schimmele (2007) posited that one in five marriages would endure 50 years of marriage. Consequently, the demographics illustrate a growth in the divorce rate among those 65 and older in the United States, Britain, Italy, France and several other countries (Wu & Schimmele). They concluded that while widowhood continues to be the most widespread form of separation for older persons, divorce in later-life is not inconsequential, and is anticipated to escalate as Baby-Boomers age. In addition, the rise in individualism coupled with longevity, has added to the phenomenon of later-life divorces (Wu & Schimmele). According to Brown and Lin (2012), the divorce rate among the middle-aged is higher than for older individuals. However, the rate among elders has increased comparatively.

**General impact of parental divorce on the family life cycle.** Cooper-Sumner (2013) also concurred that with the rise in the age of the Baby Boomer generation, an increase in the divorce rate among those ages 45 to 65 will also increase. Accordingly, with the marked increase in divorces among this age group, comes the potential increase of a previously uncharacteristically affected group of individuals-adult children of divorce. This phenomenon also brings with it the potential for an interruption in the family life cycle.

As the author (Cooper-Sumner, 2013) indicated, the family's reaching the era of parental mid-life is both active and highly transitional. Their children are becoming independent, leaving adolescence and entering young adulthood, but remain attached to their parents and roots. With well-established traditions in place, these children often

return home for holidays and other special occasions. Parents often continue to provide support financially, all of which provides stability and a sense of connection for the child, and for the parents, a feeling of prolongation of their parenthood. It is within this new context of the child's independence and the end of childrearing, that the couple tends to "reevaluate their own lives" (Cooper-Sumner, p. 272). This has the potential to be the precursor to divorce in couples married twenty years or more.

Having remained married for the sake of the children, when these children leave home, it appears that these parents see no reason to stay together. According to Cooper-Sumner (2013), "divorce marks the beginning of a series of family transitions and adjustments" (p. 273). Further, divorce at this life stage impacts everyone within the family life cycle. Grandparents experience a sense of loss as they see their family's legacy disintegrate with their children's divorce. Lin (2008) posited that with aging comes the need for older parents to be cared for by adult children. With later-life parental divorce adult children are less likely to provide this care, particularly to their father (Lin).

Grossman and Okun (2012) hypothesized that children of any age will experience a change in lifestyle for some family members; based on the life stage of the family life cycle, the effect on younger children will be different than for those in latency stage, and adolescents.

"Older children adolescents may want to or try to take different roles in the divorced family. While adolescents have their peer and own activities, outside of the family, they may attempt to protect siblings and the more vulnerable parent

and this may impede their adolescent differentiation from family” (Grossman & Okun, 2012).

Progenies in their twenties and emerging adulthood may feel caught between wanting to assist their families and starting their own career and personal relationships. Adult children may have to deal with families of their own, and may feel trapped in between generations, and shifting involvement and responsibilities as a result of their parents’ divorce (Grossman & Okun).

### **Summary**

The above studies discussed the major effects of parental divorce on children, including adult children of divorce. Although several studies addressed very similar points, such as parent child relationships post divorce, and ambivalence toward developing relationships and commitment, it is evident that attachment was a pervasive theme in many studies. Clearly the effects of this potentially disruptive family experience had systemic implications for the entire family, and may continue to affect its youngest members even into adulthood. Furthermore, forming romantic relationships can be adversely affected by issues relating to, trust for self and others, as well as poor self-esteem, as identified by Baker, (2005). Also significant to note is the potential trans-generational effect parental divorce has on their lives, as divorce often occurs in the marriage of a number of children of divorce. Adult children of divorce who have been affected by parental alienation suffer even more having lost their home, a parent and at times the extended family of that parent. This in-turn can lead to their being alienated from their own children (Wallerstien, Lewis, & Blakeslee, 2001).

Finally, studies that focused on adult children of divorce explored issues such as consequences of parental divorce for adult children's support for their aging parents; long-term effects of divorce on adult children; the long-term effects of parental alienation on adult children; as well as college aged children of divorce. The research revealed a gap and a need for further study to explore the lived experiences of children of mid-later-life parental divorce. The intent of the proposed study was to address this gap, utilizing an interpretive phenomenological analysis of three to five children of divorce, who experienced the phenomenon in actual adulthood.



## **CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY**

### **Qualitative Researching**

Qualitative research encompasses several frameworks, which include constructivism, interpretivism, feminism, and postmodernism. All these frameworks and assumptions include several approaches to qualitative research. Among these are narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies. According to Creswell (2013), foundations of qualitative research are assumptions and the usage of “interpretive/theoretical frameworks to inform the research study of problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p.44). Qualitative researchers’ approaches to inquiry use data collection in the natural setting of the study participant and the establishment of themes, or patterns, by inductive and deductive analysis. The final report of findings and results focuses on the participants “voice”, the researcher’s reflections and the interpretations and description of the problem being studied.

Creswell (2013) posited that there are some characteristics that are common to qualitative research. In qualitative research, the researcher’s role of interviewer, behavioral observer, and examination of documents makes him/her a key component in the process. Although an instrument is usually applied, it is typically one developed by the researcher. The qualitative researcher usually collects multiple forms of data including interviews, observations, and documents, which they review and analyze to come up with similarities in themes and patterns across sources. The participants’ multiple perspectives, and the meanings they attach, are major characteristics in qualitative research.

Creswell (2013) also stated that this type of research provides a holistic explanation of the problem or issue being investigated, not from a linear cause and effect stance, but rather from an identification of the complexities of the interactions of the facts related to the situation. Another key characteristic described by Creswell (2013) was the emergent and evolving nature of qualitative research, indicating the potential shifting and changing during each phase of the process. The questions may change, or inspire additional/new questions as a result of participant's response, or the tools being utilized may be modified as the need arises.

**The value of qualitative research.** According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research is best utilized to conduct studies that give voice to those who are silenced, when exploration of a problem or issue is needed, or because there is a need to study a particular population or group. The study of complex issues for which a more detailed understanding is needed may also necessitate the use of this methodology. Additionally the author posited that qualitative inquiry is useful in empowering individuals to share their story, minimize the researcher's voice and de-emphasize a potential power position in the process. Researchers also prefer this format when the preference is a literary and more flexible style of writing for telling the stories of participants, and to understand the contexts and settings in which they live.

All these rationales made this research methodology very attractive to this researcher. As Creswell (2013) stated, this researcher's process began with an issue or a problem, progressing to the question to be answered, a review of the related literature, data collection, and finally the analysis and write up of the results from the participants' perspective. The author postulated that unlike quantitative inquiry, in qualitative

research there is usually no specific structure or standard; the writing styles vary from scientific-oriented styles, to storytelling formats. Creswell (2013) also stated that qualitative researchers, including him, consider his/her own background, interests, and what s/he brings to the process. This is also true of this researcher whose own personal history was foundational in this study and the use of this form of research.

**Phenomenological study.** As defined by Creswell (2013), this research method “describes the common meaning of several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon” (p.76). Researchers who utilize this methodology focus on the commonalities of the participants as they experience their phenomenon, with the fundamental purpose of reducing the experience of the individual to its’ general essence. Accordingly, the researcher collecting the data from those who experienced the phenomena packages it in a composite description of all the experiences. Banister, Bunn, Burman, and Daniels (2011) described phenomenology as being “all about the lived experience” (p.4), further stating that this focuses on the rich, textual components of the of the individuals’ life by engaging with them.

This methodology seems ideal for use in the social sciences because of its rich complexity. With that in mind, the researcher found IPA ideal for this study, which focused on the in-depth experience of the participants. Banister et al. (2011), in discussing common features of phenomenology, pointed to the inability to separate “the world of subjects and objects” (p. 7) from one’s experience of it. Gathering data from a phenomenological framework aims to acquire the deepest account possible of the participant’s experience. The authors posited that researchers who adopt this method utilize an open attitude in order to achieve the best, and most authentic, results.

According to Creswell (2013), there are certain features that define phenomenology, some of which are:

- The emphasis on a phenomenon to be examined and articulated as a single concept or idea.
- The examination of this phenomenon with a heterogeneous group of 3 to 4 or 10 to 15 individuals for whom this experience is true.
- A discussion about the underlying concepts of conducting a phenomenology based on a philosophical paradigm which presents the “lived experiences” (p.78) of the phenomenon including the subjective experiences and the shared objective experiences when compared to others.
- A method of collecting data that characteristically focuses on interviews targeted at the persons who lived through the phenomenon.
- Data analysis geared at proceeding systemically from narrow to broad units of analysis, and thorough accounts that encapsulate “what” the experience was and “how” it was experienced (p. 79).
- Finally, a culmination of the study extracting the epitome of the experienced phenomena.

It was with several of these descriptors of this methodology in mind that this researcher chose to conduct a phenomenological research. My topic for consideration posits the examination of the ‘what and the how’ of the experience of adult children whose parents divorced in these parents’ mid-later life. Creswell (2013) stated that in some types of phenomenology the researcher “brackets him/herself out of the study by discussing personal experience with the phenomenon” (p.78), in order to set aside the

researcher's own experience with the issue being studied. This researcher felt that this methodology was the best way of focusing on the participants' experiences. The author noted the above idea as the ideal. However, this researcher acknowledged that her postmodern training as a Marriage and Family Therapist placed her contextually within the system because of the concept of the observer being a part of the observed (Keeney, 1983). In addition, she remained aware that while her focal interest was the 'lived experiences' of the participants, she was cognizant of the impact her own experience with "gray divorce" (Brown & Lin), and her own adult children's experience with the topic, could have on the study. As such, she determined that it would be appropriate for her to journal her thoughts and feelings that could potentially surface as she related to the data.

**Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA).** Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009) defined Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), as a "qualitative research approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences" (p. 2). IPA researchers are particularly concerned with what occurs when the everyday current of the lived experiences of people, takes on significant implications for them. Typically these instances are the result of something important happening in their lives. IPA according to Smith and Osborn (2007) also places the researcher in an active role, with emphasis that the research process is a dynamic one. While this methodology is a type of phenomenological research, it does not focus on the essence of a phenomenon. According to Creswell, (2013), a phenomenological analysis focuses on the "the common experiences of the participants" (p. 82). The researcher in this instance

utilizes a combined description that is representative of “the essence” (p. 82) of the phenomenon rather than the lived experience of an individual.

According to Smith et al. (2009), IPA was influenced by three key concepts and philosophies: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography, which were grounded in the work of Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre, who were significant phenomenological philosophers. It was Husserl’s interest in determining how people could truly discover their “own” experience of a particular phenomenon, with complexity and thoroughness that helped IPA researchers focus on each aspect of the event to be studied. This, he said, would be revealed to the researcher via thorough reflection.

Smith et al. (2009) wrote that Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre expanded on Husserl’s work by each contributing to the notion of the individual being “embedded and immersed in a world of objects and relationships, language and culture, projects and concerns” (p. 21). They stepped away from his evocative commitments and transcendental interests in lieu of a more interpretive and worldly locus, focused on understanding the relationship of participants to their lived experiences. Hermeneutics is the second major tenet of IPA, which literally means the theory of interpretation and stemmed from initially attempting to find deeper interpretations of Biblical texts (Smith et al., 2009).

In IPA three theorists, Schleiermacher, Heidegger, and Gadamer were major contributors (Smith et al., 2009). Schleiermacher’s focus provided a holistic view of the interpretative process, encompassing what he termed grammatical and psychological interpretation. Heidegger’s contributions focused on the following

statement. “Whenever something is interpreted as something, the interpretation will be founded essentially upon the . . . fore-conception. An interpretation is never a pre-suppositionless apprehending of something presented to us” (p. 25). Consequently, it is inevitable that the researcher brings his/her fore-conceptions to the process. Heidegger believed that fore-structure is always present and potentially dangerous to interpretation. He therefore posited that the analyst must be cognizant and give priority to the “new object” rather than focusing on one’s preconceptions. Gadamer’s concern was to look at the value of the historical and traditional perspectives, on the interpretive process (Smith et al. 2009).

According to Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), the hermeneutic circle is pivotal in understanding the relationship between “the part and the whole” (p.28). They posited that this concept is intrinsically circular in nature, focusing on the given effect of the parts on the whole, and whole on the parts of anything. Consequently, most hermeneutic writers recognize the importance of the hermeneutic circle and its value in providing a non-linear way of thinking about IPA data analysis. Lastly, Idiography, another major conceptual effect on IPA, focuses on the ‘particular’. The ‘particular’ considers the depth of the analysis, the particular phenomenon, and the particular perception of the person in their particular context (Smith et al. 2009).

In summing up the heart of IPA, Smith and Eatough (2007) stated that IPA focuses on the in-depth investigation into the lived and personal experiences of people, and how they deal with that experience. IPA also boasts what Smith and Osborn (2003) referred to as a “two stage interpretive process [AKA], double hermeneutic ” (p.53). In this context, they described the method as emphasizing “sense-making” for both the

researcher and participant, from the perspective of an insider. With these descriptors in mind, this researcher believed that IPA was the most suitable research modality for this study. This researcher was interested in the lived experiences of the participants, and how they make sense of their particular phenomena, and also believed that her interpretation of the related data in this research process was appropriate for IPA.

**The use of semi-structured in-depth interviewing.** Because IPA research analysis involves the detailed examination of the respondents' perception of their lived-experiences, as well as making sense of it all, a certain amount of flexibility in the data collection process is necessary (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Although there are several ways to collect data for IPA research, the authors posited that the semi-structured interview offers the opportunity for the researcher and respondent to engage in a conversation, and the development of additional/modified questions based on participants' responses (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

### **Participants**

**Homogeneity and sample size.** Since IPA's commitment is to the particular as well as how to understand specific experiential phenomena, there is a necessity for in-depth, detailed exploration and data analysis. With this in mind, a large sample size is antithetical to the process (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Discovering this information provided direction for this investigator's choice of a sample size of at least three, but no more than five participants for this project. According to Smith et al., (2009) "IPA utilizes small, purposefully-selected and carefully-situated samples . . ." (p. 29). The authors suggest a sample size of three to six if new to IPA, as reasonable even for the experienced researcher. Accordingly, a smaller sample size will allow for a



deeper level of engagement with each respondent, as well as a more detailed look at similarity and differences (Smith & Osborn, 2007). The researcher's ability to acquire the desired number of participants, who were willing to talk in depth about their experience with the particular phenomena, was a consideration in the final sample size.

**Participant selection.** Once approval from the Nova Southeastern University's Institution Review Board (IRB) was attained, the investigator began the process of soliciting respondents. Participants were recruited utilizing sampling that was purposive in nature as this served to hone in on a more narrowly defined group for which the research question and phenomenon held meaning. Homogeneity of the sample was also an important consideration in this process. Smith et al. (2009) further stated that this could vary among studies, and that deciding on a sample that is homogenous can potentially be affected by the ability to find people who fall within a large enough population for whom the study phenomena has sufficient meaning. The participants recruited and chosen for this study, were English speaking adult children whose parents divorced after they were adults, 25 years or older. Ethnicity was not a consideration in this study. The number of years the parents were married varied from 26 to 32, however, the phenomenon of their age at time of divorce, which determined the age of the adult child (ACD), was the primary focus.

