

A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S DECISION TO DIVORCE

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CONTEXT SURROUNDING A WOMAN'S DECISION TO DIVORCE

A Content Analysis of the Factors, Process, and Context
Surrounding a Woman's Decision to Divorce

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Abstract

This content analysis focuses on the contributing factors, processes, and contexts associated with women's decisions to divorce. In reviewing both quantitative and qualitative published articles between the timeframe of 1965 – 2009, themes were extracted from research that spoke to women's reasons to end their marriages. A feminist theoretical perspective was employed as the lens through which the articles were reviewed and informed the final findings. These findings were grouped into three themes: factors, process and decision-making, and context. While these themes were presented separately, the author also notes that they are necessarily intertwined due to the complexity connected to women's decision to divorce.

A Content Analysis of the Factors, Process, and Context

Surrounding a Woman's Decision to Divorce

Introduction

The area of research I have decided to devote my master's thesis to surrounds factors that contribute to a woman's decision to divorce. My interest stems from the tragic and romantic idea of what it means to promise your life to someone and then change your mind as well as the process and factors that contribute to this change of heart. Furthermore, I am interesting in unpacking how the social context surrounding divorce at any given moment impacts the ways in which divorce is discussed in research literature.

In the following pages, I will provide an overview of the literature as it exists in my area of interest, my own planned methodology to address my research question, present the findings as they were discovered in the existing literature, and finally provide an analysis for how this information is useful and important to future research and social work practice.

Personal Interest

My personal life experiences with divorce have led me to an interest in this research area. My own parents divorced when I was a young child, prompting a need to understand why divorce happens.

I believe that the impact of divorce is severe and widespread and I am very interested in how people, and women in particular, come to a decision to divorce. In gaining a better awareness of the contributing factors that assist in the decision to divorce, I hope to more thoroughly understand how to support couples in the various

stages of their relationship in order to make the best decision with the least negative consequence.

Who I am as a Researcher

In my most cynical of headspaces, my own hypothesis is that divorce happens upon the recognition that fairytales do not exist. Daily squabbles over housework, finances, and friends take precedence over vows to love, honor, and endure. I have a longstanding interest in the functioning of couples and families. As a child, I experienced divorce and its consequences first hand and no doubt part of my interest in better understanding this process stems from my own experiences. As I myself am about to embark on the path of marriage and promise my own forever commitment, I cannot help but wonder about the journey traveled for women who take back their promise of forever.

It was important to me that I research the *contributing factors for divorce* from the perspective of women because, as a feminist, I have a vested interest in highlighting the voices of women and their experiences whenever possible. The majority of my practice work thus far as a child protection worker has been done in combination with female clients. I anticipate the majority of my future practice will remain centered primarily around women and it is thus important to me that I maintain a specific focus on women's experiences.

Interestingly, the irony in my decision to inundate myself with literature on divorce during a time in my life where I myself am making the promise of a lifetime is not lost on me. I am aware, as someone who is willingly making the commitment to love, honour, and support that I do hold a certain level of bias in this area.

Literature Review

Women are typically portrayed as steadfast, committed, accommodating and self-sacrificing in regards to their families. Literature reveals, somewhat in contrast to this typical feminine image, that women are twice as likely to initiate divorce as men and more likely to initiate conflict discussions with their husbands (Gottman & Levenson, 1999). This, in turn, creates an environment where women may be more likely viewed as “to blame” for the demise of a marriage (Gottman & Levenson, 1999).

I began my research by reviewing the divorce laws in Canada and discovered that prior to 1968 there were no federal laws in Canada that regulated divorce. In Quebec and Newfoundland provincial divorce laws were also absent and people had to “seek the passage of a private Act of Parliament” in order to be granted a divorce (Douglas, 2008, p. 1). Provincial law in other Canadian jurisdictions referenced the English Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 to address requests for divorce which permitted “husbands to apply for divorce on the grounds of his wife’s adultery, and a wife to do so provided she could establish that her husband had committed incestuous adultery, rape, sodomy, bestiality, bigamy, or adultery coupled with cruelty or desertion” (Douglas, 2008, p. 2).

The only grounds for divorce in Canada between 1867 and 1968 was adultery, with the exception being Nova Scotia “which additionally recognized cruelty as grounds” (Nelson & Robinson, 2002, p. 343). The only province to ever acknowledge reproductive “failure” on part of either the man or woman as grounds for divorce was New Brunswick (Nelson & Robinson, 2002).

The Divorce Act of 1968 introduced the concept of “permanent marital breakdown” as grounds for divorce while maintaining the concept of fault-based grounds

for divorce, the most significant being adultery, cruelty and desertion (Douglas, 2008, p. 2). This change acknowledged that at times marriages break down without a “matrimonial offence” and the emphasis and reliance on fault allegations could drag out the already painful process of divorce proceedings (Douglas, 2008, p. 2).

As the responsibility of family law continued to be divided between federal and provincial jurisdiction with provincial statutes varying across the country it was recommended by the Law Reform Commission of Canada in 1976 that “the only ground for divorce in Canada should be breakdown of the marriage” in order to gain a more cohesive handle on the divorce laws within Canada as well as potentially reduce the hostile and adversarial nature of the process of divorce (Douglas, 2008, p. 2). It was further recommended that a primary government (be it federal or provincial) responsible for exclusive jurisdiction regarding family issues be established throughout the country (Douglas, 2008).

In 1985 amendments were made to the divorce laws based on the Law Reform Commission’s recommendations that brought about significant changes and further simplified the process of divorce. Divorces could be granted to couples citing “marriage breakdown” as established by “separation of at least one year, or by one of three fault-based criteria: adultery, physical cruelty, or mental cruelty” (Douglas, 2008, p. 2). Those who wished to dissolve their marriage were viewed, at least in the eyes of the court, as having a marriage that had broken down beyond repair, and the divorce was not seen as either partner’s “fault” (Nelson & Robinson, 2002). The concept of fault, and all the implications associated with it was, and is, an important point when considering that women are twice as likely than men to initiate divorce proceedings. Considerations at this

time in 1985 were also paid to the importance of child support, custody agreements and ensured that divorces were not to be granted until the details concerning those matters had been resolved. Additionally, couples were now allowed to file jointly for divorce, granting the couple more deciding power in how the divorce would proceed (Douglas, 2008).

Statistically, the divorce rate in Canada did increase after 1985 as it went from 61,976 divorces per year to 96,200 in the year 1987 (Statistics Canada, 2009). In the United States, the divorce rate doubled between 1960-1980 to the point where one out of two marriages would fail (Norton & Miller, 1992). This is the highest divorce rate seen in the US and the numbers have slightly fallen since this time (Hurley, 2005). Laws regarding regulation of divorce underwent change between 1970-1975 and the US Census Bureau points to an all-time peak in 1980 due to these changes (Norton & Miller, 1992).

These statistics caused me to wonder how much impact the laws regulating divorce had on the process of divorce and how that would be reflected in research literature. This is an important research question because it offers space and consideration regarding what women's experiences look like when they are placed within boundaries. My definition of boundaries refers to legal contexts and social norms as a basis for a woman's decision-making. Furthermore, what do these boundaries say about our regard for women's experiences when we only allow them to make choices based on dire circumstances such as abuse and place little value on their right to assess the quality of their marriage?

Interestingly, extramarital sex was cited as a prominent factor in divorce in a research study by Kitson, Babri, and Roach (1985), whereas a study by Kitson in 1992 revealed that “communication difficulties, general incompatibility, infidelity, no spending enough time at home, and disagreements over money” were the issues that were most frequently cited as contributing to the dissolution of marriage (as cited in Amato & Rogers, 1997, p. 613).