This researcher, in conjunction with the tenets of IPA research, proposed to conduct an in-depth interview with each respondent, with the option of one additional interview if deemed necessary. The respondents were informed of this potentiality in the invitation letter and informed consent. Each semi-structured interview session lasted approximately two hours with the goal of ascertaining the participants' particular lived-

experience with the phenomena; how they make/made sense of it; and their perception of the experience, along with possible additional related thoughts on the phenomena.

### **Informed Consent**

Consent forms detailing the parameters of the study, were provided to each participant for his/her signature. The forms and any pertinent study document with identifying participant information were stored in a locked box and kept in this researcher's personal home office. This researcher addressed additional questions from respondents during the process, openly, and honestly. The respondents were also informed of the voluntary nature of their participation, as well as the freedom to withdraw at any point during the study without penalty.

### **Data Collection**

**Interview and data collection procedure.** The goal of data collection in IPA encompasses a development of a process that garners rich, detailed stories, thoughts and feelings of the participants. The process of one on one conversation fosters rapport with the respondent, which is necessary in discussing such personal and potentially sensitive information (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). This was also a primary goal for this research study. The format of these interviews varied between face-to-face and telephone, based on the locale of the participant. Although telephone interviews did not allow the researcher to experience such nuances as body language, and facial expressions, this was still a viable method and is often used by researchers when participants are not available locally (Creswell, 2013). The interviews were recorded, and notes taken by the researcher. Every effort was be made to ensure privacy and security by conducting the interviews in a private space chosen by the participant.

IPA interview questions are typically general and open-ended, since the researcher's goal is not encumbered by a predetermined hypothesis, but is rather focused on exploring the phenomena in a flexible yet thorough manner (Smith & Osborn, 2007). During the interview, each respondent was asked the same open-ended questions, with unique follow-up probe questions based on the individuals' response to the base question. As meaning making is a key construct of IPA, the investigator paid close attention during the interview, to the particular meaning each respondent ascribed to his/her lived-experience, and attempted to avoid allowing personal biases, and the introduction of leading questions, into the process as much as possible.

Smith and Osborn (2007) posited that IPA's theoretical stance is committed to the person's "cognitive, linguistic, and physical being" (p.54), and presumes a link that connects a person's discourse, thought process and emotional state. Although these constructs connect, there is often a struggle between the individual's thoughts and feelings. This places the investigator in the position of interpreting the dichotomy between the two-the mental and emotional and their way of languaging these (Smith & Osborn, 2007). As an IPA investigator, interpretation was an expectation in this study's process.

**Data analysis.** As previously stated, this IPA analyst's interest was in learning about the psychological world of the respondent. The researcher was interested in the complex nuances of the meaning of the content the participant shared. In the process of trying to encapsulate and do justice to the respondents' information, these meanings were not always obvious, making it necessary for the investigator to spend time engaging with the text in the interpretation process (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), believe that IPA data analysis provides a great deal of flexibility, and that there is no right or wrong way of conducting this analysis. As a guide to the process of analyzing the data the researcher utilized the steps discussed by Smith et al. (2009), Smith and Eatough (2007), and Smith and Osborn (2003), in table one below.

**Table 1: Process of IPA Analysis**

- Step 1. Read and re-read
- Step 2. Initial note taking
- Step 3. Note developing emergent themes
- Step 4. Search for connections across emergent themes in the first case
- Step 5. Move on to the next case
- Step 6: Look for patterns across cases

***Read and re-read.*** This is the first step in analyzing IPA data, and involves the researcher's self-emersion into the transcript. This also ensures the proper placement of the respondent as the focus of the analysis. The researcher followed this procedure, in order to connect as closely as possible to the data.

***Initial note taking.*** In this step, the semantic substance and how the data is languaged are explored and examined. The researcher was determined to remain curious and open minded while noting anything of significance or interest in the transcript, which permitted a deeper level of familiarity with the transcript (Smith et al., 2009).

Descriptive, linguistic and conceptual comments are also key elements of this phase, to which the researcher attended, deconstructing, underlining and writing down anything that peaked the analyst's interests (Smith et al. 2009).

According to Smith et al. (2009), the researcher in analyzing the transcript takes note of key words, phrases, participants' real world experiences and, in general, information of value to respondents. They further stated that this level of note taking involves "taking things at face value" (p. 84) and being cognizant of the respondents' experiences related to their connection to that which is the focus of their lives. Deeper meanings may ensue as the descriptive analysis develops (Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009). Linguistic comments refer to how the transcript reflects the use of language. Content and language use may at times appear interconnected and important to highlight. Attention to "pronouns, pauses, laughter, functional aspects of language, repetition, tone, degree of fluency (articulate or hesitant)" (p. 88), will be paramount (Smith et al.). They further noted that noting things such as the use of metaphors is crucial. Metaphors, Smith et al. stated, can be "particularly powerful component of the analysis . . . because it is a linguistic device which links descriptive note taking . . . to conceptual notes . . ." (p.88).

Another aspect of note taking, defined by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), as the third level of annotation, is conceptual comments. This they described as being more interpretative, viewing the transcript at a conceptual level, particularly during the earlier phases of the interview.

At this juncture, a detailed synopsis of the information may not have been elucidated, and a thought-provoking statement by the participant, may induce additional

questions. Consequently, this may cause a change in the analyst's concentration to pay closer attention to the respondents' predominant understanding of what they are sharing (Smith et al. 2009).

Deconstruction, according to Smith et al. (2009), involves possibly fracturing the "narrative flow of the interview" (p. 90). This is accomplished by, for example, reading a paragraph backwards, sentence by sentence, to get a sense of how each word is used. By so doing the analyst gets a closer relationship to what the respondent is saying, and helps to evade concentrating on simplistically reading the data (Smith et al.).

***Developing emergent themes.*** By becoming intensely familiar with the data set, the researcher began the process of locating and developing emergent themes. Smith et.al. (2009) advised that during this part of the process, the analyst's task and focus shifts to concurrently decreasing the bulk of the data, while maintaining its complex nature, "mapping the interrelationships, connections, and patterns between exploratory notes" (p. 91).

***Search for connections across emergent themes.*** In attempting to locate connections across emergent themes, this researcher utilized Smith and Osborn's (2007) suggestion, listing the emergent themes and noting the connections found. A table of the themes was then ordered logically, and noted clusters were named representing "super-ordinate themes" (p. 72).

***Moving to the next case.*** The analyst repeated the process with each of the following cases as indicated in Smith's work. Care was taken to treat each case individually and not as a mere replica of the one before, while noting thematic instances between cases (Smith and Osborn, 2007). Accordingly, Smith et al. (2009) advised the

“bracketing” (p. 100) of ideas emerging from the analysis of the first case, while working on the prior case.

*Looking for patterns across cases.* This was the final in the six-step process, and involved locating patterns across cases. Smith et al. (2009) suggest asking such questions as: What are the connections across these cases? How does this theme in this case shed light on a different case? Which of the themes are the strongest? These were some questions asked to potentially lead the researcher to “reconfiguring” and “relabeling” (p. 101) the themes.

### **Reliability**

According to Creswell (2013) reliability in qualitative research is enhanced if the researcher obtains detailed notes utilizing a high quality tape recorder, and by accurate transcription of the data. Interviews in this study were recorded using an Olympus VN-722PC digital voice recorder. Attention was paid to tangential, but potentially critical, pauses and junctures in the recording, as well. The researcher adopted these guidelines, and attempted to supply as much “rich” descriptions of the respondents’ interview responses as possible. The researcher also used member checking to solicit participants’ view of the accuracy and credibility of the study’s findings and interpretations, by conducting a second interview lasting approximately 30 minutes (Creswell, 2013).

### **Ethical Guidelines**

According to Creswell (2013), during the process of planning and designing research, one must remain cognizant of ethical issues which will, in all likelihood, arise. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) stated that the practice of ethical research must be monitored throughout the data collection and analytic processes. The researcher

attempted to abide by the principle of avoiding doing harm, which is an inviolable research principle. The informed consent and open, honest discussion of the study was paramount in conducting this inquiry. Informed consent in IPA covers not only participation in data collection, but also extends to possible results of data analysis. The researcher remained open to revisit the issue of consent if it arose during the interview process and potential emergence of particularly sensitive topics. Risks and benefits to the participants were openly and honestly discussed. Respondents' data was de-identified and pseudonyms used to differentiate the case files, and protect the participant's sensitive information. Marriage and Family Therapy and ACA codes of ethics principles were also consulted to help in the process of ensuring the respondents' wishes were considered. They were also informed about the difference between confidentiality and anonymity, since the data (interviews) would be analyzed and presented in the dissertation.



## **CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Parental divorce in the mid-later years appears to have become more common in the past decade, leaving in its wake a cohort of adult children who are now dealing with the after effects. The individuals in this study took the opportunity to speak candidly about their experience as Adult Children of Divorce (ACDs) and how if at all, different aspects of this experience have impacted their lives. In this chapter the researcher utilized IPA analysis write up strategies to present an account of the data as well as the researcher's own interpretation of the data. The process consisted of reviewing the data, delineating exploratory comments, journaling researcher's thoughts and interactions with the data, and extrapolating themes within and across cases.

The excerpts shared in this chapter gave voice to the participants personally and collectively. While each case showed variations in reactions to life with the phenomenon, there were both subtle and obvious shared experiences. The researcher conducted 5 audio taped interviews, 2 of which were face-face, and 3 by phone to adjust for the participants' location. Two of the 5 participants, Lisa and Danielle, are siblings. While they may have overlapping experiences, they also shared aspects of their lived experiences unique to each of them. Also to be noted is that Lisa, the elder of the two, is married while Danielle, the youngest of three siblings, is not. The questions were used to guide the conversation with each participant, with additional questions based on participants' response. Following is the table of the participant's demographic data, and another of noted themes across cases that will be the focus of the discussion of findings in this chapter.

**Table 2: Participants' Demographic Data**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age at interview</b>	<b>Age at time of divorce</b>	<b>Number of years Parents' Married</b>	<b>Parent's age at divorce</b>	<b>Marital status of ACD</b>	<b>Children</b>
Mary	32	24	26	Mother: 48 Father: 52	M	1
Karen	35	22	30	Mother: 53 Father: 60	M	1
Lisa	33	28	32	Mother: 57 Father: 56	M	0
Danielle	29	25	32	Mother: 57 Father: 56	S	0
Jon	32	24	26	Mother: 53 Father: 56	M	2

<b>Table 3: Master Themes Across Participants</b>	
<b>Superordinate Themes</b>	<b>Emergent Themes</b>
A. Parents' marriage . . . like any other marriage	A1. They seemed very happy A2. They had their issues A3. They had a partnership
B. Growing up in a Christian Household and parental divorce	B1. Christian values B2. Concept of Biblical marriage B3. Impact of divorce on current spiritual life of ACD B4. When there was infidelity
C. Parents wait to divorce till children are "grown"	C1. When they graduate C2. When they're out of the house
D. Lost time with Grandchildren . . . having to schedule time with parents	D1. No summers with "grandparents" D2. Having to Schedule time/visits D3. No family pictures with parents together
E. Study ACD's wedding day experience with divorced parents	E1. They sat on opposite side of room E2. No photos with both together/uncomfortable E3. Mom and dad's attitude at ACDs wedding.

F. Romantic relationships impacted	F.1 Approached relationship with husband (then boyfriend) looking for things to avoid F2. Umm, I have seen the pain that can come from a broken relationship . . .
G. Divided loyalties/choosing one parent above the other	G1. Loyal to dad G2. Close to mom G3. Definitely took sides
H. “You’re still our parents . . .”	H1. Mom and dad are estranged H2. We’re still your children
I. You Can’t Go Home Again . . .	I1. Loss of family home I2. Mom means home I3. Feels like a visitor

### **Parents’ Marriage . . . Like Any Other**

Some participants responded to the question about their parents’ marriage by noting that they were either unaware of any marital problems between their parents, or that they seemed happy for many years. Others saw a marriage that was like any typical marriage with its ups and downs, while some were fraught with issues of infidelity. Overall, on one level or the other, each ACD expressed not seeing a marriage they thought would end, particularly after being in its’ twenty sixth, up to thirty second, year.

Mary described her parents’ marriage as:

“I witnessed my parents disagree a couple of times, but nothing to the point where I suspected that their problems weren't any different from other people's

problems. I've actually witnessed other family and friends' parents argue like, all-out brawl in front of us. So, I never really experienced my parents doing that, so I thought my parents were fine. Well, I thought it was like any other marriage. I mean, my parents – my Dad, in my opinion, was affectionate. He – I saw him hug my Mom in the kitchen, and I can remember seeing my Mom push him off or shrug him off. I remember my Dad buying flowers for my Mom all the time. My parents rarely went anywhere without us, so it was always a family affair whenever we would go somewhere. So, I thought, I thought everything was fine. I didn't think that they – when I, whenever I thought of people getting divorced, I always thought it was gonna be something really bad, like it had to be an affair, or there was domestic violence.”

She also shared that although she recalled her parents talking about getting a divorce when she was in middle school, that conversation ended when the children reacted with tears and upsetness. There was no further indication until 12 years later.

Karen's perspective of her parents' marriage was that it was a “good partnership.” She also thought they were “happy for many, many years.” but stated that “. . . they were independent of each other . . . [and that] dad would travel and mom was getting a bachelors degree for herself.” She described a statement her mother made about “education being the one thing no one can take form you,” as potentially being, in retrospect, a sign that she was “anticipating that they would separate.” Karen also reflected that her parents “weren't loving” and did not spend a lot of time together. One could potentially interpret that type of relationship as distant and query the strength of the relationship in terms of couple-hood.

Lisa described her parent's marriage as "putting on a good show."

"But otherwise in terms of their interactions, I think that when we would see them talk to each other, it would be a lot about us as kids. Funnily enough, we never saw them discussing finances in front of us. They would talk about finances separately. I know that they definitely were on different pages when it came to finances, but in terms of their integration with each other most of the time my dad would definitely try and put on a good show and try and give my mom a hug or something, and he was like, "Oh, don't be cross. Don't be mad," or something. Sometimes she would roll her eyes and just be like, "Oh, stop," in a kind of jovial way. But when she wasn't amused, then he wouldn't try anything like that."

From what she shared, it appears that there was a certain amount of tension in the marriage. She also described seeing from her perspective,

"... a lot of reserved anger from my mom's side, and I didn't understand why until much later. We'd be in the car. And my mother can be naturally just very quiet, but you could tell that she was seething. You could tell she was seething, so my father would ask something seemingly innocuous about directions or something just seemingly benign, and she would give a very terse response. And I think part of that was just tiredness. I think there was a lot going on underneath..."

Danielle's view of her parents' marriage was that it was "a good marriage, as marriages go." She described her father as controlling and being the "alpha" in the relationship, but that her mother who played the role of "the pastor's wife" also had control in areas such as finance, and keeping "everything running in the background".

She stated that her father did “credit her mother” for what she did. Danielle also spoke of her father’s need then and now “to keep an appearance, like definitely keeping a façade.”

The researcher found one particular incident described by her as interesting.

“I think, there were times where I did see affection between the two you know driving in the car on the road trips and he would take her hand and things like that where it was clear that they love each other umm it’s not just appearances or whatever, but I would say that those times are kind of rare in as much as I would be sitting in the back seat and I would see him take her hand, I remember I would always think it was kind of odd and kind of unnatural and I don’t, and I mean... I just remember mentally taking a note that umm yea it just seemed a little odd and kind of like not natural or you know a little forced and kind of I don’t know if it was just maybe for us to see like oh mom and dad are in love or yea well those were kind of the things that I remember.”

Reflecting on the above statements, the question could be asked as to whether or not she held conflicting views of her parent’s marriage. On the one hand there seemed to be the desire to see her parents as affectionate with each other; while at the same time questioning the validity of those glimpses versus her mother’s underlying anger, and her father’s “patronizing and controlling” attitude as problematic.

Jon, the only male participant, was less forthcoming than the 4 female participants, which could potentially be attributed to gender differences. Like Karen, he also described his parent’s marriage of twenty-six years in terms of “a good partnership” stating further that, “they both worked . . . and showed how to put family first.” He said “ it was what I would identify as a good marriage . . . they didn’t always agree on

everything, however they dealt with things together.” Jon saw his parents as a “loving couple” who unlike the description of the previous parent’s, “could always be observed . . . spending time with one another.” In his teen age years however, he began to see what he described as “still the partnership, but it’s just the working-they worked a lot.”

Analyzing the transcripts showed a pattern of the participants’ view that their parents’ marriages, while somewhat challenging, at times were not unlike “any other marriage”. Some even thought their parents were happy, while others, although they noticed rifts in the marriage, thought that they had a good marriage. Others witnessed infidelity and yet they did not expect the marriage to end. It could be hypothesized that, like younger children, adult children want their parents to stay together. They want the family they’ve known all their lives to remain intact, potentially at all costs.

### **Growing Up In a Christian Household and Parental Divorce**

While it was not the intent of the researcher to target a population that identified as Christians, the interview process revealed that 4 out of 5 participants focused heavily on the influence of faith and Christianity in their families growing up, and in terms of their parent’s divorce. The fifth participant identified as Catholic but did not focus on faith as a significant component of her upbringing or as a direct issue in the divorce. Because of the apparent value placed on this by the participants it was apropos to address this theme.

Mary was particularly vocal regarding her thoughts on her parents being Christians who divorced stating;

“But, growing up in a Christian household, I would expect that my parents would have resolved some of those issues, or worked through some of those issues.



Especially since my parents, in my opinion are very religious. And, I also asked them, because of what – like I said, my parents are Christian, so I think about the things that the Bible says about divorce.”

She spoke emphatically about this topic and appeared to be still somewhat upset about this particular issue. Her emphasis on the Biblical concept of marriage as a covenant and her belief that her parents “ . . . did not keep their covenant” coupled with her emphasis on how they in her opinion “have violated their faith” appeared to be an expression of her disappointment in her parents divorce. She did not simply speak of the Christian faith as her parents’, but also claimed it for herself. As a possible statement of disapproval on her part, she also stated: “Because, like, I’m going back to my faith. Our faith, we’re all Christian.”

Lisa was from a pastoral family and described religion as a major component of their life. Her parents met through the church and served as missionaries in various countries. She spoke frequently of how life in the home was like being on a “tight rope.”

“Growing up I would say that it was a household of parent religiosity. Some of it personally held in terms of the individual members of the family and some of it was definitely what you’re doing to look good perception wise. So that could have been a lot of the tight rope . . .”

Lisa’s reaction to the high degree of religiosity in the family was to get off the tight rope as indicated in the excerpt. “ . . . and I think how my siblings and I have reacted to religion in our older lives has varied for that reason in terms of really walking that tight rope a lot of times.” This was further expressed by her moving away from her parent’s faith by marrying outside of it and also changing to a different denomination entirely.

Danielle's experience of the hyper-religiosity in her family was very similar to that of Lisa. She tried to make sense of it in relationship to her parent's divorce and spoke anxiously about how that played into her idea that divorce did not seem to be something her family would have ever had to deal with. "I just remember growing up and I think maybe it's partially the religious upbringing but I just remember thinking like divorce would never happen to my family . . ." Danielle punctuated her speech with what could be described as periods of nervous laughter since the information being shared by her was not only serious but also apparently painful for her. She also burst into tears periodically while recalling her experience.

In the case of Jon, it appeared that while religion was major part of the family, it was not over emphasized. ". . . we were always taught to love God, respect God, have a relationship with God". Christianity became more of a focal point for Jon when his parents decided to divorce, as evidenced by his increased involvement in the church, by accepting the nomination of youth leader. He described this as "the only thing that gave me fulfillment, and I started deflecting and planning programs, and doing things, and it was kind of my own thing that got really brought me to a better place. It brought light to me." Although his faith was for Jon a vital coping mechanism, he did not appear to take it as a mere crutch. An accurate assessment would be that it was a natural occurrence and a direct result of faith/Christianity being thought of as a having a "relationship with God."

### **Parents waiting to divorce till children are "grown."**

According to Furstenberg & Kiernan (2001), one in three parents who divorce wait to do so until their children are grown. This study addressed this premise, which was a commonality between all five participants. Mary expressed that her parents

discussed divorcing when she was approximately 13 years old, but that based on the reaction of her and her siblings, they decided to wait.

“. . . we were crying and all that other stuff. And then, after a while, I guess my parents decided not to move forward with it after that conversation. I guess they realized how much of an impact it was gonna make on us, I don't know”.

Twenty-six years into the marriage after the last child had graduated high school, and the participant was 24 years old, her mother filed for divorce.

“And she had been saying she was gonna get divorced when my brother, my youngest brother got out of high school. And I think most parents say, I'm gonna stay in this relationship because – because there's children involved.”

For Karen, it was traumatizing to come home for a visit from college and find that her father had moved out.

“It was right after I had finished high school or was it college? Hold on. Let me think. It was actually right after I had finished college. I was in college, actually. I was in college, and my sister had moved on. My sister had gone off to school, graduated, everything. She was married already, I think. So I was the only one left in the home, and then I went off to college. And I came back probably like for a break or something - went to break or summer break - and it was almost like the house felt different. I felt something was different. My mom was gone for a business trip or something, and my dad was the only one home. I went into my mom's closet, and I went to go borrow a belt or something because all my stuff was off at college. So I needed a belt or something, and so I went into her closet and I noticed that my dad's stuff was gone. And here he was sitting in the living

room pretending everything was okay. I went in there, and I said, “What’s going on? Where’s your stuff?” And he’s like, “Oh, man. We were gonna wait to tell you together. “. . . my mom was in her 50s maybe - early 50s, maybe like 53. So my dad was closer to 60.”

Relating her experience was emotional for Karen. She experienced bouts of crying and spoke of how hard it was especially now that she has a child of her own. In addition she empathized with her father who she stated, offered to do anything her mother wanted, for her to not leave.

Lisa was 28 years old when her parents divorced after 30 years of marriage and serial infidelity, as well as misappropriation of finances, on the part of the father. Lisa shared that her mother definitely wanted to wait until her children were “out of the house [as she] did not want to uproot them.” She described her mother as very open and “forthcoming” and that it was she who broke the news of the decision to file for the divorce. There was, however, a period of marital disintegration for at least 3 to 4 years before the divorce was finalized.

“Yes. Oh, yes, definitely for at least I would say a good three to four years. I would infidelity was a major cause of the divorce. I think that another major issue was again finances. It came back to be a real ghost in the end because in terms of how they were managing for example their joint finances . . .but far and away the infidelity. I remember my brother saying that people would say, ‘Oh, you know, are you sure you don’t have any other siblings somewhere else? You sure? You sure?’ And even the situation of why my dad had left that particular position, it was again dealing with infidelity because it was to the extent that the woman in

question was making overtures that she wasn't caring for the child that she was pregnant with. It turned out that she was not pregnant at all, but it was just had support been there, pregnancy tests and sending for the doctor even though she was not pregnant."

A significant effect Lisa shared was not only related to the divorce, but to the reason for the divorce.

"I think that one of the biggest things that has impacted me is when my mother said she'd gone to her doctor, and the doctor said, "You know, I think you may have contracted an STI [sexually transmitted infection]." And that for me after that many years of marriage to find out, "Okay, now you have to be on like drugs and stuff to cure." That for me I think was very definitive."

This statement was not only shared with grief on behalf of her mother but with great passion regarding the idea that she was infected while in a long-term marriage. As a result Lisa was vehement about how she might possibly respond should this happen to her. Her internal thoughts on her mother being infected seemed to overwhelm her. Her use of the word "really" repeatedly also appeared to indicate the enormity of the effect this has had on her.

"It definitely . . . I think is something that - I feel so bad for my husband - but I think about that particularly because if that were to happen to me, I look fabulous in orange. I'm a fall . . . I look really good in orange, and I wouldn't hesitate to consider violence. And that's not a good thing. It's really not a good thing really that I have other options at my disposal, but I completely would understand the crime of passion. And I let him know that frequently."

Danielle described her mother as “the conduit of information,” and the one who shared the news about the pending divorce. She also described her father as,

“ . . . kind of being the lone wolf on the other end didn’t really know what information we knew so he was under the impression that we were still you know, blindfolded to what was going on so it was really quite unique watching it unfold in that way, like we knew some aspects of it but then he didn’t know that we knew so you know what I mean? It was very, very, convoluted as far as the communication and the barriers and who knows what and all of that.”

Danielle’s repetitious use of the word “very” could be indicative of how troubling the poverty of communication in her family was. When she spoke about her mother’s sharing her plan to file for divorce she described it as “devastating.”

“ . . . like we were that perfect family we were that Cosby show family if you will and I just remember thinking like these bad things just wouldn’t happen to our family because if anything divorce happened to my friends families and it happened when they were younger and like my friends if anything they had step-parents who would have known them since they were kids, like little, and you know divorce doesn’t happen beyond a certain age, like that was kinda like my rationale, like if it was going to happen it would have happened already and like you know people stay married, the they suck it up, that was kind of like some of my denial thinking . . .”

Interestingly, although Danielle described the major catalyst for her parents’ divorce as multiple incidences of infidelity on her father’s side, she appeared ambivalent

and overwhelmed with the idea of her family being split up. Danielle also expressed without reservation feeling that being an adult child of divorce is;

“ . . . much more confusing because I remember when all of this was happening I was you know I was probably almost 21, I was legal, I was definitely an adult but I remember feeling like I was five years old inside because I remember thinking to myself, why do I feel like this? When I am an adult I should be able to deal with these emotions in a more logical way like I am watching my parents split up; but there’s a part of me that is like a little child feeling like her family is breaking apart but at the same time I am out of the house, I live on my own, like these things should not be affecting me in this way so why are they?”

Impacted by her parents’ divorce, she questions her feelings and herself as well as the childlike vulnerability and emotionality she experienced.

Jon’s parents divorced when he was 22 years old. They had been married for 26 years. As with the other 4 participants, his mother was the one who filed for the divorce.

“It wasn’t really them. The conversation was with my mom. I kind of knew from what was going on, it was leading to that anyway, so it, to me, didn’t really hit home of exactly the gravity of what was taking place. There was still a lot of questions that weren’t answered, a lot of things that at that time I didn’t understand.”

Unlike the other participants Jon did not express his parent’s desire to protect them by waiting to divorce when they were older. However as a result of him experiencing mid-later life parental divorce, he has been impacted by the phenomenon. As he described his parents’ divorce it was the impression of the researcher that although

Jon showed a measure of strength, he also appeared to have lingering angst regarding unanswered questions about the complete truth about why his parents divorced.

“It was a normal day. The gravity didn’t settle; the dust was still kind of being flung in the air. So that understanding, and it hitting, didn’t actually hit until months and months later. The questions – for me it was like, the questions of why, . . . for both sides. Again, all of my information was one-sided. The hindsight, and even in the situation, I’m the type that if I want to know something I’ll come up to you and I’ll ask straight. That’s how we were raised, “If you have a question – ask.” So with that situation, it was what do I ask? And I never got any answers. To this day, I have not gotten those answers.”

The frustration of not getting answers resonated throughout the conversation. Having been raised by those same parents to ask questions, and yet they were now refusing to answer his question was obviously unsettling.

“I’m a fixer. I’m that type of guy who likes to bring results, and that’s why if I don’t get the answers, I can’t fix it. So if I can’t do that then it causes me to be frustrated.”

### **Lost time with grandchildren . . . having to schedule time with parents**

This was a theme that resonated deeply with all three participants who are currently parents. They each spoke of how painful it has been for them to handle the impact of their children not having coupled grandparents. When speaking about this topic, Jon was the most forthcoming about his feelings than at any other time. When the researcher asked him if the divorce had an impact on his children, he responded



emphatically. His repetition of “absolutely” expressed the intensity of his feelings about this loss.

“Absolutely! Absolutely! And keep in mind, within me being married a little under two years after the divorce and having a child literally a year later, it was one that was very challenging in the beginning in a number of... Because now it’s not me; now I look at my kids. My brother and sister – they had their kids. But out of the second set, or of the younger it was me and my brother, I was the first one to have a kid. Definitely the first one to have a kid after the divorce. So I remember my son’s first birthday party. It was like pulling teeth to have them both there. And one only wanted to show up for a little bit, and, “I’m just gonna show up and I’m leaving.” And so my son didn’t get the full interaction of having both of his grandparents there. And it was kind of – no family photos with both parents.”

Additionally Jon expressed a sense of profound sadness for his children missing a component of family that he so desperately wants for them. His response also seemed to encompass some of his own loss of not having had coupled grandparents and linked this experience to a repetition of the pattern for his children, as a result of his parent’s divorce.

“And so with the grandchildren – yeah, there is a direct impact because I have experienced having two parents and growing up and having all of that. And I never had a pair of grandparents alive at the same time. *I’ve only had my grandmother*, so she is who I identify grand parenting with. *So I’ve never had*

*two grandparents at the same time, and I would love to have that as an experience, at the same time, for my children. They'll never get that."*

At this point his speech became more pressured, and his expressions more pointed! Time spent together as family would now be only a memory and not one shared by his children.

"Holidays are split! Birthday parties – you'll never get them both together. So they're affected. Again, I still articulate my point with them, and speak to that because I'm fine, but they are the ones who are affected! They don't know anything – they don't know any better; they just don't understand! And so the greatest impact of the whole divorce is not so much with me, it's with my kids."

Mary's experience with this aspect of her parent's divorce took her back to her childhood fantasies of the role her parents would play in her children's lives. Her expectations of continuing the legacy of her mom being caregiver to them as she had done for her would never be a reality.