It is worthwhile to unpack how women’s positions and value within society impacts not only the options that are made available to her, but the consequences of her decisions within the social realm. What does it mean for women, who have traditionally had their importance and value located within the family, to be viewed as “abandoning” the family structure? (Nelson & Robinson, 2002).

I am interested in exploring what women are willing to share (in the context of research) when fault and blame, at least from a legal standpoint, are omitted from the discussion and women can be honest in *their* telling of what factors contribute to their divorce. Additionally, as women are twice as likely as men to initiate divorce proceedings, a better understanding of contributing factors in their decision to divorce will serve as a greater awareness of divorce in general (Amato & Rogers, 1997). By extracting themes from existing literature by means of a content analysis regarding the contributing factors in women’s decision to divorce, I hope to contribute to an overall understanding of this issue.

Methodology

Methodology serves as a language for which the process of research can be discussed as opposed to the subject matter (Krippendorff, 2004). The true purpose of

methodology is to allow researchers to “examine critically the logic, composition and protocols of research methods” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. xvii) so they can choose the one that fits most with their intended research.

With this in mind, I determined that a content analysis of existing published articles would be the most efficient and effective means to carry out my research question.

Research Article Analysis and Assessment

Out of the 15 articles that were selected for this research project, six were rated as “strong”, six as “moderate”, and three as “weak”. I have also quality assessed each of these articles to scrutinize their strength and validity as pieces of research. This quality assessment has been developed using information from *Evidence-based Nursing* by Cullum, Ciliska, Haynes & Marks (2008). This tool rated each article out of six, with five to six out of six signifying a methodologically strong study, three to four indicating a moderate study, and one to four designating that study as weak. It is important to note that while three of the articles were rated as “weak” due to the quality assessment, they still remained useful and strong articles for informing my research. The strength of the article was determined through the quality assessment when an article met all of the criteria of the assessment. I found that the quality assessment did not always give value to aspects of the articles that I felt were valuable to my research; however, I do feel the assessment tool was useful in gaining a better understanding of the articles and does add value to my research as a means of demonstrating the criteria and standards I have set for the articles selected.

I have analyzed a) the primary question, b) the sample characteristics (ie. size, representational quality, follow-up and attrition rates), c) bias and limitations as noted by the authors, d) the rigor and design of the study, e) data analysis, and f) whether the author's interpretation is valid in light of the results of the data.

Sampling

I have been reliant on relevance or purposive sampling to collect my data due to my specific criteria (Appendix 1.). This process assists in reducing the number of texts to be reviewed to a manageable number (Krippendorff, 2004). It is important to keep in mind that using a relevant or purposive sampling results in findings that are not representative to a "population of texts; rather, they are to a population of relevant texts" (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 119). Thus far, I have selected journal articles from the academic body of social science journals. Journals that I have opted to use include those of *Clinical Social Work, Divorce & Remarriage, Family Issues, Marriage and Family, Family Relations*, and *Personality and Social Psychology*. In my review of the literature on divorce these are the journals that appeared time and time again and I feel that these are the most pertinent examples of research to address my question.

Types of Data

My criteria for "useful" articles is straightforward; all that I am requesting is that the article speaks to *women's* experiences in regards to the contributing factors in their divorce. While some of the articles selected also incorporated the experience of males within their testing sample, there was clear distinction made between the information abstracted from men versus women. The articles have been situated in a North American context and fall between the time frames of 1965-2009. I have chosen this timeframe

keeping in mind the amendment made in 1985 to the Canadian divorce law. I wanted to research back far enough before the 1985 amendment and feel that 20 years fulfills this criteria. Society and cultural norms are constantly, if subtly, changing and the timeframe before and after 1985 should reflect these changes. As well, I wanted to ensure that the literature would be dated enough to clearly illustrate how women's experiences regarding the process and context of divorce was being discussed within academic journals. The research articles chosen speak primarily to women's experiences; however, in articles that include men's experiences, the author's make a distinction between the two genders' different experiences.

I selected my sample by entering words such as "divorce", "factors", "reason", "women", "contribute", "process", "experience", "negotiate", "cause", "marriage" into the McMaster University Library journal database. The articles that I ultimately selected were articles that I continued to come across repeatedly during my search and found them to be informative in addressing my research question. Despite my initial interest in teasing out the impact of the amendment to the divorce laws in Canada in 1985, when I went through the McMaster data base using the key concepts above, there was no Canadian literature relevant to my topic that revealed itself.

Data Analysis

Research Design

A content analysis is a beneficial research method when studying the topic of divorce as it allows the researcher to review extensive bodies of literature and to identify themes that will be useful in making recommendations for practice. Content analysis is particularly suited when researching the process of communication and "who says what,

to whom, why, how, and with what effect?" (Rubin & Babbie, 1993, p. 407). When exploring the factors that contribute to a woman's decision to end her marriage, it is important to understand how this is communicated and what the decision-making process entails. A content analysis is appropriate in exploring how women's decisions are made when laws and policies communicate boundaries and expectations of her role.

Research Article Analysis & Assessment

	<i>Focus Question</i>	<i>Sample Characteristics</i>	<i>Research Design</i>	<i>Sources of Bias and Limitations</i>	<i>Data Analysis</i>	<i>Methodological Strength</i>
<i>Amato & Rogers (1997)</i>	Which marital problems predict divorce best.	- under-represented African-Americans, Hispanics, young respondents, renters and those with no college education	Longitudinal study (12 years) -2033 telephone interviews with 78% completion rate	None declared	Logistic regression for significance (one-tailed) with p-values	Strong
<i>Catlett & McKenry (1996)</i>	Women's post-divorce economic status and implications of feminist theories for research on post-divorce SES	Not discussed	Not discussed	Not discussed	Not discussed	Weak
<i>Skaldeman (2006)</i>	Differences in perceptions of spousal role in marital problems by each spouse	- post-grad program in psych - 70 persons (20 married females, 19 married males, 17 divorced females, 14 divorced males)	Questionnaire with five-pt. scale (1= disagree, 5= agree)	None declared	-Conbach's alpha to assess data reliability - three-way Sex X Marital status X Self-other ANOVA with p-values of <0.05	Moderate
<i>Kim & McKenry (2002)</i>	Relationship between marriage and psychological well-being	- ages 19-74 - educational level of 13-14 years - income \$34 000 - 46 000/yr	Longitudinal study (National Survey of Family and Households, 1987-88, 1992-93)	None declared	ANOVA	Strong

	<i>Focus Question</i>	<i>Sample Characteristics</i>	<i>Research Design</i>	<i>Sources of Bias and Limitations</i>	<i>Data Analysis</i>	<i>Methodological Strength</i>
<i>Dolan & Hoffman (1998)</i>	Relationship of occupation, income, and education to divorce and marital career support	-Inland Southern California - ages 18-74 with median age of 40 - 8% bachelor or grad degrees, 22% classed as menial service workers - income \$10 000- 20 000/yr - 74% Caucasian - 61% had children	Questionnaire -130/260 questionnaires completed	Students compensated with extra credit for completing questionnaire	None	Weak
<i>Yogev & Brett (1985)</i>	Relationship between marital satisfaction and perceptions of distribution of housework and child care	- females: 31-33 years old, 43% working, income of \$11 000 – 15 000/yr - males: 36-40 years old, income of \$16 000 – 30 000/yr	Questionnaire (identical for both spouses) - 239/376 completed questionnaires in Chicago area	No causal relationship tested	Linear regressions of marital satisfaction	Strong
<i>Cleek & Pearson (1985)</i>	Inter-relationship between perceived causes of divorce	- 275 males, 336 females	Questionnaire	None declared	Factor Analysis	Moderate
<i>Jockin, McGue & Lykken (1996)</i>	Relationship between genetic factors and divorce risk, suggesting “heritability of divorce risk”	- Minnesota Twin Registry - opposite-sex twin pairs - 503 females, 458 males	Marital history questionnaire & Multi-Dimensional Personality Questionnaire	Limitation of limited generalizability	Two-tailed biserial correlations	Strong