"Growing up, I always had a vision of me dropping off my children with my parents and them hanging out with them, or going to spend the night, or whatever. And now, knowing that my Mom will probably be doing most of the work – that's how it was growing up. She was the domestic one, so she was the one who took care of our needs with stuff like that. So I kind of expected the same thing. So, it's disappointing that they're not together. Like, right now, my son is with my husband's parents, they're all – (*trails off*)"

The hesitancy and staccato in her voice when she spoke of how hard it is to coordinate her son's visits with each grandparent, was evidence of an underlying emotional difficulty with experience.

“So, it's kinda – it's hard now, because they see each other – my son sees my parents separately. And I – it's hard to coordinate that. And then, on top of that, it's hard to coordinate when... Like, if my Mom is coming over, and my Dad is available . . .”

Coordinating schedules between her parents seemed to bring Mary back to the anger she felt because of the divorce. Her frustration and annoyance were clearly expressed in the excerpt that follows. The internal struggle with her parents not being together appeared to be impactful, not only on the grandparenting issues but also on her as well.

“. . . my Mom and Dad are usually available at the same time, in the evenings. Well, this one – my son hasn't seen my Dad in a little while, so I have to coordinate when he can see my Dad. But my Mom wants to see him now, or she's available now, and who knows when she's going to be available next time? Trying to coordinate schedules like that is very challenging. And then, honestly, I just get annoyed, so I'm just like, you guys can be together right now, and I could just be dropping my son off to enjoy his grandparents, you know?”

Karen's story echoed the experiences of Jon and Mary concerning the impact of her parent's divorce on her 5-year old daughter. The challenge of scheduling time with both parents appeared to put her in a challenging position even more so, because both her parents live in another state.

“Yeah, but it does get kind of challenging because even when we go visit it’s like ahead of time I almost have to preschedule what our trip is going to look like. I’ll have to say, “Dad, you have to be available,” or, “Are these dates okay with you? I need you to be available on Wednesday and Friday because on Tuesday and Thursday, we have plans. Mom and I are going to go do something with Elise or whatever.” So it’s almost like he has to then cater to us too, and that makes it hard because he works.

Like Mary, she expressed feeling internally conflicted with reconciling her parents’ divorce with the need to have them as a couple in her daughter’s life. Discussing this topic also brought her to tears, particularly when she shared with the researcher about the questions her daughter asks.

“But it’s not as easy as it would be if they were together and we could just go one place and go have dinner together. And my daughter’s at a point now where she asks. She’s learning. She’s like, “Why does grandma live by herself, and why does grandpa live over this way? Why don’t they live together they’re grandma and grandpa and I hear grandmas and grandpas are supposed to be together?” So, no, that’s a whole other thing to try to explain, and then she also realizes that we do things separately with each parent.”

While Lisa is not yet a parent, the researcher believed that her story deserved to be mentioned because of the connection to her parents’ divorce. Her parents’ ability to have children and her lack there-of seemed to weigh heavily on her psyche. Her use of words like “very (repeatedly), simple, easy” to describe their fertility appeared to be, in fact, being critical of herself.

“...but in terms of seeing how easy it was for my parents. I mean, everything else seemed to have gone awry, but they were able to have this very ordered life with respect to fertility. So they were married in '80. I was married born in '82, my brother in '84, my sister in '86 - very, very ordered, very, very, simple, easy fertility story.”

She expressed a great degree of angst concerning her inability to conceive, and went as far as questioning her own marriage, since her parent's imperfect marriage produced three children so easily.

“I'm just wondering, (trails off) . . . Okay, well, if all of that is going wrong but that's going right, what are we doing wrong?” And just seeing the fertility on both sides of the family, . . . and just wondering, “Okay, well, do you have to have this kind of relationship to be able to have kids or what is it?” So that is something that manifests definitely for me anyway because I've been ready to have kids for, oh, like a good 10 years. But, yeah, no, I wonder. I wonder all the time in terms of, “Okay, well, maybe you can't have everything. So maybe if things were less perfect.”

#### **Study ACD's wedding day experience with divorced parents.**

Having one's parents at your wedding is an experience that most people relish. For all 4 married participants it was not the best experience, however. While Mary's parents attended her wedding, her mother's overall demeanor beginning with the rehearsal the night before marred the day. She reported that the pastor actually instructed her mother to walk with her father and sit with him, because of how she acted. Interestingly, this was 7 years after the divorce, and he was not aware they were divorced.

“My Mom will snub, and if my father was sitting right here? She would not even – first off, she would not even be sitting with him. The only reason she sat next to him at our wedding is because she had to, but you should see the picture. The picture is like this, (gestures with hands) and my Mom's face has a scowl, and my Dad's sitting there like... you know?”

Mary's sense of loss was evident in her expressiveness as she spoke about her mother's actions on her wedding day. “And, in that situation, it wasn't about my parents, it was about me and my husband at the time, so . . . (trails off).”

Karen's experience was similar to Mary's in that, while her mother attempted to connect with her father, he completely ignored her. As he walked down the aisle, her mother told him how nice he looked, but received no response.

“That was kind of hard because I guess for the most part they kind of stayed on separate sides of the room anyways. And then the day of my dad walked me down the aisle, and my mom was just sitting off to the side with her family. And, again, it was that division of families. My dad's family was there too, of course.”

Picture taking proved awkward when the parents misunderstood the photographer's instructions.

“The funny thing - I say funny for lack of a better term - was when we got the photographer you had to write on there certain images that you wanted to capture, you know, “Mom with daughter, daughter with dad, or bride with dad, or whatever.” And on the form I had to put, “Pictures with bride with mom and dad on separate sides of the bride.” So I was in the middle, and the photographer did not read his notes. And he said, “Okay, so mom and dad, now you guys kiss the

bride on each side of the cheek.” And my dad heard, “You guys kiss each other,” and my mom heard it too. And their faces - their eyes - got really big like, “What did he just say?” and I was like, “Calm down. They just said kiss me on the cheek.” And they were like, “Oh, okay.” But still for them that was even awkward and it was awkward for me to be like I had to prepare for those situations on my wedding day to make them feel less uncomfortable. It still came about anyway.”

Lisa made a point of sharing how frightened she was on her wedding day. This fear stemmed from her knowledge that it rained “very heavily” on her parent’s wedding day, and that it was raining “cats and dogs” on hers as well. She emphasized how “eerie it was that in both cases, the day before, and the day after were beautiful!” She further stated, “I was dismayed because we had planned an outdoor wedding, and I felt sad when I thought about it and the fact that it mirrored my parent’s wedding day given all that it represented.” She questioned her pending marriage asking herself, “I was like, their marriage was so crazy, does this mean mine will be too?” This questioning of her future marital success versus failure appeared to be in line not only with having experienced her parents’ divorce, but from also having lived with the issues that led to their failed marriage.

She was happy that her parents were cooperative on her wedding day. The ceremony was officiated by her father, and he and her mother both sat together at the reception. However things “fell apart towards the end” when her father wanted to continue the “façade” by greeting more guests together as a couple. Her mother had enough by then, refused and “hit the dance floor instead.”

When the researcher interviewed Jon, she again identified a connection to this theme. In sharing the events of his wedding day Jon stated,

“Oh yes, thinking... Both parents did show up again – pulling teeth. But no, they – I did not get both in the same photo; nope. It is what it is. Yeah, I got married at the beach. But no, there was really no seating, but one was all the way on one side and the other was all the way on the other.”

Although he stated that he “was happy just to have both of them in attendance” his expression gave the impression that he would have been happier had they been more cordial. The tone of his voice was incongruous with his actual words.

### **Romantic relationships impacted.**

The researcher found this theme less congruous across cases. However, both Mary and Lisa expressed some relationship issues. Danielle appeared to have been affected the most in this area and continues to be affected. When the researcher posed the question; “Were you in a committed relationship at any time during that time period of the divorce?”

Danielle responded,

“Hmm no . . . and honestly I am glad that question has come up because committed relationships are something I have struggled with my entire life. I am 29 years old and I can honestly say I have never been in a committed relationship that would be labeled as you know, a boyfriend and girlfriend who have been going out for months or years . . .”



She seemed anxious to talk about this topic and spoke rapidly, hardly taking a breath. There seemed to be a need to emote and to share this apparently difficult experience/information.

“Like I have never had that and I know for a fact it has something to do with my relationship with my family and my relationship with men, my father, I know it has something to do with that but you know part of why I went to therapy . . . was for that because at the time I was dealing with a young man who was just you know, by no means good for me . . .”

The emotional pain Danielle was experiencing as a result of her parents’ relationship and subsequent divorce was very apparent in her speech pattern as well her periods of tearfulness. Her choice of men may also be a consequence of her reaction to her father’s infidelity.

Danielle’s emphatic repetition of “*Crawling for affection, crawling for affection . . . really, really, devastating . . . umm, really . . . self-esteem so low . . .*” in the excerpt below, was potentially an expression of a depleted sense of self and a perceived loss of self respect.

“I would just take any crumbs from him . . . so I was really like in a volatile situation where it was just like, I was just like, crawling for affection, crawling for affection from any man, and it was really, really, devastating to my life, really um . . .” (*Sobbing*)

She struggled to talk about this being in the past, yet expressed herself as if it remained in the present.

“I mean I feel like it still affects me today so it’s hard because, umm I just don’t know where to find that affection and . . . umm, it’s just been a barrier for me for many, many, many years and I don’t know how to get out of this cycle; because in as much as I stood up to my dad there really has not been any resolution.”

Her repetitious use of the time frame “*many, many, many years*” shows that she has not yet come to terms with, and remains vulnerable to the effects of her parent’s marriage and divorce. She seems overwhelmed with the thought of not being in a committed relationship.

“Umm, I have seen the pain that can come from a broken relationship, I have seen the devastation and like a part of me is always afraid . . . umm it’s like, it’s like I intentionally go after people who like are unavailable or uncommitted because I know, like deep down it’s like it would never work anyways . . . I don’t know, I cant figure it out but for the longest time it held me back and no I have not been in a committed relationship so that’s where I am at right now.”

The researcher was curious if Danielle’s being impacted by parents’ divorce plays into her inability to connect romantically. Walker and Ehrenberg (1998), hypothesized that adult children who observed infidelity and betrayal of trust in their parents’ marriage as a reason for divorce, tended to struggle with attachment issues. As a result those ACDs would be cautious in becoming romantically involved, fearing that a potential mate may betray them as well.

#### **Divided loyalties/choosing one parent above the other.**

All 5 participants equally experienced this particular theme as they relate to their divorced parents. Mary was, however, the only participant who chose to take her father’s

side above her mother's and continues to view her as the one who is "angry". It is possible that her reaction stems from not knowing the reason for her parents' divorce, coupled with the fact that her mother filed for the divorce.

"Well, if you speak to my Dad, he says he still doesn't know why my Mom and him got divorced. But, when I speak to my - And, when I speak to my Mom, she says a bunch of different things that, to me, are - now that I'm married, I think they're trivial, but I was not married - I haven't been married as long as she and my Dad were. Yeah . . . to this day . . . For me, I'm like, okay, you got divorced, so you got, you got - in my opinion - what you wanted, so why are you still acting this way when we're - whenever there's a family gathering. Like, she doesn't wanna be around my father, so she will avoid anything . . . I've asked her specific questions. I said, "Did he hit you?" She says, no. I said, "Did he cheat on you?" She says, no. I asked, like, I guess the big ones."

In Karen's case, while she expressed empathy for her father as possibly being lonely, she clearly chooses to be loyal to her mother stating;

"Oh, yeah, for sure. I would say that my loyalty is probably to my mom because, of course, she's the closest to me. **[Cries]**. So I would say my loyalty is to my mom because from what I can remember she was always there for me. I don't know if it's just like that kind of more motherly bond or connection than with my father because he's very independent. When he's available or he's accessible that's when he wants you there, but my mom is always, always there for us. So, I mean, since I was little we were her little girls. We went everywhere with her, so I would definitely say the loyalty is to her."

Lisa expressed that her loyalty to her mother came naturally since she was always the parent who was there for her. Her father traveled extensively for work during her childhood and currently lives in Africa. Her mother having contracted a sexually transmitted infection/disease as a result of her father's infidelity has definitely impacted her and helped to create the division of loyalty.

"My mom has made peace with the fact that, "Okay, well, you know, it happened, but it's behind me. That's not something that will have to affect me going forward." And I admire that about her. I'm very blessed that we have a mother who is so forthcoming. She's forthcoming, very transparent, very honest."

Danielle's speech was emphatic and decisive leaving no doubt where her loyalties lie. Having shared that she spent the majority of her childhood with her mother, it is not farfetched for her to feel closer to her than to her father.

"umm it's a good question because as much as I am loyal and I mean that word is strong but I am, I spend more time with my mother and I talk to my mother more, like I, you know it just dawned on me the other day, I haven't physically seen my father, since...in five years! I have been in touch with him but he is for the most part not really in my life right now so my mother is the one who is in my life right now and she is physically far away from me as well but I have seen her waaaay more often, at least every year, a couple times a year . . . but I will say I am very close to my mother umm like very, very, close to her and I don't know being her youngest and my allegiance. Like it will be held high, I have no shame in saying I am definitely on her side and my allegiance is to her, as much as I can look at

both sides of the equation like I just feel like, I just want to protect her more and I just want to be on her side more and that's kind of where I settled so umm . . .”

While Jon was not as explicit with having divided loyalties between his parents, it could be inferred based on his reaction to his father refusing to give him the answers he craved, to make sense of the divorce.

“There was a lot of questions that I wanted answers to, and demanded answers to. And they didn't come fast enough. Once I would get one, I wanted more, and it got to the point where I wanted to know the intricacies of their marriage –what led to it. And my dad didn't give me everything; he didn't give me anything. It was kind of deflective. And what it did for me, was I was kind of, ‘Okay, well here is the information I've got. You haven't given me anything to refute, therefore it's your fault.’ You know what I mean? And so it – his mindset was always, ‘It's not your business.’ I wanted answers. You can't give me answers; therefore it is your fault. We stopped talking.”

Reading the excerpt could then lead one to conclude that Jon chose to be on the side of his mother since he laid blame for the divorce on his father.

Also resultant to the ACD choosing to be loyal to one parent versus the other, is the probability that the favored parent will be cared for should illness or another need arise. As in the case of both Lisa and Danielle, their mother is their focus currently particularly since she has a medical issue, and has not remarried.

### **You're still our parents . . .**

As in Ahrons' (2007) study, where it was found that the adult participants wanted their parents even twenty years post divorce, so did three of the 5 participants in this

study. They also wanted them to as Mary said, “. . . when you're together, I need you to be pleasant. Not bearable, but pleasant. That's it. Plain and simple . . . Or as Jamaicans say – British Jamaicans, full stop.”