	<i>Focus Question</i>	<i>Sample Characteristics</i>	<i>Research Design</i>	<i>Sources of Bias and Limitations</i>	<i>Data Analysis</i>	<i>Methodological Strength</i>
<i>Levinger (1965)</i>	Marital cohesiveness is analyzed in terms of group cohesiveness (ie. as a “two-person group”)	- different research articles not quality reviewed by author - unknown sample characteristics of different articles reviewed	Literature Review – qualitative conceptual framework	Limitation of being based upon hypothetical perceptions of what is considered to be attractive or perceived barriers within a relationship - difficult to define cohesiveness - relied upon single findings of studies that may not be able to be generalized	Conceptual Framework	Moderate
<i>Heaton, Albrecht & Marti (1985)</i>	Correlation between timing of events and impact on a marriage and reasons for divorce.	- cross-sectional -1060/1114 selected households (no info on selection process)	Longitudinal (Systematic Random Sample of Households as part of Intermountain Divorce Study)	- authors state that their paper generates more questions than answers	Chi-x test	Strong
<i>Lowenstein (2005)</i>	Addresses the causes of divorce as spoken to by recent research	- no quality assessment done on research studies - no discussion on individual samples included in studies	Literature Review	None discussed	Not clearly stated	Weak
<i>Baum (2006)</i>	Explores feelings of separation guilt in women who initiate divorce	- two case studies	Qualitative Research Study	None discussed	Not applicable	Moderate

	<i>Focus Question</i>	<i>Sample Characteristics</i>	<i>Research Design</i>	<i>Sources of Bias and Limitations</i>	<i>Data Analysis</i>	<i>Methodological Strength</i>
<i>Amato & Previti (2003)</i>	Assesses questions of why men and women divorce and the differences in their answers.	- 2033 married persons (not couples) in US 55 years of age or younger - representative sample when compared with U.S. Census Data - contacted in 1983, 1988, 1992, and 1997 with interviews with 78%, 76%, 55%, and 53% of the original sample	- 17-year longitudinal study of Marital Instability Over the Lifecourse in 1998.	- lack of attrition over the years - lack of extensive, detailed accounts - lack of space for detailed questions	- multivariate logistic regression variables	Strong
<i>Rokach, Cohen & Dreman (2010)</i>	Causes of marital dissolution and basic marital unhappiness	- six Israeli men, nine Israeli women divorced at ages > 45 - half couples in marital therapy, half in individual therapy	Qualitative Interview	None discussed	Not Applicable	Moderate
<i>Blow & Hartnett (2005)</i>	Highlights attitudes towards infidelity with incorporation of social location	Literature Review	Substantive Qualitative Literature Review	None discussed	Not Applicable	Moderate

The six components of a content analysis are described in length below.

Unitizing.

The first task in any research project is to decide what is going to be observed and then how those observations are going to be recorded and transferred into research data (Krippendorff, 2004). This can be carried out in different ways depending on the researcher's focus. For example, a political analyst may explore one political speech, divide the speech into distinct parts, and then probe at each part in order to identify what the solution is and whether the issues are used to "attack, acclaim or defend" (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 98). A content analyst on the other hand may take several political speeches during the campaigning period and identify various units or "themes" within each of the speeches for the purpose of comparison and to relate to other research (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 98).

Within a content analysis there are three distinct units that are deserving of attention: sampling units, coding units and context units (Krippendorff, 2004). The sampling units for my research are comprised of existing research literature that speaks to women and their experiences with divorce. I have coded the units in their connectedness to the contributing factors of divorce and rely on single words to inform my units of context. I then analyze the information gathered in relation to the context of the situation in which the women were making their decision.

The articles that make up the research sample are to be reviewed in their entirety to gain a general impression of the overall narrative. After the initial review of the text, all the information that references contributing factors in divorce are extracted into "meaning units" and eventually coded into themes and sub-themes (Hedberg, Brulin &

Alex, 2009, p. 128). These themes and sub-themes will be gathered until a saturation point, at which time no new themes will emerge from the literature (Bullock, 2005).

Sampling.

Ideally results obtained from a sample population should reflect the results of the entire population. Sampling allows for the analyst to economize on the research efforts by limiting the observations to a manageable amount that is conceptually representative of the population or units of interest (Krippendorff, 2004).

Sampling from the text can be much more complex than sampling from “psychological experiments or consumer research” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 84) due to the fact that text can be read on multiple levels drawing from “words, sentences, paragraphs, chapters or even whole publications” to inform the research (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 84). Qualitative sampling differs from quantitative sampling as the results are not drawn from statistical guidelines. Instead, the aim of a qualitative study is not generalizability (as with a quantitative study) but transferability from one context to another (Krippendorff, 2004). This means that while one cannot conclude spouses with certain personality traits or relationship issues/stressors will necessarily predispose them to divorce, marriages that have certain patterns or themes emerging (as will be discussed later in this paper) are at risk for divorce.

Coding.

Also referred to as “recording”, one of the purposes for coding is to create something durable out of otherwise “transient phenomena”, such as a spoken word or a passing image (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 84). Once the phenomena has been recorded, the information can be compared by different analysts at different points in time to “apply

different methods to them and replicate the analyses of different researchers” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 84). The process of recording is highly important because valuable information surrounding social situations can be lost if they are not properly preserved using witness accounts (Krippendorff, 2004). This makes it possible to compare changing perceptions and impacts of certain phenomena. As Krippendorff (2004, p. 125) notes, “research is re-search, a repeated search for patterns”. The second purpose in the recording and coding of text is to apply an analysis and create meaning out of raw material or data (Krippendorff, 2004). Simple words or images alone do not carry much weight or importance. What is of value is the meaning and analysis that can be attached to them.

Reducing.

The reduction of data is important as it makes data manageable for researchers and aims to highlight such data deemed of value to the research. In qualitative research, summaries are an example of how the diversity of texts are reduced to what matters (Krippendorff, 2004). Coding is also useful in the reduction of data as it condenses complex information into manageable themes.

Abductive Inferences.

Inferring is the process of bridging “the gap between descriptive accounts of texts and what they mean, refer to, entail, provoke or cause” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 85). This is the space in the research where the analysis of the data is stated and everything known about the context is provided (Krippendorff, 2004). In this space of my research I discuss what my findings reveal within the context in which they were researched. My initial pre-research hypothesis was that findings extracted from research generated before 1985

would reflect a more “black and white” rationale for divorce, where it would be considered acceptable to divorce because of infidelity or abuse, but not based on a “change of heart”. I wondered if findings generated into the early 1990’s might be reflective of women really assessing the quality of their marriage as opposed to concrete reasons of ill treatment. This hypothesis and how it actually compares to the research is analyzed further in my discussion.

Narrating.