Karen said it best and probably echoed the sentiments of most ACDs, when she stated;

“I think it would be nice for parents even after they've been married twenty years, thirty years and divorcing that they still maintain some sort of relationship with each other when it comes to the children or the grandchildren and you be able to do things collaboratively. If my sister and I were in trouble, I wish my parents would call each other and say, ‘How do we help them? How do we get them out of there?’ Because you're their parents . . . You're our parents, and it would be nice if they still had that partnership, that team together to where they could come together in a time of crisis or a time of happiness and be there for the two of us - my sister and I. So the two takeaways I would say is not to talk bad about the other parent and to remain a bond regardless for the sake of the children.”

Accordingly, Danielle expressly abhors her mother's speaking ill about her father in her presence. She emphasized the desire not to know the intimate details of his wrong doing although she is already aware of what he's done.

“And so one point where I feel like the line, there is a line in the sand is when she starts talking to me about my father. I just find that I tense up and I find that my reflex is to say, I don't want to hear about that, like I don't want to hear you bad mouthing daddy . . . In those terms, its like, . . . You know, there needs to be that parent-child divide where I don't want to hear, even though I know in general detail, I don't want to hear all the details of how, how much wrong he did you . . .

he's my father. So that's where I find there is like, that difficulty. That's where I feel like there is a limit."

Overall, the essence of the theme is that ACDs are no different from younger children of divorce in wanting their parents to get along, even for their sake or the sake of the grandchildren. They would like family events to be attended by both parents and for them to "behave."

### **"You Can't Go Home Again . . ."**

This theme resonated with the participants although it was slightly different for Lisa and Danielle. Both consider themselves "a third culture kid [ie., they were born in one country/culture, to parents from another culture, but raised in another culture] who, to begin with I don't have a very strong set of roots, like what's unique for me is that I have always grown up kind of not having a sense of place . . ."

Danielle continued with describing herself as fearful of losing her mother who she now identifies as "home."

"And part of, you know it's, it's difficult because I don't really have a sense of roots, and I feel like part of what I talked about when I went to therapy years ago, was you know, I have this terrible, terrible fear of when my mother passes away like what am I going to do in terms of a sense of place and a sense of home and I mean home is where you go over the holidays, home is where you go at Christmas and that's my mother's place, right now. Just that fear of displacement when one parent is no longer there and I just don't feel like I can rely on my father to be that sense of home if anything were to happen so yea, just a little bit of a no-man's land. And you know, very, very fractured family, that's how I feel like we are."

Throughout the interview the researcher found that whenever Danielle repeated words or phrases, it showed a degree of stressfulness. In general the topic was stressful for her, but certain topics more so. This was one such topic as shown in her repeated use of “*terrible, terrible*” to describe her fear of losing her mother and “that fear of displacement.”

Lisa seemed a bit less apprehensive, probably because, unlike Danielle, she is married.

“Growing up we were always more comfortable with her, and part of that is because she adopted my great-grandmother’s style in the sense of just being very nurturing, very open, very tough parent. So we naturally gravitated towards her. And that was something that for me I made that shift in my mind not to say that my dad ceased to be my parent, but just in terms of home psychologically it was easier to gravitate towards that home being with my mom.”

Jon’s mother resides in the family’s original home. His perspective was

“Yeah, maybe – again how I deal with things –. Home is home; home is where I grew up. Home is not a set of people always, but is the place and the experiences shared there with those people – with them. So when I go home, I call – my home address – I call that home.”

That being said, his next statement showed another thought process for Jon. There seemed to be some dissonance in how he feels.

“Is it different when I walk in there? Absolutely! Because, in essence, I can even find myself – I close my eyes and walk that house blindfolded, know where I’m going, but there are certain noises that trigger certain feelings and emotions. And you look for certain people to be there based upon those triggers and emotions,



and they're not. But it still doesn't change the place. The feeling that I get is just, "Hey, this is where I grew up."

As he continued to share his thoughts regarding "home," the researcher found what could be considered conflicted thoughts.

"Yeah, maybe – again how I deal with things –. Home is home; home is where I grew up. Home is not a set of people always, but is the place and the experiences shared there with those people – with them. So when I go home, I call – my home address – I call that home. Is it different when I walk in there? Absolutely! Because, in essence, . . . there are certain noises that trigger certain feelings and emotions. And you look for certain people to be there based upon those triggers and emotions, and they're not. But it still doesn't change the place. The feeling that I get is just, "Hey, this is where I grew up." There's a sense of pride. There's a sense of ownership. I went back there and stayed for a year while we were trying to purchase my home, and it was just like being back home. It didn't have the same feel in the people that I saw. Again, every time I hear that noise – the door opening, my parents' door opening and hear the footsteps – I look for my dad. But I see my mom's husband. And it's different. It's not the same vibe of . . . (trails off). Is it the same? No, because there's different people."

Mary's statement about home was very significant. She shared that although her father has remained in the family home, going "back home" is not possible.

"So yeah, if they were together, and they moved somewhere else, I think I'd still feel a little uncomfortable, because it's not the house that I grew up in. But I think

I would get over that, because it would be my parents' house. Being with them is what makes that whole family – that whole family feeling that you get, when you come home. When I came home from college, I would be like, 'ahh. I'm not gonna be doing anything for the next couple of days.' And I felt this peace, relaxation, that I don't feel anywhere as an adult now.”

She appeared to be deeply impacted by the knowledge that home no longer exists from that perspective of her childhood family home, stating; “I feel like a visitor ...”

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Exploration of the lived experiences of adult children of mid-later life parental divorce was conducted with the use of IPA as the methodology. The resources available to the researcher through the tenets of IPA were beneficial in acquiring rich and robust data from the participants. By allowing each participant to share their experiences of living with the phenomenon, the researcher was afforded the opportunity of entering their world. IPA enabled her to also interact closely with the data and to draw certain conclusions from an interpretative stance.

It was clear from information the participants shared that mid-later life parents' divorce does affect their Adult Children. Interviews of 5 ACDs between the ages of 25 and 45 were conducted and while participants varied in some of their lived experiences, several similarities were discovered across cases. Each participant shared in depth how this phenomenon has impacted them on a number of levels, including their experience of their parents' marriage, the effects on their own children, parents' relationship post-divorce, and the loss of their family home. The researcher believes that this study will be beneficial in giving voice to ACDs, will allow therapists to be more aware of the

existence of this group of individuals, and will elucidate some of the problems ACDs face.

While IPA does not intentionally focus on the essence of the phenomenon being explored, the researcher concluded from this study that the themes across participants revealed an overarching essence. With a number of participants sharing intersecting and overlapping accounts of their experiences, the researcher found that more aspects of life as an ACD are shared than may previously have been thought. The fact that all 5 participants desired their parents to relate amicably post divorce; spend time together instead of individually with their grandchildren; and to continue to parent them cooperatively, are some examples of a thematic essence of the ACD experience. Also clear from this study was the conclusion that while ACDs may interpret their experiences differently, they are no less affected by their parents' divorce than are younger children.

## **CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY**

### **Making Sense of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore and examine the effects of mid-later life parental divorce on adult children, using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach. From this process the researcher was able to ascertain the participants' lived experiences as described by them. Consequently, the researcher was able to extrapolate, report, and discuss the findings identified from analyzing the data, and share possible implications for the field of marriage and family therapy. The findings also demonstrated the researcher's own interpretation of how these participants have made sense of their lived experiences as Adult Children of Divorce (ACDs) and what they think about this. According to Smith and Osborn (2003), this is the process of 'double hermeneutics', with the researcher attempting to make sense of the participant, and the participant trying to make sense of their lived experience as ACDs.

The hope of the researcher was to elucidate the existence and experience of the adult child of divorce. The participants in this study volunteered to be included, with some of them saying how happy they were to be a part of the study. When Lisa and Danielle became aware of the study through their mother they contacted the researcher and requested that she include them. During their interviews they each expressed feeling privileged to be involved in the study. Danielle shared what this study did for her stating,

“Well you know what? If anything I feel like that label, its almost as comforting as a label because like I said, I have been feeling like I have been operating in limbo for the longest time so that's part of why I was so excited to hear about this study just because it was a label, it was acknowledging that, this group of

individuals exist and we are here and we are trying to figure out life and there is a lot of sympathy for children of divorce, there's a lot of you know studies and research and you know, empathy, for that group and I feel like it is kind of comforting to have a label and to know that we exist and that there is some attention being paid to this. So yea you know, I think I am happy that I participated and definitely look forward to reading about it.”

As a result of conducting this research study the researcher confirmed her original hypothesis that ACDs are deeply impacted by their parents' mid-later life parental divorce. The in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted applying Yardley's (2000) sensitivity to the context of the study, empathetically putting the participants at ease. Also important was remaining cognizant of the potential for there to be a power discrepancy between researcher and participant. IPA studies accordingly must also include a significant amount of direct quotes, as this gives voice to the participants being interviewed.

This researcher utilized Yardley's (2000) principles throughout the process, including attention to rigour. In IPA this refers to making sure that the participants selected are appropriate for the question or topic being addressed, and as such, the researcher in this study ensured homogeneity in choosing these participants. Each of the study participants were able to answer in the affirmative that they experienced mid-later life parental divorce and were between the ages of twenty-five and forty-five years old. Tables were used in the write-up to show details of the study, including participants' demographic data, the interview questions, themes, and other components of the analytic process (Yardley, 2000).

**Member checking/second interviews.**

Member checking was accomplished by conducting a second interview lasting approximately thirty minutes with each participant except Jon. The researcher was unable to connect with him in order to conduct the second interview. Mary and Karen both shared that they had no new information they wished to share. They stated that because of the researchers' interview style of allowing them to be reflective with their responses, and her approach of active listening and reflecting back what they had said, they were assured of the accuracy of the transcripts of the original interviews.

The researcher utilized Lisa's second interview to clarify some of the data she found unclear and also asked her the same question as the two previous participants. Apart from the clarification, Lisa had no new information to share. She did however reiterate her "pleasure" in having participated in the study. Danielle reflected that she found the process therapeutic and that having "over an hour to tell all" was a very beneficial. She also reported that even after having experienced all she had with her parent's divorce, she "is still a proponent of traditional marriage, [and] hope[s] to be married." Danielle also revealed that although she has sometimes held "a skewed perspective," she does still have a "somewhat idyllic concept of marriage."

**Strengths and limitations of the study.**

The focus of this study allowed the researcher to illuminate the value of individual experiences and their own idiosyncratic account of how the incidence of mid-later life parental divorce has impacted their lives. Participants were allowed the opportunity to not only be retrospective in describing how they experienced their parents, but to share current emotional reactions to the divorce. A major strength of this study

was the researcher's ability to connect with the participants, establishing rapport and trust early on in the interview. The methodology applied also bolstered the study as it permitted a richer and deeper exploration and sharing of the descriptive nuances of life with the phenomenon by the participants.

While this study examined a topic that deserves exposure, due to the size of the sample, generalization from these findings should be approached cautiously. Although the recruitment process was homogenous, continued conversations with a larger number of participants over a longer period of time would be beneficial. The current study was designed to include a maximum of 5 participants for whom the lived experience of adulthood as children of mid-later life parental divorce was significant. It was not the intention of the researcher to develop such ideas as treatment modalities or to provide generalizability of this study. The intent was in essence to elucidate the phenomenon, and to provide insight into the lives of ACDs.

### **Future Research**

It is the researcher's intention to conduct future research on several topics related to the phenomenon. The participants in this study varied culturally; all except one who identified as Hispanic from Texas, were Black with one identifying as Haitian American, one American born of Jamaican and American parentage, and two as "third culture kids," from West Indian parentage. However they could all be described as having experienced their parents' marriage and subsequent divorce within subcultures within the U.S.

Expanding research to focus on ACDs of African American heritage, in comparison to Whites, may be appropriate as we seek to shed light on the phenomenon. Races may have varying views on the phenomenon, based on their customs and traditions

as well as their beliefs about divorce. Research has shown a greater propensity for divorce among Blacks. According to Saunders, Curtis, Alexander and Williams, (2013), compared to Whites, Blacks are less likely to marry, but more likely to divorce. Statistics published by The U.S. Census Bureau (2011) indicated that only 31 percent of Blacks are currently married, compared to 55 percent of Whites. An examination of how siblings in the same household may view or experience this occurrence may also be a relevant area of research. Comparison of Adult Children of long-term intact families and ACDs could also be considered.

### **Implications of the Study**

#### **Implications for ACDs.**

Unlike children of earlier parental divorce, ACDs potentially feel alone with their angst. They have experienced being in a two-parent household all their lives and while they are no longer seen as “children” they continue to view themselves as the children of their parents. The idea of no longer having both parents together can be crushing and confusing. According to Danielle, it is harder to sever the ties when you have had both parents all your life:

“I feel like as much as little children might feel like okay they want to live with mom or they want to live with daddy and have that relationship as young children in the middle of divorce I feel like as adults we have better formed understandings and bonds with our parents so it is just that much more difficult to sever those ties. And it is just that much more difficult to demonize one parent so you know, it is just more confusing as well because all those years of training and teaching and knowing your parents as grown people it’s more difficult to kind of just sever



it. Like now when I talk about my family there is this sense of shame that comes with it because really, I am really only talking about my mother a lot of the time and so it comes across as if I was raised in a single parent household so its almost like... dammit like now I am part of a cliché.”

This study shed light on, and gave voice to, these adult children and allowed them to recognize and share their experience in a safe environment. The researcher also hopes that where open dialogue has not been the case, those who have participated in the study will find it easier to approach their parents and to share what they have been feeling. There is also a potential for parents who are considering divorce in their mid-later years, to become more aware of how their choices could impact their families. While it may not cause them to change their plans to divorce, opening a channel of transparency could be beneficial to the relationships going forward.

#### **Implications and recommendations for the field of family therapy.**

As a student in the field of marriage and family therapy undertaking this study, I found it rather interesting that locating literature about this topic in our journals was not possible. I also recall that when I shared my dissertation topic with other mental health professionals in the field, their response was disconcerting, to say the least. They felt that this was a great sociological study and that it was not in line with a marriage and family study. Since this phenomenon is becoming more widespread with the aging Baby Boomer population in the U.S., I believe that it is highly necessary for the MFT field to become cognizant of this demographic.

The child of divorce which we as therapists see is becoming part of an older population which needs our support. This study portrayed the new generation of children

of divorce-ACDs as another potential client presenting for therapy. Karen, a study participant stated;

“It is an interesting phenomenon that is happening with parents or children that have parents that are getting divorced, I mean, after 30 years. It’s interesting that my parents were married 30 years and then just they said, ‘You know, we’ve lived our lives - half of our lives - together. Now let’s live our other half of our lives apart.’”

This appears to be a new reality for which we as family therapists must prepare ourselves. It is the researcher’s hope that family therapists reading this document would be educated about the fact that ACDs are not only those who experienced parental divorce at a younger age, and have been tracked into adulthood. From this study, family therapists can garner information shared by ACDs, and utilize the data to develop therapeutic tools for working with this population.