Narrating the results is the process of making the findings of a content analysis available and comprehensible to others (Krippendorff, 2004). In some cases this will involve detailed explanation of the findings’ significance and their contribution to research, and at other times it will involve arguing the appropriateness of utilizing a content analysis versus observational techniques (Krippendorff, 2004). The narration process also allows space for researchers to share where they feel their findings will be useful in regards to further research and encourages recommendations for applicability to practice or legal action (Krippendorff, 2004).

Theoretical Positioning

Theoretical Perspectives

It is important to also note that a content analysis is theory-driven and that the theory has an impact on what the researcher will be looking for (Ratcliff, date unknown). The main theory that I have selected to guide and inform my research is from an Interpretative Social Science (ISS) research perspective. It is important to me to incorporate a theory within this research project that highlights the experiences of women as well as allow me to look at and interpret the factors, context, and process that impact

women's experiences in marriage and divorce. It is important to me that my theoretical perspective will assist me in getting to heart of the 'why's' of my research question (Rowlands, 2005) and I felt that in using an ISS perspective, I would be able to highlight the contributing factors in divorce from women's perspective and be considerate to the contexts in which their decisions were based on due to, for example, social notions of marriage, motherhood and femininity.

Interpretative Social Science Perspective

In my research I am interested in highlighting the factors that contribute to women's decision to leave their marriage and by doing so also investigate the meanings and implications attached to that decision. What I have considered throughout my review of the literature is the meaning that is attached to contributing factors of divorce for women and how women are making sense of their relationships and subsequently how they make sense of decisions made based on their relationship (Smith & Osborn, 2007). What does it *mean* when a woman begins divorce proceedings, "abandoning" her family? I have kept a keen eye out for what is assumed about gender within the sampled literature.

Being that I am conducting a content analysis and thus have total power and control over article selection and which voices I am hearing and privileging, I must be careful not to let my own opinions influence which research I believe is credible. Researcher reflexivity is an integral part of the ISS perspective so it is important to me that I am transparent in any bias that I may hold as not to jeopardize the credibility of the research (Neuman, 1997). It is important to me that I allow the literature gathered through my search strategy to inform my findings and that I do not manipulate my search

in a way that will only serve to support themes that emerge from my review that I can most identify with or feel are most important. I have also taken this point as a caution to be aware of what the researchers within the literature review are saying and highlighting and what their motive or agenda may be. I have tried to identify potential biases of these different studies.

Using an Interpretative Social Science perspective as the theoretical framework to inform my findings is useful since the main tenants of this perspective is that by learning about people's personal motivations and reasoning, the decisions they make and how they come to those decisions can be better understood which results in a greater understanding of social life (Neuman, 1997). The idea being that better understanding of social phenomena such as divorce can be created when there is better understanding surrounding the meaning that people assign to the phenomenon, such as divorce, and the role it plays in everyday life (Klein & Myers, 1999). For example, there will be a greater understanding of why women leave abusive relationships when there is a greater general understanding of the experience of an abusive relationship.

The aim of this theoretical framework is to contribute to an understanding to the social context in which a phenomenon exists and to investigate the process by which the social context impacts upon the phenomenon and vice versa (Rowlands, 2005; Klein & Myers, 1999). In reviewing a multitude of published literature that speaks to the contributing factors, as reported by women, to their decision to divorce, the social realities and contexts of the women's marriages can be better understood. Furthermore, by extracting the indicated factors from the literature, the meaning attached to those

decisions and value that women attach to certain aspects of their relationship are highlighted.

Interpretative Social Science researchers strive to answer the questions of how people experience the world and how meaning is created and shared (Neuman, 1997). By reviewing existing literature that speaks to women's experiences with divorce, and better understanding how women experience their relationships, marriages and divorces, as a researcher I can better understand the meaning that they are attributing to their relationships, the meaning the relationship has to their life and the decisions that they make based on their experiences. The emphasis of my research will be based on generating a greater understanding of the contributing factors in divorce for women in order to generate a greater understanding of how women experience relationships and their social realities attached and interconnect to ideas about marriage, motherhood and femininity.

Findings

There are several themes that reoccur throughout the literature, contributing to the research goal of extracting contributing factors in women's decision to divorce. These can be grouped into the following categories: *Factors, Process and Context*. Within these categories there are various themes that emerge from the existing research literature that speak to my question about the contributing factors to female-initiated divorce.

The first category, factors, refers to specific events that contributed to the divorce. The themes most prevalent in this category are infidelity, personality of spouse, and lack of intimacy. While I am not suggesting if a marriage experiences one or all of these

themes divorce is certain, literature has illustrated that these themes are commonly cited when women reflect specific contributing factors to their divorce.

When considering the factors, processes and contexts of divorce, it is somewhat ambiguous to discuss these separately as they will overlap to a certain extent. Factors could be grouped under contexts and contexts could be grouped under factors due to their similarities and over-arching effects. For example, a marriage that contains stressors of raising children or ill communication may generate an overall poorer perception of the quality of the marriage or lack of intimacy between the spouses (Wynne & Wynne, 1986). Furthermore, couples experiencing great stress in their marriage may be at greater risk for marital infidelity (Kohler-Riessman, 1989; Vangelisti & Gerstenberger, 2004). Keeping this in mind, factors and contexts have still been kept separate as they do contain different kinds of information that is helpful to dissect separately.

Factors

Infidelity.

The impact of infidelity on marriage and divorce can be a “chicken or the egg” type of debate. Does unfaithfulness taint otherwise happy and stable marriages and render them unbalanced, or is infidelity a consequence of an unhappy and unstable marriage which generates individuals to look outside of their marriages to fulfill their needs? While the sequence of infidelity may be debatable, there is no debate that being unfaithful does impact, in some way, on a marriage. In fact, the research points to infidelity being a very large factor in decisions to divorce (Amato & Rogers, 1997; Blow & Hartnett, 2005; Previti & Amato, 2004).

Sexual fidelity within marriage helps to maintain marital cohesion by minimizing the chance that spouses will gain an emotional attachment to persons outside of the marriage. Sexual fidelity also decreases the likelihood that married partners will be responsible for children outside of their marital union (Previti & Amato, 2004). Obviously this rationale does not include children who were born during previous (monogamous) relationships.

Marital infidelity has long been linked with “immoral” and socially unacceptable behaviour and before the introduction of no-fault divorce, infidelity was “one of the few legal grounds for divorce” (Previti & Amato, 2004, p. 218). Furthermore, when surveyed, 122 marital therapists cited extramarital sex as the most frequently reported problem among couples seeking therapy or counselling (Previti & Amato, 2004). Previous research studies have consistently found a strong correlation between extramarital sex and marital instability, with findings that marriages ending in divorce were more likely to have experienced infidelity than marriages that remained intact (during the time of the research studies) (Previti & Amato, 2004; Amato & Previti, 2003).

It is important when considering the impact of infidelity on marriage to understand the context that transgression has within the marriage. Blow & Hartnett (2005) are quick to point out that while infidelity may stain a relationship, it is not the act of being unfaithful alone that marks the relationship but rather the impact of the event. What was the quality of the relationship before the act of unfaithfulness, the motive behind the infidelity, the conflict generated over the infidelity, and any attitudes that the partners may have about what infidelity “means”? These questions need to be taken into consideration when examining the demise of marriages due to infidelity (Blow &

Hartnett, 2005). The importance of examining and determining the meaning of the infidelity is consistent with my theoretical perspective, which seeks to find the meaning of an event in order to better understand it.

When both partners engage in acts of infidelity, research indicates that women are more likely to attribute the demise of the relationship to their own infidelity, whereas men are more likely to attribute the end of the relationship to their spouse's unfaithfulness (Blow & Hartnett, 2005).

Women who are unfaithful during their marriage may experience a greater sense of stigma which may be linked to traditional notions about women's sexuality in that a woman's sexuality is historically connected to the benefit and appeasement of 'her man' rather than her own desire (Alexander & Fisher, 2003; Thompson & Walker, 1989).

Personality Traits.

While not all of the characteristics that will be outlined below are necessarily "flaws", they are characteristics associated with factors that contribute to the risk of divorce. These personality traits include: poor intellectual, educational and social skills, alcoholism and/or substance abuse, alienation, victimization, mistreatment, aggressive personality, forceful or dominant personality, low impulse control, lack of personal development, infidelity, jealousy and foolish money spending.

Personal development is a key ingredient to being able to positively contribute to any relationship, especially within a marriage. When people do not have a true sense of who they are, how can they expect to appreciate another's sense of self and understand

what their needs in a relationship are? If marriages are about partnerships, it does make sense that the most successful unions are those in which each person has a keen sense of who they are who they are in “business” with.

According to a study by Jockin, McGue & Lykken (1996) traits such as traditionalism and social potency (forcefulness, aggression, decisiveness, leadership, dominance) appeared to be the “most important correlates of divorce risk” (Jockin et al., 1996, p. 291) for both men and women. In contrast, when women scored high on the Achievement Scale and low on the Aggression and Well-Being Scale the risk of divorce for women was elevated (Jokin et al., 1996). An additional risk factor for divorce for women appears to be high emotionality (Jokin et al., 1996).

It is common for women and men to report differing types of marital issues. Women typically focus on the personality traits and behaviors of their mates more often than men. Specifically, women report their husband’s “use of authority, his cruelty, drinking habits, immaturity, untrustworthiness, infidelity, poor money management, values, and lifestyle” (Amato & Rogers, 1997, p. 615) as factors in their decision to divorce. Amato & Previti (2003) also found that personality problems were one of women’s highest rated factors for initiating divorce. Interestingly, this study found that while men, too, report their wife’s infidelity as a “cause” of divorce, they also report their own “drinking, drug use, and physical abusiveness, as well as external causes such as family death, work commitments, and problems with in-laws” (Amato & Rogers, 1997, p. 615). Lester (1997) found a positive correlation between alcohol consumption and divorce and his study reveals that American states with the highest levels of alcohol consumption also had the highest divorce rates. As well, risk-taking behaviors such as

excess drinking and smoking have been strongly linked as factors contributing to the risk of divorce for both women and men (Lowenstein, 1995; Amato & Previti, 2003).

The theory of attribution suggests that due to “self-serving bias, people tend to attribute problems to external, rather than internal, causes” (Amato & Rogers, 1997; Skaldeman, 2006, p. 148). Divorce research literature supports this theory, as spouses are more likely to attribute the cause of their divorce to the misgivings and ill behaviors of their partners rather than their own (Amato & Rogers, 1997).

Additionally, research by Lowenstein (2005) indicates poor intellect, education and social skills as contributing factors in divorce, along with women’s independence and abuse of substances, including alcohol.

The work options available to women affect rates of divorce as well. Research has indicated that women who work outside of the home are 22% more likely to divorce than women who do not work (Lowenstein, 2005). Additional contributing factors regard the type of work a woman is employed in and her success within that work (Lowenstein, 2005). The more access a woman has to support herself financially, the less likely she will stay in a marriage that is unsatisfying (Levinger, 1965).

The ISS framework is interested in understanding how people manage ‘everyday life’ in order to explain social phenomenon (Neuman, 1997). Through my research I have found that the personality of one’s spouse does contribute greatly to how everyday life is managed and to the satisfaction that one has with their life; living life with a partner that you do not get along with looks very different from marriage between two people that enjoy each other’s company. There may be various reasons for people entering into relationships in which they and their partner are not compatible in terms of personality

which go beyond the scope of this paper and therefore will not be discussed at great length. Culture, including community expectations or obligations and religion may contribute to this issue, which may require spouses to attribute different meaning and purpose to their marriage and therefore 'getting along' may not be at the top of their list when considering marriage and may not seem as important until they are living a life together and discover they are not compatible and therefore are in a position to make a decision based on what meaning that has for them.

Lack of Intimacy.

Intimacy is an important aspect of any relationship because it creates a sense of unity and something shared between two people. Intimacy can take on various personas, including physical and emotional connectedness. There are typically eight components associated with intimacy and intimate relationships: conflict resolution, affection, cohesion, sexuality, identity, compatibility, expressiveness and autonomy (Larson & Allgood, 1987). The research strongly indicates a relationship between how connected a woman feels to her spouse and the success of that marriage (Goodman, 1999). Women who feel unhappy and alone within their marriage appear to be more likely to concentrate their efforts elsewhere, such as a career or raising their children, slowly increasing the divide between them and their husband (Baum, 2006). This contributes to women believing they should be held responsible for their divorce and may blame themselves for focusing their attention to other areas besides their marriage. Once reaching an ending point of unhappiness, they may find themselves truly no longer recognizing the person they are married to.

The creation of intimacy within a marriage is truly a process that is reliant on communication between spouses and dependent upon explicit and implicit marital rules (Feldman, 1979). The contract of intimacy that is formed between two people assists in bonding and uniting them as a team. It is easy to see why a marriage that lacks the unity of intimacy would easily come undone with little provoking.

Research literature has illustrated the importance of balance between partner intimacy and autonomy in long-lasting relationships. A powerful predictor of marital adjustment is the space between desired and actual intimacy between spouses (Goodman, 1999). Goodman (1999) states that intimacy versus autonomy may be a continuous issue for married couples in the future due to women's presence in the workforce and the individualistic nature of North American culture. In contrast with our culture where people are typically more invested in themselves, literature is clear that relationships are better served when intimacy and autonomy work in collaboration with each other (Goodman, 1999). When couples experience intimacy in the form of friendship and sharing while simultaneously experiencing benefits of autonomy in having their own decisions respected and supported, greater relationship satisfaction is achieved.

An ISS perspective is useful for understanding the meaning attributed to intimacy within marriage as men and women may interpret intimacy differently. For instance, traditionally, intimacy has been discussed within literature as the expression of feelings, emotional warmth, sensitivity and vulnerability, all of which are typically associated with women rather than men (Thompson & Walker, 1989). In contrast, men are discussed to enact intimacy through sexual relations, practical support and assistance, economic support and spending time in each other's presence (Thompson & Walker, 1989). To

better understand dissatisfaction that women may experience in regards to the level of intimacy in their relationship, it is helpful to understand how women define intimacy and what story they are telling themselves in regards to the importance that intimacy has on their marriage. Couples that are able to identify these differences may be able to more successfully negotiate a compromise that will satisfy the desire for an intimate marriage.

Process & Decision-Making in Divorce

The process of decision-making in regards to divorce is important to consider as research has clearly illustrated that divorce does not typically occur on whim. Women in particular have a lot to consider when thinking about divorce, as the impact of divorce can be severe especially if there are children involved.

Existing research literature has revealed that themes such as *assessing the consequence of divorce, perception of family and social supports and personal guilt associated with initiating a divorce* are all elements contributing to a women's decision to leave her marriage.

Assessing the consequence of divorce.