#### **Implication for educators and supervisors.**

Reviewing the literature in various mental health fields, as well as the resources offered by some of the mental health organizations, solidified for me the need for educators and supervisors to include a new concept of the child of divorce in educating MFTs. Future clinicians need to be educated on the increasing diversity of the demographic of children of divorce. During my own MFT educational experience, there was no mention of this group of individuals. We learned about divorce and how it impacts children--the definition of children was always toddlers, adolescents and teens. The new definition must be expanded to include ACDs and to be reflected in how MFTs are educated and trained. Supervisors themselves also need to be reeducated on the growing

number of mid-later life parents who are divorcing, and the fact that these parents' grown children are as affected by their parent's divorce as younger children are.

The study has profound implications for current and future MFTs who will inevitably come in contact with ACDs. Several participants in this study expressed that they are concerned that more parents are divorcing at such a late stage, and how they have been impacted by it. Lisa expressed her perspective as an example of how ACDs make sense of their experience.

“I think that no matter how old you are, you are affected. You're definitely affected by the divorce regardless of your age. It just might manifest differently.”

Danielle communicated that unlike younger children, the ACD's experience is less understood than are younger children of divorce.

“... they don't understand that I was an adult when it happened so its like they don't get that part because I am still trying to work through those emotions that a lot of people worked through years ago, like I am now in the thick of it when my life should be starting, my relationship should be starting with whomever I meet but its like I am still working through these emotions that are clearly holding me back in some capacity.”

This was a research study and not a therapy session, however due to the use of IPA the participants were able to share their lived experience, which some stated was “therapeutic.” Danielle spoke poignantly of one of the ways her parent's mid-later life divorce impacted her.

“I feel like on my own its difficult to connect the dots like what you said, connected the dots to my most recent failed attempt on a relationship where I was

projecting my parents issues onto this relationship and it ultimately completely destroyed it.”

This discussion was instrumental in allowing her to “connect the dots” and showed the value of addressing these issues in what she described as a therapeutic setting. This study elucidates the need for educating MFT professionals on this salient topic.

### **Researcher’ Reflections (Reaction to the Study)**

#### **Self of the researcher**

This study was conceived out of the concerns I had watching my adult children navigate the effects of my own mid-later years divorce. These two young men ages thirty-two and thirty, both married with children, were dealing with the fall out of their parents’ divorcing after thirty-three years of marriage. It was a period of confusion and uncertainty as to how they should react, what marriage really meant if marriages end after so long a time, among other consequences. When I began the Ph.D. program and was asked to write my first research question, there was no question what that would be. Four years later came the birth of this study.

My own affinity to the phenomenon made it virtually impossible to completely bracket myself out of the participants’ experiences. As a result I found myself empathizing with some of the participants’ experiences, and often having to “check” myself as a reminder that while I needed to remain empathetic and caring, I was not conducting therapy. The third and fourth interviews were particularly impactful because of the participants’ sharing that infidelity was the major reason for their parents’ divorce. The striking similarity to the circumstances of the researcher’s own divorce, produced a degree of angst.

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), advised that the IPA researcher put aside any previous apprehensions and focus on the participant's experience. In order to manage this concern, the researcher practiced journaling particularly during the data analysis period, noting themes or statements that resonated with her, or closely resembled any experience of her own ACDs. The shared experience of Lisa, Danielle and my children, as children of pastors who lived overseas, and are called "third culture kids," was one salient point. Other notable connections were that, both sets of parents had been married for over thirty years, and had worked in other countries as missionaries. All these themes produced visceral reactions in the researcher, but were not allowed to impact the study or how the data was handled. The researcher maintains that as humans we all share life experiences that inevitably manifest in different, and sometimes similar, ways. Consequently, the researcher's reaction to the data was not out of context considering her personal relationship with the phenomenon in question.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Sample Questions

#### Sample Questions

<b>Box 1.2</b> <b>Example of research questions in a typical IPA study</b>
----------------------------------------------------------------------------

- How long were your parents together?
- How old were they when they got married?
- For how long did they date and do you know what that was like?
- Tell me about the day they informed you that they were splitting up; where you were; what you were doing, and anything else.

## **Appendix B: Interview questions**

Title of study: The lived experience of adult children of mid-later life parental divorce: An Interpretive phenomenological analysis.

### A SAMPLE OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about yourself . . .
2. What was life like in your home growing up?
3. Tell me about your parents' marriage . . .
4. How long were they married?
5. What do you know about what lead to their divorce?
6. How old were you at the time of the divorce?
7. Tell me about . . .
8. Were you in a committed romantic relationship at the time of your parents' divorce, and if so, what if any effect did this experience have? Has it stayed the same or has it changed?
9. Now that you've experienced your parents' divorce after so many years of them being together, how if at all has your belief about marriage changed?
10. What has been your experience in these areas?
11. I'm curious to know if your concept of trust, intimacy, commitment and security, has changed since your parents' divorce.

### Appendix C: Invitation letter

Dear

My name is Joan Collins-Ricketts, and I am in the marriage and family therapy (MFT) doctoral program at Nova Southeastern University. In order to fulfill partial requirements for my doctorate degree, I am conducting a research study to contribute to the body of literature in the marriage and family therapy field. I am interested in examining the lived experiences of adult children whose parents divorced when the parents were in their mid-later years. Through this research study, I seek to explore the views of 3 to 5 adults between the ages of 25 and 45. My goal is to discover their overall experience, how they have been affected by this occurrence, as well as how, if at all, they have dealt with/are dealing with their parents divorce.

The only criteria for inclusion in this study, is for you, the participant, to be between the ages of 25 and 45, and for your parents to have divorced during their mid-to later life, as well as your willingness to share your experience. The divorce may have occurred several years ago, or recently.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you will NOT be compensated for your time. You will also be asked to sign and return a consent form to the researcher in person after she has reviewed it with you and answered all of your questions. Should you decide to participate in this research study, you will meet with the researcher for a maximum of two interviews, of approximately 1 hour each time. The interview will consist of questions formulated by the researcher, as well as any additional questions, which may arise as a result of a response, which needs clarification, or engenders interest in acquiring further information. Please keep in mind that participation is based on first come, first serve basis due to the small sample size.

Confidentiality is of optimum importance for academic research. There is always the potential for a breach of confidentiality, although unlikely. Your data will be de-identified with the use of pseudonyms in place of your actual name. Your data will however be available to my dissertation chair Dr. Martha Marquez. Every effort will be made by the researcher to ensure the confidentiality of your information throughout this entire process.

If you are interested in participating, have any questions regarding the requirements for participation, or any other questions regarding the research study in general, please contact the researcher, Joan Collins-Ricketts, via telephone at 561-251-9127, or email at [jc2215@nova.edu](mailto:jc2215@nova.edu). Thank you for your consideration in participating in this study and/or nominating someone who you believe would also be suitable for this study.

Sincerely,

Joan E. Collins-Ricketts, M.S.

## **Appendix D: Adult/General Informed Consent form**

Consent Form for Participation in the Research Study Entitled: The effects of mid-later life parental divorce on adult children: An interpretive phenomenological analysis

Funding Source: None.

IRB protocol #:

Principal investigator(s)  
Joan E. Collins-Ricketts  
650 SW 138 Avenue: J306  
Pembroke Pines, Fl., 33027  
561-251-9127

Co-investigator(s)  
Martha Marquez, PhD  
Family Therapy Department  
3301 College Avenue  
Fort Lauderdale, Fl., 33314  
954-262- 3056

For questions/concerns about your research rights, contact:  
Human Research Oversight Board (Institutional Review Board or IRB)  
Nova Southeastern University  
(954)-262-5369/Toll Free: 866-499-0790  
[IRB@nsu.nova.edu](mailto:IRB@nsu.nova.edu)

Site Information (N/A)

### **What is the study about?**

I am interested in examining the lived experiences of adult children whose parents divorced when they, (the parents) were in their mid-later years. Through this research study, I seek to explore the views of 3 to 5 adults between the ages of 25 and 45. My goal is to discover their overall experience, how they have been affected by this occurrence, as well as how if at all, they have dealt with/are dealing with their parents divorce.

### **Why are you asking me?**

My reason for asking you participate is that you have met all criterions to be a participant in the above-entitled study.

### **What will I be doing if I agree to be in the study?**

You will also be asked to sign and return a consent form to the researcher in person after she has reviewed it with you and answered all of your questions. Should you decide to participate in this research study, you will meet with the researcher for a maximum of two interviews, of approximately 1 hour each time. The interview will consist of questions formulated by the researcher, as well as any additional questions that may arise as a result of your response(s).

### **Is there any audio or video recording?**

This research project will include audio recording of the interview(s). This audio recording will be available to be heard by the researcher, the IRB, and the following such

as dissertation chair or committee. The recording will be transcribed by . . . The recording will be kept securely in my home which is only occupied by the researcher. The recording will be kept for XX months (SPECIFY) and destroyed after that time (SPECIFY HOW). Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the recording, your confidentiality for things you say on the recording cannot be guaranteed although the researcher, will try to limit access to the tape as described in this paragraph.

**What are the dangers to me?**

The procedures or activities in this study may have unknown or unforeseeable risks. Should a need for therapy arise as result of your participation in this study, a list of therapists will be provided in the event that you desire therapy.

If you have any questions about the research, your research rights, or have a research-related injury, please contact the principal investigator, Joan E. Collins-Ricketts and Dr. Martha Marquez, Dissertation Chair. You may also contact the IRB at the numbers indicated above with questions as to your research rights.

**Are there any benefits for taking part in this research study?**

There are no direct benefits.

**Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?**

There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

**How will you keep my information private?**

Confidentiality is of optimum importance for academic research. There is always the potential for a breach of confidentiality, although unlikely. However, all information obtained in this study is strictly confidential, unless law requires disclosure. Your data will be de-identified with the use of pseudonyms in place of your actual name. The IRB, and/or Dr. Martha Marquez, (dissertation chair) may review research records. It will be kept for a minimum of 36 months from the conclusion of the study as required. Every effort will be made by the researcher to ensure the security and confidentiality of your information throughout this entire process.

**What if I do not want to participate or I want to leave the study?**

You have the right to leave this study at any time or refuse to participate. If you do decide to leave or you decide not to participate, you will not experience any penalty or loss of services you have a right to receive. If you choose to withdraw, any information collected about you before the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the conclusion of the study and may be used as a part of the research.

If the participant may request that his/her data not be used, then it should read:

“You have the right to leave this study at any time or refuse to participate. If you do decide to leave or you decide not to participate, you will not experience any penalty or loss of services you have a right to receive. If you choose to withdraw, any information

collected about you **before** the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the conclusion of the study but you may request that it not be used.”

**Other Considerations:**

This general statement should be included (in the appropriate person):

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available, which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you by the investigators.

**Voluntary Consent by Participant:**

By signing below, you indicate that

- this study has been explained to you
- you have read this document or it has been read to you
- your questions about this research study have been answered
- you have been told that you may ask the researchers any study related questions in the future or contact them in the event of a research-related injury
- you have been told that you may ask Institutional Review Board (IRB) personnel questions about your study rights
- you are entitled to a copy of this form after you have read and signed it
- you voluntarily agree to participate in the study entitled: **The effects of mid-later life parental divorce on adult children: An interpretive phenomenological analysis**

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E: Divorce and Annulment rates

### Divorce and Annulment rates

Provisional number of divorces and annulments and rate: United State, 2000-2011

<b>Year</b>	<b>Divorces &amp; annulments</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Rate per 1,000 total population</b>
<b>2011<sup>1</sup></b>	877,000	246,273,366	3.6
<b>2010<sup>1</sup></b>	872,000	244,122,529	3.6
<b>2009<sup>1</sup></b>	840,000	242,610,561	3.5
<b>2008<sup>1</sup></b>	844,000	240,545,163	3.5
<b>2007<sup>1</sup></b>	856,000	238,352,850	3.6
<b>2006<sup>1</sup></b>	872,000	236,094,277	3.7
<b>2005<sup>1</sup></b>	847,000	233,495,163	3.6
<b>2004<sup>2</sup></b>	879,000	236,402,656	3.7
<b>2003<sup>3</sup></b>	927,000	243,902,090	3.8
<b>2002<sup>4</sup></b>	955,000	243,108,303	3.9
<b>2001<sup>5</sup></b>	940,000	236,416,762	4.0
<b>2000<sup>5</sup></b>	944,000	233,550,143	4.0

1. Excludes data for California, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Louisiana, and Minnesota.

2. Excludes data for California, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, and Louisiana.

3. Excludes data for California, Hawaii, Indiana, and Oklahoma.

4. Excludes data for California, Indiana, and Oklahoma.

5. Excludes data for California, Indiana, Louisiana, and Oklahoma.

Note: Rates for 2001-2009 have been revised and are based on intercensal population estimates from the 2000 and 2010 censuses. Populations for 2010 rates are based on the 2010 census.



<b>Table 3: Master Themes Across Participants</b>	
<b>Superordinate Themes</b>	<b>Emergent Themes</b>
A. Parents' marriage . . . like any other marriage	A1. They seemed very happy A2. They had their issues A3. They had a partnership
B. Growing up in a Christian Household and parental divorce	B1. Christian values B2. Concept of Biblical marriage B3. Impact of divorce on current spiritual life of ACD
C. Parents wait to divorce till children are "grown"	C1. When they graduate C2. When they're out of the house
D. There are Global effects on relationships outside nuclear family	D1. Effects on friends D2. Effects on community
E. Time with Grandchildren has to be scheduled	E1. No summers with "grandparents" E2. Having to Schedule time/visits
F. Study ACD's wedding day experience with divorced parents	F1. They sat on opposite side of room F2. No photos with both together/uncomfortable

	F3. Mom and dad's attitude at ACDs wedding.
G. "You're still our parents . . ."	G1. Mom and dad are estranged G2. We're still your children
H. You Can't Go Home Again . . .	H1. Loss of family home H2. Mom means home H3. Feels like a visitor

### Sample Exploratory Comments

Table: 4

Excerpt from Original Transcript: Danielle	Exploratory Comments
<p><b>Question: Were you in a committed relationship at any time during that time period of the divorce or what was happening with you then?</b></p> <p><b>D:</b> Hmm no . . . and honestly I am glad that question has come up because committed relationships are something I have struggled with my entire life. I am 29 years old and I can honestly say I have never been in a committed relationship that would be labeled as you know, a boyfriend and girlfriend who have been going out for months or years. . . Like I have never had that and I know for a fact it has something to do with my relationship with my family and my relationship with men, my father, I know it has something to do with that but you know part of why I went to therapy . . . was for that because at the time I was dealing with a young man who was just you know, by no means good for me; but my self-esteem was so low I would just take any crumbs from him . . . so I was really like in a volatile situation where it was just like, I was just like, crawling for affection, crawling for affection from any man, and it was really, really, devastating</p>	<p>“ . . . <i>I am glad that question has come up because . . .</i>” (Seemed anxious to talk about this).</p> <p><i>Speaking rapidly . . . hardly taking a breath.</i> (Is there a need to emote; to share this apparently difficult experience/information?)</p> <p>Father’s infidelity possibly impacted Danielle in her choices of men.</p> <p>“<i>Self-esteem so low . . .</i>” (struggles to talk about it; in the past, but still present)</p> <p>“<i>Crawling for affection, crawling for affection . . . really, really, devastating . . . umm, really . . .</i>” (Emphatic description of events/impact on self)</p>