While the knee-jerk reaction to hearing of anyone in an unhappy marriage may be to ask (either out loud or to oneself) "why not leave?", research indicates that the process of divorce is much more complicated than other decisions, especially if abuse has occurred within the marriage. While the topic of abuse and all the complexities that surround it is beyond the scope of this paper, it is an important piece to consider when examining the contributing factors to why women leave their marriages. A

phenomenological research study found that the process for women to leave an abusive marriage could be broken down into four categories that were consistent with the ecological perspective: intrapersonal, interpersonal, structural-organizational and sociocultural (Haj-Yahia & Eldar-Avidan, 2001). This study found that a large part of the process of leaving their husband surrounded a woman's belief that she had the strength and ability to survive on her own. This may explain why many divorces are plagued with brief periods of separations and reunions before a final ending to the relationship occurs. The context of the marriage is also considered by women who are assessing the value of their marriage, especially in relationships where violence is present. Women may be assessing the impact of the violence not only to themselves, but to their children (Haj-Yahia & Eldar-Avidan, 2001).

The interpersonal category speaks to the reaction that women receive from their spouse when they become privy to the idea that their marriage may be ending. Typically, women have already come to their own conclusions about the state of their marriage due to intrapersonal reflection. However, especially in marriages containing abuse, women may experience more threats from their husbands regarding what may happen should they leave. Social supports and planning become vital for women during this time, for reasons of practicality, safety and strength (Haj-Yahia & Eldar-Avidan, 2001; Albeck & Kaydar, 2002).

The structural-organizational factors speak to the information gathering that women may explore within social service agencies. As women typically will take any children with them when they leave their marriage, they understand that they will need to figure out a way to provide for the children and may connect with various social agencies

to see what is available in the ways of assistance and support (Haj-Yahia & Eldar-Avidan, 2001).

Sociocultural and historical factors have also been illustrated to provide a backdrop and context for women in their decision to divorce. What is happening in the world around them can give them courage and foresight into what their life *could* be (Haj-Yahia, & Eldar-Avidan, 2001). This is why I initially believed that the amendment to the divorce law in Canada in 1985 would make a larger impact on divorce for women. I had hypothesized that when the “fault” and “blaming” aspect of divorce was omitted (at least from a legal standpoint), women would be absolved from the responsibility of ending their marriages and feel more free to do what they felt would be best for their lives.

As laws, public awareness, and social supports increase surrounding spousal abuse, it will be interesting to see the impact on marriage and divorce.

From an ISS theoretical perspective, assessing the consequence for divorce becomes very important when women are to consider what their life would look like should they divorce, and what experiencing a divorce will mean for them. Women who consider divorce also must consider the financial impact this will have for them and their family, which may include children or elders they are assisting in caring for. Women, especially those belonging to specific cultural groups or close knit communities must consider the stigma that may be attached to them after a divorce.

Perception of family and social supports (after the divorce).

One factor that women may need to consider when contemplating divorce is the make-up of their social network and support system. Friendships and social supports are

invaluable when working through difficult emotional times. Research has indicated that a divorcing individual can lose up to 40% of their social network and friends during the process of divorce (Albeck & Kaydar, 2002) which can be attributed to the ease in which social activity embraces couples but often excludes singles (Albeck & Kaydar, 2002). Conflicts of loyalty may also arise among friends who feel the need to “take sides”, rendering the person who “chose” the divorce most responsible and subsequently friendless (Albeck & Kaydar, 2002, p. 115).

Research by Kitson and Roach (1989) assessed the everyday work and activities of women who had experienced divorced or been widowed and found that women who had experienced divorce had greater distress in performing the social roles, suggesting that a change in social roles is an important element to consider when looking at adjustment to divorce (Kitson & Morgan, 1990).

Social activity within marriage typically sees couples befriending couples, with the husband’s social network being much more extensive (Albeck & Kaydar, 2002). This can leave women who divorce their husbands out of the social “loop”, so to speak.

Furthermore, as women typically assume custody of any children after a divorce, they are usually less available socially but more physically, emotionally and psychologically exhausted (Albeck & Kaydar, 2002).

Guilt associated with the decision to divorce.

Most research literature supports the idea that the initiator of the divorce proceedings tends to fare better in the divorce aftermath and reports fewer psychological and physical symptoms (Chang, 2004). However, there is some research that highlights

the guilt many women experience over being the initiator of divorce, particularly when a divorce means breaking up a family that includes children.

The truth that divorce is much more than an option to be decided is described by women speaking of their experiences *after* this decision has been made, illustrating the struggle involved in the decision-making process.

Research shows that these feelings are linked to the gender-specific socialization that women experience in childhood (Baum, 2006). Women are typically held more accountable for the quality of their relationship and more perceptive regarding marital dysfunction, thus more likely to pick out problems with the marriage in an attempt to improve it (Heaton & Blake, 1999). Oftentimes, research pays attention more to the non-initiator than the initiator (Baum, 2006). This is surprising when considering that the majority of the research points to women as initiating divorce twice as often as men (Baum, 2006). This raises the question of why are women often portrayed as the unknowing victim in divorce? And why their experiences are not often documented in research literature?

Previous research by Spainer and Margolis (1983, as cited in Baum, 2006) and Walters-Chapman, Price and Serovich (1995, as cited in Baum, 2006) has found that guilt feelings after initiating divorce contributed to depression and decreased life satisfaction after the divorce. Interestingly, previous research by Weiss (1975, as cited in Baum, 2006) also suggests that guilt feelings “impaired the ability of divorced mothers to define their identity outside of their marital status” and contributed to a continued attachment to their ex-spouse (Baum, 2006, p. 48). It is important to note that of the minimal literature that does exist regarding divorce-initiator guilt, only one study by Boney (2002, as cited

in Baum, 2006) focuses on females as the initiator. The lack of material available to speak to women's experiences with divorce-related guilt is what adds value and significance to a female-centred research of divorce experiences because it names what other research does not. It publicizes feelings of guilt that women may experience as the initiators of divorce and states that women do understand that divorce may hurt their spouse's feelings, betray their previous commitment, and break up their family. This research puts that out there and says that within the context of their marriage, and despite the guilt feelings attached to divorce initiation, it was the option that they felt was best for them.

As previously indicated, research has incorporated the impact of gender into the analysis of guilt and outlined the differences in identity formation for girls and boys (Baum, 2006). "Because girls are generally parented by the same-sex parent, they experience themselves as being like their mothers" (Baum, 2006, p. 50). This creates the fusion of attachment with identity formation (Baum, 2006). It is suspected that the process of separation for girls, then, is more frightening and guilt-provoking than for boys as there is not the same enmeshment of identity and likeness (Baum, 2006). Additionally, previous research such as that of Heaton & Blake (1999) has illustrated that girls are socialized to define themselves more in the context of their relationships, with emphasis and value placed on their ability to form and maintain relationships, whereas boys are encouraged to place value on their personal achievements (Baum, 2006).

Context

The context of the marriage is perhaps the most important category to consider when reviewing the topic of divorce because divorce typically occurs due to a medley of factors. Although I have listed some frequently cited factors above, even these themes have different meanings for different individuals. Even though research literature reveals that infidelity is a commonly cited “cause” of divorce, no research suggests that all marriages that experience infidelity will result in divorce. Perhaps no one can better speak to the importance context has within marriage than George Levinger and his wife Ann Cotton-Levinger, who celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary by publishing a paper titled *Winds of Time and Place: How Context Has Affected a 50 Year Marriage* (2003) examining their own marriage. The couple speak about the *macrocontexts* (cultural values and beliefs, laws, societal norms, resources and economic opportunity) as well as *microcontexts* (the intimacy that a couple builds and the evolution of their relationship over time) to illustrate the importance and impact of context within marriage relationships (Levinger & Cotton-Levinger, 2003).