<p>to my life, really um . . . <b>(begins to cry)</b></p> <p><b>J:</b> Are you ok?</p> <p><b>D:</b> I mean I feel like it still affects me today so its hard because, umm I just don't know where to find that affection and . . . umm, its just been a barrier for me for many, many, many, years and I don't know how to get out of this cycle; because in as much as I stood up to my dad there really has not been any resolution. Umm, I have seen the pain that can come from a broken relationship, I have seen the devastation and like a part of me is always afraid . . . umm it's like, it's like I intentionally go after people who like are unavailable or uncommitted because I know, like deep down it's like it would never work anyways . . . I don't know, I cant figure it out but for the longest time it held me back and no I have not been in a committed relationship so that's where I am at right now.</p> <p><b>Question: I know that from studying and</b></p>	<p><i>Sobbing</i> (heart-breaking)</p> <p><i>“I mean I feel like it still affects me today so its hard because, umm I just don't know where to find that affection and . . .”</i></p> <p>Seems overwhelmed with thought of not being in a committed relationship.</p> <p><i>“Umm, I have seen the pain that can come from a broken relationship, I have seen the devastation and like a part of me is always afraid . . .”</i></p> <p>Does being greatly impacted by parent's divorce play into her inability to connect romantically?</p> <p><i>“Umm it's like, it's like I intentionally go after people who like are unavailable or uncommitted because I know, like deep down it's like it would never work anyways . . . “ (Trails off)</i></p> <p>Father cheated and was not really available to those women . . .</p>
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**also just from experience dealing with younger children of divorce, some have dealt with the whole concept of trust and intimacy and commitment and feeling, secure in themselves and in relationships**  
**Would you say based on your experience that this is similar or a potential for adult children as well?**

**D:** Absolutely, if anything, I feel like it is that much more confusing because I remember when all of this was happening I was you know; I was probably almost 21 I was legal. I was definitely an adult, but I remember feeling like I was five years old inside because I remember thinking to myself, why do I feel like this? When I am an adult I should be able to deal with these emotions in a more logical way like I am watching my parents split up but there's a part of me that is like a little child feeling like her family is breaking apart but at the same time I am out of the house, I live on my own, like these things should not be affecting me in this way so why are they? Like I said I remember seeing my friends go through it, they were younger, high school, middle school, elementary school, their parents had gone through it and okay fine maybe they weren't the most well-adjusted kids, maybe they acted out in different ways, and I remember, I always remember being that kid that looked at

*"I was probably almost 21 I was legal. I was definitely an adult, but I remember feeling like I was five years old inside because I remember thinking to myself, why do I feel like this?"*

(Questions herself /her feelings . . .)

Impact of parent's divorce . . . feels like a child emotionally. Sense of loss of family . . . *"Why is this affecting me . . .?"*

*"I remember seeing my friends go through it, they were younger, high school, middle school, elementary school, . . . "*

(Saw these kids as not well adjusted)

<p>them and thought oh you know that will never be me or you know they, its because of this that they act that way or because of this that they act in these ways and you know they aren't that well-adjusted because their parents got divorced at such a young age so for me that was what was going on and I just remember really having these conflicting feelings of almost being hard on myself because I was even just talking about it with people it just feels strange. And just being an adult and saying oh you know my parents are getting divorced. I mean first of all, that is not something that would ever come up in conversation . . .</p> <p><b>D:</b> I mean, it was just, it just didn't seem like it happened that often for people my age and it is almost like well if your parents suck it up this long, then why now?</p>	<p><i>“ . . . thought oh you know that will never be me or you know . . . ”</i> (Struggles with idea of now being one of “those children”).</p> <p><i>“I just remember really having these conflicting feelings of almost being hard on myself because . . . ”</i></p> <p><i>Trails off</i></p> <p><i>“ . . . it is almost like well if your parents suck it up this long, then why now? ”</i></p> <p>This shows that ACDs do struggle with Mid-later-life parental divorce.</p>
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## Participant Themes

Table 4.1 Mary

<b>Emergent Theme</b>	<b>Superordinate Theme</b>
Experiencing life growing up in family home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Thought we were a pretty close family</li> <li>▪ Mom concerned about the domestic affairs</li>   <li>▪ Dad laid back, more out there when it comes to musical, and sports activities</li>   <li>▪ Witnessed parental disagreement; not enough to suspect problems different from others</li>   <li>▪ Family affair whenever we went out</li> </ul>
Parents spoke of divorce earlier in marriage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Happened in middle-school</li> <li>▪ We were crying</li> <li>▪ They decided not to . . . guess they realized how much of an impact it would have</li> </ul>
Parents' marriage . . . like any other marriage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ My opinion, dad affectionate</li> <li>▪ Would hug mom</li> <li>▪ Mom shrugged him off</li> <li>▪ Dad bought flowers</li> <li>▪ Thought everything was fine</li> </ul>
ACD speaks of not knowing/wanting to know reason for parents' divorce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Thought it would be something bad, like an affair or DV . . .</li> <li>▪ Dad still says doesn't know why; mom gives several answers</li> <li>▪ Possible secret on mom's part.</li> <li>▪ Asked dad if he cheated or hit mom</li> </ul>

<p>Growing up in a Christian Household and parents' divorce</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Christian Values</li> <li>▪ Biblical concept of marital covenant</li> <li>▪ We're Christians . . . felt like parents violated their faith; did not keep their covenant</li> </ul>
<p>They love differently-Mom vs. dad</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Dad would cheer us on; talks with us . . . it's very light; we laugh</li> <li>▪ Mom would come to events, but stay in car</li> <li>▪ Mom thinks we're closer to dad</li> <li>▪ Dad goes out of his way . . . more flexible</li> <li>▪ Mom won't adjust plans</li> <li>▪ Mom doesn't hang out</li> <li>▪ She cleans and cooks . . . her way of showing love</li> <li>▪ She's not at peace</li> </ul>
<p>Parents estranged post divorce</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mom is angry</li> <li>▪ Why when you (mom), got what you wanted (She filed)</li> <li>▪ Mom doesn't want to be in place with dad</li> </ul>
<p>Parents wait to divorce till children are "grown"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Because of children</li> <li>▪ Doesn't mean it'll be different</li> </ul>



<p>Impact on grandchildren/ Scheduling Time with grandparents</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Now I have a child . . .</li> <li>▪ Always had a vision of me dropping off my children, and them hanging out with them</li> <li>▪ So, it's kinda hard . . . my son sees my parents separately</li> <li>▪ Trying to co-ordinate schedules like that is very challenging</li> <li>▪ I don't want him to see their negative interaction</li> <li>▪ Scheduling is hampered by mom</li> </ul>
<p>ACDs potentially have similar issues (like younger children) with trust, intimacy, and security commitment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ I think the same can be true for adults</li> <li>▪ If I found out one of my parents was unfaithful . . . I'm gonna have a problem with commitment</li> <li>▪ . . . I found out they're getting a divorce . . . I'm gonna be a little shaken</li> <li>▪ If you're in your 20s and looking to start a relationship, and your parents are getting a divorce, you're like, whoa, wait a minute</li> <li>▪ The expectations I had . . . family dinners, reunions . . . I'm not going to have</li> <li>▪ Unlike with younger children, nobody asks parents of adult children, how they think it might affect their children</li> </ul>
<p>Mary's wedding day experience with divorced parents</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mom sat in back of church at rehearsal</li> <li>▪ Pastor had to tell her "you will sit next to our husband. It's not about you . . ."</li> <li>▪ Sat next to father because she had to/ Scowled in pictures</li> </ul>

<p>Global impact of divorce, goes beyond nuclear family (extended family; church)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Husband (boyfriend at time of divorce) . . . disappointed because he knew my parents growing up</li> <li>▪ He expected more from them</li> <li>▪ Pastor did not find out they were divorced till 7 years later . . . at my wedding</li> </ul>
<p>“You can’t go home again”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ It’s annoying; frustrating . . . It’s a whole bunch of stuff</li> <li>▪ Dad lives in the house that my parents had</li> <li>▪ It’s not the same . . . my mom was the home</li> <li>▪ I feel like a visitor</li> <li>▪ My mom took all the furniture . . .</li> <li>▪ Still didn’t feel like her place was home</li> <li>▪ It’s just not the same house “It’s a new memory”</li> <li>▪ Building new memories</li> <li>▪ Husband and I are talking about . . . the forever home . . . the house that 20 years later he’ll (son), he’ll be like; “this is my room.”</li> </ul>
<p>Parent’s current relationship status . . . single/dating or remarried</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Dad is single</li> <li>▪ Still calls my mother his wife/takes the Bible covenant . . . they’re married</li> <li>▪ My dad wants to be married to her</li> <li>▪ I think my dad is lonely . . .</li> <li>▪ Mom says she has no intention of remarrying</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Dad usually wants me to go to</li> </ul>

Divided loyalties/choosing one parent above the other	events with him <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ They get invited to the same events</li><li>▪ I have to choose which parent I wanna go with</li><li>▪ She gets upset because I go with him</li></ul>
Lessons learned from parents' divorce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Proactive in my marriage</li><li>▪ Take the cruise now instead of waiting for the kids to grow up</li></ul>

## Participant Themes

Table 4.2: Karen

Superordinate Themes	Emergent Themes
Experiencing life growing up in the home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ My sister and I were very close</li> <li>▪ Mom stressed importance of education, telling me; “education is the one thing that somebody can’t take away from you.”</li> <li>▪ Separate vacations sometimes with either mom or dad . . . some family trips. “But it was very separate for many, many, years.”</li> <li>▪ Summer vacation was with mom’s side of the family</li> <li>▪ With dad’s family only for holidays and reunions . . .</li> </ul>
Parents seemed happy for many years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Good relationship, but independent of each other</li> <li>▪ They weren’t loving</li> <li>▪ Not together all the time, but good partnership</li> <li>▪ Communicated well; managed finance well</li> </ul>
ACD speaks of not knowing/wanting to know reason for parents’ divorce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Empty nest</li> <li>▪ I was now out of the house (2<sup>nd</sup> child)</li> <li>▪ “We were strangers”</li> <li>▪ Mom said they tried, but it was “too late to tell me you love me.”</li> <li>▪ So, looking back, he kind of lost her along the way</li> <li>▪ Divorce took some time (division of assets)</li> </ul>

Effects of parents' current acrimonious relationship with each other on ACD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Not on good terms</li> <li>▪ It's hard for me</li> </ul>
Divided loyalties/favoring one parent above the other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Oh yeah, for sure!</li> <li>▪ Loyalty is to my mom; she's the closest to me (CRIES).</li> <li>▪ She was always there for me</li> <li>▪ My father is very independent</li> </ul>
Parents' waited to divorce till children are "grown"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ I think my parents faked it for a really long time for our sake</li> <li>▪ They wanted to stay together because they thought we needed them</li> <li>▪ Hard to think it was their normal</li> </ul>
Parents' current relationship status/single/dating or remarried	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Both single</li> <li>▪ Mom could care less . . . 100 % content</li> <li>▪ Dad says he's done it once . . .</li> </ul>
How Divorce impacts committed relationship/marriage of ACD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ It made me apprehensive about marriage . . . not disinterested</li> <li>▪ I knew that I wanted to get married</li> <li>▪ Beliefs about marriage still solid</li> </ul>
Visions of own marriage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sees self and husband as partners</li> <li>▪ See my husband as being the dad my dad wasn't (to daughter)</li> <li>▪ We're each others best friend ("Happy tears")</li> <li>▪ We communicate very well</li> <li>▪ We balance each other</li> </ul>
Karen's wedding day experience with divorced parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Was kind of hard</li> <li>▪ They stayed on separate sides of the room</li> <li>▪ "Pictures with dad and mom on either side of the bride" . . .</li> <li>▪ Awkward to kiss me, each on opposite sides of my cheek</li> </ul>
"You can't go home again"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mom got the house we grew up in; she sold it and moved away for work</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ That was hard . . . that was our</li> </ul>

	<p>home</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ She moved back 5 years later and bought another home</li> <li>▪ Doesn't feel like home . . . not where we grew up . . . wasn't the tree we climbed</li> <li>▪ Just a place to stay</li> <li>▪ Mom's home comforting, but not our home</li> <li>▪ Father's little condo . . . "his home"</li> </ul>
Impact on Grandchildren/Scheduling time with parents/grandparents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Does get challenging</li> <li>▪ Dad, are these dates ok with you?</li> <li>▪ Gets frustrating . . . don't get to see him as often</li> <li>▪ Not as easy as if they were together</li> <li>▪ Daughter; "why does grandma live by herself?"</li> </ul>
ACDs have potential for similar issues with trust, intimacy, and security commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Yes and no</li> <li>▪ I've always been a trusting person</li> </ul>
What people should know about ACD experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ If you're a child or AC going through your parents' divorce, it's still very difficult</li> <li>▪ Parents shouldn't talk negatively about each other</li> <li>▪ Maintain some sort of relationship with each other and be able to do things collaboratively with the children or grandchildren</li> <li>▪ "How do we help them?" . . . You're still their parents.</li> <li>▪</li> </ul>
How parents' divorce "shaped you . . ."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mom taught me value of education</li> <li>▪ Made me stronger person</li> <li>▪ Gave me a "rougher edge" about divorce</li> <li>▪</li> </ul>
Lessons learned from parents' divorce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ If I need something he's not giving me, . . . I feel ok saying it.</li> <li>▪ My mom would not . . .</li> <li>▪ We're vulnerable with each other</li> </ul>

## Participant Themes

Table 4.3: Lisa

Superordinate Themes	Emergent Themes
Experience of life growing up in the family home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Very interesting . . . we moved around a lot</li> <li>▪ Great international experience</li> <li>▪ Oldest of three siblings . . . regulated emotions around me</li> <li>▪ Tried to help mom with siblings</li> <li>▪ Household of “serious religiosity”</li> <li>▪ Walking a tightrope</li> <li>▪ Education highly valued</li> <li>▪ Dad’s anger when frustrated . . . both parents were studying</li> <li>▪ Both parents were driven</li> </ul>
Parents courtship pattern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Met at church . . . Dad was visiting the church . . . was asked to pray for the sister (mom) who was on her way to a missions trip (1978)</li> <li>▪ Returned 1979 . . . called him for ride to church</li> <li>▪ Discovered similar interests . . . classical music</li> <li>▪ Influence of older West Indian Community</li> <li>▪ We’re getting tired and getting older</li> <li>▪ Both had been in serious relationships</li> <li>▪ Dated a few months. . . got engaged . . . Married a year later</li> </ul>
Parents marriage . . . wanted a husband just like daddy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Good times . . . birthdays, anniversaries; dad taking mom to hotels for weekend</li> <li>▪ Lisa; “when I grow up, I want a husband just like daddy!”</li> <li>▪ Mom’s response; “Well, I hope you do, and I hope you see exactly what’s happening (mom chuckled).”</li> <li>▪ Saw reserved anger on my mother’s part . . .</li> <li>▪ In terms of interaction, saw them</li> </ul>

	<p>talk to each other . . . a lot about us kids.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Never discussed finance in front of us . . . on different pages about finance</li> <li>▪ Dad would try to “put on a good show” . . . try to hug mom</li> </ul>
When ACD knows reason for divorce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Serial infidelity on dad’s part</li> <li>▪ Dad’s misappropriation of finance including using loan funds of younger kids</li> <li>▪ Dad gave mom an “STI” (STD)</li> <li>▪ Dad fired from job in religious institution because of infidelity</li> <li>▪ Women saying they’re pregnant for him . . . woman harassing mom and threatening children</li> <li>▪ Dad was “vehemently opposed to the divorce.”</li> <li>▪ . . . a lot to do with appearances; he was in religious studies.</li> </ul>
How the divorce impacted ACD’s dating/romantic relationships/marriage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Dated/lived with a man for three while parents marriage was disintegrating, who cheated on me</li> <li>▪ Approached relationship with husband (then boyfriend) looking for things to avoid</li> <li>▪ Finance still an issue in marriage . . . biggest adjustments I had to make . . . my money vs. our money</li> <li>▪ Biggest impact . . . Mom contracting STI from dad (Lisa’) . . . “wouldn’t hesitate to consider violence” if husband did the same.</li> </ul>
Parent waited to divorce after children out of the home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mom filed . . .</li> </ul>
Growing up in a Christian household and ACDs’ relationship to religion after parental divorce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ On a tightrope</li> <li>▪ High degree of religiosity</li> <li>▪ Meant “looking good perception wise”</li> <li>▪ Self and siblings have reacted to religion</li> <li>▪ Married outside of faith . . . attends a different denomination</li> </ul>



Divided loyalties; choosing one parent over the other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Loyalties are with mom</li> </ul>
“You can’t go home again”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Growing up we were always comfortable with mom . . .</li> <li>▪ Before when mom was grappling . . . was hard to watch; I didn’t want to be a burden’ Was . . . “Ok, well, home is a lot less defined . . .”</li> <li>▪ Was away at school . . . had to “create my own little nest.”</li> <li>▪ “Home is where mom is now”</li> <li>▪ Dad moves around a lot “trying to find his happy place.”</li> <li>▪</li> </ul>
Potential impact on experience of infertility and hopes for future Grandchildren	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ We don’t have children yet</li> <li>▪ Struggling with infertility . . .</li> <li>▪ Links it to father’s infidelity . . . reports of him having “kids in other places.”</li> <li>▪ Struggles with parents “easy fertility” although “everything else seemed to have gone awry.”</li> <li>▪ Wondering if “maybe you can’t have everything.”</li> </ul>
Lisa’s wedding day experience with divorced parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ It poured (rained heavily)</li> <li>▪ Same as parents’ wedding day</li> <li>▪ Freaked out wondering if marriage would be like parents’</li> <li>▪ Parents were cordial; sat together</li> <li>▪ Dad wanted to mom to go speak to someone together at reception . . . she got on dance floor and refused</li> </ul>
Global impact goes beyond nuclear family (extended family; church)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Close friends</li> </ul>
How Parents Relate to each other post divorce.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Divorce was acrimonious</li> <li>▪ Mom did try to help him get a job at a religious institution, by playing the “dutiful wife,” and so he would be financially independent and not need to ask kids for help.</li> <li>▪ Currently don’t speak</li> </ul>
Lessons learned from parents’ divorce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Their relationship is not my own</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Instilled a stick it out mentality</li><li>▪ Things to avoid</li><li>▪ What things look like when they're going wrong</li></ul>
What people should know about ACD experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ No matter how old you are, you're affected</li><li>▪ Just manifests differently</li></ul>

## Participant Themes

Table 4.4: Danielle

<b>Superordinate Theme</b>	<b>Emergent Theme</b>
Experience of life growing up in family home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Life centered around matriarchy</li> <li>▪ Moved for parent’s jobs overseas- dad traveled a lot</li> <li>▪ Home was identified with mother more than father</li> <li>▪ Father, type A personality; home a bit unstable/not peaceful when he was home</li> <li>▪ Seemed more like home when he was gone</li> <li>▪ Father’s high stress level; walking on eggshells</li> <li>▪ Youngest child . . . witnessed the “cracks’ in the marriage/the worst of it</li> </ul>
Parent’s courtship patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Asked specifically about that</li> <li>▪ Fascinated about fact that . . . mother was around same age as participant</li> <li>▪ Mom met dad shortly before going on a mission trip to Cameroon</li> <li>▪ Reconnected at church a year later when she returned</li> <li>▪ Broke off relationship with boyfriend who didn’t want children</li> <li>▪ Dated for about 6 months then got engaged</li> <li>▪ Married within a year</li> <li>▪ Church . . . place that “instigated” the relationship</li> </ul>
Parent’s marriage relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Good marriage . . . as marriages go</li> <li>▪ Times when they were happy</li> <li>▪ Put on a good face</li> <li>▪ At times dad, Alpha male . . . mom assumed household responsibilities</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Father patronizing/controlling at times</li> <li>▪ Father “loved, loves, keeping up appearances . . . a facade</li> <li>▪ Mother had control in certain areas-housekeeping, finance . . . running everything in the background</li> <li>▪ Signs of affection “very forced”</li> <li>▪ Father traveled a lot; hard to keep a real “rhythm” of parent’s relationship</li> </ul>
When ACD knows reason for divorce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Infidelity . . . absolutely the catalyst for the divorce (serial infidelity)</li> <li>▪ Mom receiving threats and harassment from one woman . . . threats extended to children</li> <li>▪ Unconfirmed claims of pregnancies, by the other women</li> <li>▪ Called him out on his actions</li> <li>▪ Sought therapy</li> </ul>
How the divorce impacted dating and romantic relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Has never been in a committed relationship</li> <li>▪ Impact of relationship with father</li> <li>▪ Has seen the pain of a broken relationship . . . the devastation</li> <li>▪ Intentionally goes after unavailable men . . . “won’t work anyway”</li> <li>▪ Struggled with self esteem</li> </ul>
Parent waited to divorce after children out of the home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mom waited till kids were all out of the house</li> <li>▪ Would “suck it up” ; put on a “good face” for sake of children</li> </ul>
Growing up in a Christian household and ACDs’ relationship to religion after parental divorce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Religious upbringing . . . divorce doesn’t happen to my family</li> <li>▪ Father is a pastor</li> <li>▪ Slowly moved further away from church</li> </ul>
Divided loyalties; choosing one parent over	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ More loyal to mom</li> </ul>

the other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Father is still father . . . not really in life right now</li> </ul>
“You can’t go home again”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “Third culture kid”. . . no strong set of roots</li> <li>▪ Home is where you go for holidays</li> <li>▪ Home is where mom is. Fear of “displacement”. . . can’t rely on father for “sense of home</li> <li>▪ Fractured . . . doesn’t feel much like a “unit” anymore</li> </ul>
“Dammit, like now I am a part of a cliché”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sense of “shame” when I talk about my family . . . talking only about my mom</li> <li>▪ We were the “Cosby” family from the outside looking in; that talented Black family; well adjusted . . .</li> <li>▪ Sense of pride being a part of a “family unit” which has “eroded”</li> </ul>
ACDs potentially have similar issues (like younger children) with trust, intimacy, and security commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Divorce as AD more “confusing”</li> <li>▪ Should be able to deal with these emotions more logically</li> <li>▪ Watching my parents “split up”; a part of me feels like a little child</li> <li>▪ Projected parents’ relationship on to a failed relationship</li> <li>▪ Knows a secret about parents’ relationship</li> <li>▪ The secret is a burden and impacts ability to trust, as well as intimacy</li> </ul>
How Parents Relate to each other post divorce.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Don’t want to be a part of “bashing” the other parent</li> <li>▪</li> </ul>
What people should know about ACD experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Longer time to “form these bonds” with parents</li> <li>▪ More difficult to sever ties</li> <li>▪ More confusing</li> <li>▪ Still working through emotions others have had time to work through</li> </ul>

The label of ACD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Didn't seem like it happened to people my age</li><li>▪ Label of ACD almost "comforting"</li><li>▪ Felt "in limbo" for long time</li><li>▪ Sympathy for children of divorce</li><li>▪ Acknowledgement . . . to know that "we exist" and some attention is being paid</li></ul>
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## Participant themes

Table 4.5: Jon

Life growing up in the family home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Really close family in terms of “family activities; family vacations”</li> <li>▪ Taught to be “self-sufficient” (mom taught cooking; how to love).</li> <li>▪ Dad taught how to work hard</li> </ul>
Parent’s courtship patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Short courtship</li> <li>▪ A time in their lives when they both knew what they wanted</li> <li>▪ Got married late twenties, early thirties</li> <li>▪ Parents were united in parenting</li> </ul>
Parent’s marriage relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What I “identified as a good marriage”</li> <li>▪ No real big arguments, although didn’t agree with</li> <li>▪ Marriage was a “partnership”</li> <li>▪ Mom supported dad’s business/dad supported mom’s education (nursing)</li> <li>▪ Loving couple</li> <li>▪ Spent time together</li> <li>▪ Showed how to “put family first”</li> <li>▪ Modeled sacrificing for family</li> </ul>
How the divorce happened	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Breakdown in communication</li> <li>▪ They started living separate lives</li> <li>▪ Other questions unanswered</li> <li>▪ Mom broke the news</li> <li>▪ Mom also filed</li> <li>▪ Wasn’t immediate</li> </ul>
Divided loyalties; choosing one parent over the other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Definitely took sides-Mom’s side</li> <li>▪ Had many questions that went unanswered</li> <li>▪ Dad was “deflective”; didn’t give answers</li> <li>▪ Stopped talking to him</li> </ul>

ACD's reaction to the divorce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ACD angry and frustrated</li> <li>▪ Questions of "why?"</li> <li>▪ Have never received answers (sighs)</li> <li>▪ Coped by stayed out of house . . . "Well I'm going out . . . I wanna hang with the fellas . . . with the "chicks"".</li> <li>▪ Coping mechanisms to deflect; to deal with the "gravity" of what was happening</li> <li>▪ Filling the void</li> <li>▪ Wasn't enough . . .</li> <li>▪ "Got heavy in church"</li> <li>▪ Only thing that "gave me fulfillment"</li> <li>▪ Brought "light to me"</li> </ul>
Growing up in a Christian household	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Taught to love and respect God</li> <li>▪ To have a relationship with God</li> <li>▪ Parents active in church</li> </ul>
"You can't go home again"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mom is still in family home</li> <li>▪ Feel . . . this is where I grew up"</li> <li>▪ Lived there for a year after parent's divorce</li> <li>▪ Didn't have the same feel because of the people I saw</li> <li>▪ Every time I hear that "noise" the door opening . . . my parents' door . . . I look for my dad.</li> <li>▪ Still call it home . . . share it with my son</li> <li>▪ Different "because there's different people"</li> </ul>
Impact on Grandchildren/Scheduling time with parents/grandparents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Impact? "Absolutely, absolutely</li> <li>▪ First to have kids after the divorce</li> <li>▪ Very challenging.</li> <li>▪ Like "pulling teeth" to get them both to attend son's birthday party</li> <li>▪ No family photos with both parents</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ With grandchildren, “direct impact”</li> <li>▪ I never had two grandparents growing up . . . I’d love to have the experience for my children</li> <li>▪ They’ll never get that</li> </ul>
Jon’s wedding day experience with divorced parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Both parents showed up</li> <li>▪ Didn’t sit together</li> <li>▪ No photos with them both in it</li> </ul>
Lessons learned from parents’ divorce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What happened to my parents, does not mean it has to happen to me</li> <li>▪ Everyone deserves their “fair chance at happiness”</li> <li>▪ Learn from people’s experiences without “letting it label us”</li> </ul>
Parents’ current relationship status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Both remarried shortly after divorce</li> <li>▪ Yeah, it affected . . . I wasn’t happy over it.</li> <li>▪ I voiced my opinion</li> <li>▪ No! I didn’t like it</li> <li>▪ I don’t look at their spouses as “step parents” . . . God gave me one set of parents</li> <li>▪ They [parents], chose to break their marriage and go elsewhere</li> <li>▪ “I’ll be respectful”</li> <li>▪ Relationship has grown . . . not based on them being married to my mother and father.</li> </ul>

### **Biographical Sketch**

Joan Collins-Ricketts was born on the beautiful island of Jamaica, where she earned her primary degree, a bachelor degree in nursing (Bsn) at the Northern Caribbean University. She relocated to the U.S a few years later where, and after working as a registered nurse for a number of years, she decided to switch careers. She decided to enroll in the marriage and family therapy program at Loma Linda University in California, where she obtained her master's degree in marriage and family therapy.

After completing her master's she, along with her family, moved to Kenya (East Africa), as missionaries. As part of a community of missionaries and pastors' wives, during her stay in Kenya, she volunteered as much as possible offering classes in peer counseling, active listening and how to recognize the signs and symptoms of suicide. During a very trying time when several students at her sons' boarding high school were attempting suicide, she, along with another local therapist, provided group as well as individual counseling. As a result she was given the status of honorary faculty member.

After seven years in Kenya, Joan and her family returned to the U.S where she served as Dean of women, Associate Vice-president for student services and chair of the disciplinary committee, at a college in South Lancaster, MA., again casting her in the role of counselor and therapist more often than not. During this time she also taught an online class in Marriage and Family Therapy, and completed a summer course in College Teaching. Wearing so many hats, however, did not lend to doing much else. Her goal to continue her training formally was once again put on hold, however, pursuing a doctoral degree remained a primary goal.

Seven years later, Joan moved to South Florida after experiencing a painful divorce and began a new chapter in her life. Excited at the prospect of getting back in touch with the field and of finally arriving at her intended destination, she enrolled in the family therapy Ph.D. program at Nova Southeastern University. Her strength of resolve, purpose and interest in people, how they function and why they function made the field of Marriage and Therapy a perfect fit for her career goals. Her ability to be introspective, and self-evaluative were honed during her time in the program. Working with individuals and couples in the Brief Therapy clinic at NSU, and her experience working with at risk children in the PROMISE program at Broward County School District, have been instrumental in refining her therapeutic skills.

Joan has conducted seminars and presented at a national conference, and currently has an article which will be published in an international journal in May 2015. She also successfully sat for her MFT licensure exam in November 2014, and will continue to acquire the necessary hours to move from Registered Intern to fully licensed MFT post graduation. Born out of her love and concern for own adult children, Joan's personal passion for Adult Children of Divorce, culminated in her dissertation research exploring the Lived Experiences of ACDs of Mid-later Life Parental Divorce. She plans to focus her practice on working with that cohort, as well as divorce recovery, among other areas of concern to individuals and couples.