The themes that frequently emerged when discussing elements that contributed to divorce in context were: children, age at the time of marriage, marriage roles, compatibility and communication (Levinger & Cotton-Levinger, 2003).

Children.

An ISS approach is an appropriate theoretical perspective to use when examining the impact that children may have on the social reality of a marriage (Neuman, 1997). The presence of children arguably changes the dynamic between even the most stable of couples and therefore is an important element to consider when assessing factors that contribute to divorce. To do this, an ISS perspective looks at the changes that the

introduction of children may bring to a marriage and the impact of their presence on the relationship. An ISS perspective considers how the reality of everyday life may change for a couple once different stressors and roles are introduced to the relationship.

Additionally, it is also important to consider the impact that divorce has on children, as parents are generally concerned regarding the wellbeing of their children and typically want to make choices that they feel will be in their child's best interest. Women (and men) may feel that it is in their child's best interest to preserve their marriage and keep their family 'intact' and therefore resolve to stay in an unhappy or unfulfilling marriage believing that they are doing so for the sake of their children (Burns & Dunlop, 2003; Schmidtgall, King, Zarski, & Cooper, 2000; Vandewater & Lansford, 1998).

In marriages that have produced children, there is arguably more to consider when contemplating divorce, such as custody, financial arrangements, and emotional impact and adjustment of the children. Most research regarding divorce and children focuses on young and dependant children. However, the context of marriages with grown children are also important to consider as the remaining married couple left once the children leave are "empty nesters". Partners who have poured every ounce of energy into parenting may wake up to find themselves sharing their home and their life with someone who they do not know and recognize, and this can be a strong catalyst for the re-evaluation of one's life and marriage (Rokach, Cohen & Dreman, 2004).

Research has illustrated that partners who are also parents and have children living in the home experience greater stress, anxiety, depression and worry while experiencing less happiness and satisfaction than those who do not have children (Lavee, Sharlin, & Katz, 1996). Stress within marriage can slowly erode the relationship by

digging at the self-esteem, overall happiness, and well-being of each spouse (Schafer, Wickrama & Keith, 1998).

The impact of children on a marriage and the stress that may result has traditionally been discussed in two ways – through normative events predicted to occur within the life cycle (moving out of familial home, marrying, having children, etc) and non-normative events that are not factored into expected “life plans”. Examples of non-normative events may be natural disasters or the early death of a spouse or child (Lavee et al., 1996). The concept of role strain has also been introduced as another way to view the impact of stress in relationships. Role strain refers not to specific life events that occur at a moment in time, but rather are experiences that slide discreetly into life and into daily experiences (Lavee et al., 1996). For example, women who are frustrated or overwhelmed with the daily demands and pressures of motherhood may feel unsupported by their spouse or feel inequalities in the division of parenting and household responsibilities. This can create stress for the woman and tension within the marriage.

The impact of divorce on children is expanding as the divorce rate continues to climb throughout North America and the world. In the 1970’s, 12% of American children experienced divorce (Demo & Acock, 1988). That number grew to over 60% by the early 1980’s. Freudian, structural-functional, and social learning are among the theories used to support the argument that a family’s basic function is to serve as a “stable and organically integrated factory” in which “human personalities are formed” (Demo & Acock, 1988, p. 620). This begs the question of what is happening to children who are experiencing such turmoil and upset during their formative years?

One could argue that divorce creates the absence of one parent, and subsequently a role model. It has long been accepted that the same-sex parent is the most crucial role model in a child's learning and development of what it means to be a "boy" or "girl" (Demo & Acock, 1988).

In many ways, I believe that the issues and sadness connected with divorce has become so commonplace and almost *expected*, that the true loss and impact of divorce is sometimes glazed over. Mainstream media now references "starter marriages" and "starter wives/husbands" with the same causality that is used when referring to "starter homes". The all-knowing *Wikipedia* defines a "starter marriage" as a marriage that lasts five years or less and does not produce any children (Wikipedia, 2010). While there are various sides to the debate over the value in these "learning marriages", author Pamela Pauls (2002) of *The Starter Marriage and the Future of Matrimony* comments that divorce, from any marriage, leaves emotional wreckage.

The social work practice will continue to experience the impact of divorce when confronted with clients – men, women, and children who are struggling with the consequences of divorce and trying to unpack for themselves what the impact will be for them. Additionally, the transmission of divorce from generation to generation supports the notion that divorce is not only a private matter between a couple and/or family, but has an impact upon the functioning and construction of society as a whole (Bodenmann, 1997).

One obvious consequence when divorce occurs in a family where children are involved is that one parent will typically see their children less. Even in situations where custody is split equally, each parent will still miss out on certain moments with their

children, and children will miss out on sharing certain moments with both of their parents present.

The impact of divorce may present itself in economic, emotional, and/or interpersonal ways for children who are experiencing the divorce of their parents (Kenyon & Koerner, 2009). It is important to note that not all children who experience divorce experience drastic, or even negative, change. For example, children who were living in high conflict situations may experience divorce as a positive solution in creating peace within their household (Kenyon & Koerner, 2009).

As children typically continue to reside with the mother after divorce, research has found mixed results when comparing the *frequency* of visits between children and their fathers to the connection to the children's well-being and adjustment to the divorce. Research studies have illustrated the importance of the *quality* of the relationship between children and their father after a divorce. In particular, authoritative parenting and feelings of closeness (to the parent) have been associated with positive adjustment in children (Kenyon & Koerner, 2009). Furthermore, adolescents who experience "closeness" to their non-residential parent are credited with less depression and higher grades and self-esteem than adolescents that do not have a quality relationship with the parent they *do* to reside with (Kenyon & Koerner, 2009). It is important to note that fathers in particular are aware of this and understand the importance of maintaining a relationship with their children and being available to them despite a divorce. It is important for practitioners to have the tools and the understanding of how to assist parents in moving through their divorce so that feelings of frustration with being a "visiting parent", "part-time parent", or "gate-keeper" do not in fact impact on their parenting and the focus of putting their

children's needs first. It is also important that mothers recognize value their child's relationship with the father can have for their child. Women may feel overwhelmed and resentful with their new role as a single mother; however, it is important for women to not become wrapped up in this role and angry and hostile towards the other parent, especially in the presence of children.

Research has also shown that in divorced families, mothers more than fathers are likely to "parentify" their children during discussions, particularly in regards to adolescent children (Kenyon & Koerner, 2009). This may include matters relating to financial circumstance or hostile feelings towards their former spouse (Kenyon & Koerner, 2009). This "sharing" can greatly impact upon the child, resulting in symptoms of depression and anxiety (Kenyon & Koerner, 2009). Studies have not yet revealed the impact of such maternal disclosures on the father/adolescent relationship.

My own hypothesis that as children age, they develop an emotional autonomy and begin to see their parents as people outside of their role as "mom" and "dad". This idea is certainly aligned with prevalent research (Kenyon & Koerner, 2009). As children age, they become more reliant on their own assessments and opinions of the situation (even if they keep those observations to themselves) and are less easily influenced by one parent. However, one must keep in mind that this would, of course, vary from child to child.

Another way that divorce impacts upon children is in the potential introductions to step-parents and step-siblings. Due to the high probability of divorce within second marriages, it is highly plausible that children will eventually experience a second divorce should their parent(s) choose to remarry (Wallerstein, 1991).

Ultimately, it is important to remember when considering children who have been impacted by divorce that the divorce is the symbolic outcome of that marital history. One must consider what took place during the marriage and what the children were exposed to. Was the marriage spotted with violence and emotional or verbal abuse, or strong silences and tension (Wallerstein, 1991)? By the time that a marriage does breakdown, many children have experienced years of living in conflict and feeling unsupported by their parents. “This experience of many years surely contributes to the anxiety, the vulnerability and the symptoms of children as the difficulties rise to a crescendo” (Wallerstein, 1991, p. 351). Although symptoms may appear to present themselves suddenly at the onset of the divorce proceedings, it is likely that children who have been living in households where a divorce is imminent experience issues throughout a turbulent marriage.

Research has also investigated some of the defensive parenting patterns that parents have participated in over the years of troubled marriages. Men in particular are found to disengage from their children, attributed to the anger they experience from their wives who wish they would take a more active role in parenting. However, studies have revealed that disengagement takes place long before the acute crisis of the divorce and is a reality in which many children live (Wallerstein, 1991).

When parents and practitioners are educated around the consequences and impact that divorce can have on children, they are better equipped to address the needs of children to ensure they are provided with appropriate tools and outlets to cope with their feelings surrounding the divorce. Furthermore, the impact of divorce on children is important for parents to be aware of in order to learn/implement appropriate skills and

understanding in regards to how they handle themselves during divorce and maintain a positive environment for their children.

The impact of divorce upon children is an extremely important point to consider when analyzing why women divorce their spouses because this decision may be based upon their perception of what is best for their child. Women may resolve to stay in unhappy marriages with the belief that they are doing so for the sake of the children, when in reality research indicates children are better off living in conflict-free situations and having parents model happiness and stability (Burns & Dunlop, 2003; Schmidtgal, King, Zarski, & Cooper, 2000; Vandewater & Lansford, 1998). By gaining a better understanding of which aspects of divorce have the greatest negative impact upon children, parents and practitioners can address those concerns and focus on creating a smoother transition for the family.

Age.

It is widely accepted within family sociology that the age of a person at the time they marry has an impact on the outcome of the marriage. Although there is not as much research available regarding the theories behind this widely supported claim, South (1995) suggests that “explanations for the inverse association between age at marriage and divorce invoke one of three different causal mechanisms” (p. 433). The first is outlined through persons who marry early in life and lack the emotional, psychological and social maturity that would best prepare them for all of the hills and valleys that marriage brings (South, 1995). Similarly, they may not have the skills that meet the expectations of marriage and be unable to perform “marital roles adequately” (South, 1995; Bahr & Galligan, 1984). Secondly, people who marry early in life may lack

valuable outside support from family and friends. This may cause strain on the marriage and contribute to marital instability and weakens the bond of marriage by removing barriers to marital dissolution (South, 1995). Finally, those who marry early in life may be associated with lower-income situations which may contribute to financial stress (Bahr & Galligan, 1984).

The marital search theory, which has roots in the social exchange theory, is useful to further support the connection between age at the time of marriage and marital success. This hypothesis states that “relative to people who marry later in life, persons who marry at comparatively young ages will be especially susceptible to divorce when confronted with abundant alternatives to their current spouse” (South, 1995 p. 433). The idea behind this theory is that people who have married young have spent an inadequate amount of time “searching” for a well-matched spouse and are subsequently partnered up with an ill-matched spouse (South, 1995). “The accumulation of better knowledge about both one’s spouse and one’s marital alternatives during marriage exposes these discordant traits, thereby increasing the likelihood of divorce” (South, 1995, p. 434). While it may seem superficial and over-simplistic to buy into the idea that divorce may happen when people acknowledge there are indeed more (and possibly better) fish in the sea, there may be something to be said for the idea that the better one knows oneself, the better one can find a partner they would best match.

Interestingly, people who have perceived themselves as likely to remarry in the case of a divorce are more likely to dissolve their marriage (South, 1995). It could make sense that those who can picture themselves living a life separate from their current

spouse – perhaps married to someone more patient, attentive, attractive, etc. – are more likely to take steps towards that imagined life. If you dream it, it will happen.

What is important to take from a discussion about age as a contributing factor and context in divorce is the meaning of age at the time of marriage. While age alone is insignificant, it becomes valuable when weighted with all of the elements that age can represent: maturity, life experience, self-knowing, self-acceptance and understanding and awareness of one's values and goals. If age is connected to a better understanding of oneself, then this could potentially be a different number for everyone – some people may come into self awareness and maturity at 17 years old, while it takes others a true lifetime. However, the majority of people do not have a true understanding of themselves and what life has to offer until they have some life experiences and lessons to draw from.

This self awareness and acceptance proves to be key in marriage success, as is apparent in various research literature: the more in tune one is with one's own needs, the more in tune one can be regarding the needs of others. Lack of met emotional needs, loneliness within marriage, communication problems, incompatibility, lack of personal development are all issues within marriages that may contribute to divorce (Lowenstein, 1996; Heaton et al., 1985; Yogeve & Brett, 1985; Amato & Rogers, 1997, Skauleman, 2006; Baum, 2006; Dolan & Hoffman, 1998; Cleck & Pearson, 1985; Levinger, 1965; McGue & Lykkeh, 1996). This can be connected to how well one knows oneself and what is looked for in a marriage partner, with the sense of self being connected to age in terms of life experience.

For example, a woman who marries young in life before she has a means of supporting herself financially, before she has experienced true conflict, or before she has

been introduced to a variety of people and life obstacles may look for a different partner than a woman who has established a means of supporting herself, has overcome some challenges, and experienced a little bit of the world for herself (Baum, 2006).

Marriage roles.

Marriage roles refer to the couple's attitudes toward divorce, definitions of marriage, husband's job income, role conflicts, distribution of family work and inequitable relations (Yogev & Beett, 1985; Lowenstein, 2005; Levinger, 1965; McGue & Lykkeh, 1996).

Role conflict between spouses is attributed in some part to a disparity between a husband's and wife's attitudes towards equality, with the female's being more progressive (Lowenstein, 2005). Historically, the relationship between husband and wife has been characterized by an "exaggerated respect" for the husband, whereas relations tend to be more equal nowadays between spouses and there is the expectation that respect and understanding will be mutual (Lowenstein, 2005, p. 159). With these changing roles, some of the traditional authority that men have had over "their" household has dwindled; however, there is still a silent expectation placed upon men to continue to provide financially for their family (Lowenstein, 2005).

Research by George Levinger reveals that since industrialization divorce among lower-income marriages has been greater, attributed to the reduction of "legal obstacles and of economic costs" associated with divorce (Levinger, 1965, p. 21). One could argue that the attractions inside a marriage are lower for lower SES brackets than for higher income earners and with satisfying and adequate income, marital stability and security increases as stressors decrease (Levinger, 1965).

Individuals who experience frustration regarding role expectations may experience a diminished sense of self-competency, loss of confidence to perform the roles, and reduced self-esteem based on their own perception of self and how they feel they are viewed by their partner (Schafer et al., 1998).

When individuals experience frustration or discontent with their role in parenting it can contribute to stress in the marriage, creating difficulty in discerning the root causes of their unhappiness and dissatisfaction. Lavee et al. (1996) suggests that it is more acceptable for a woman to say that she is experiencing unhappiness and discontent in her marriage versus her role as a mother. In turn, women may divert their attention into disconnecting themselves from the marriage that they may perceive to be the underlying “cause” of their stress. Research reveals that a wife’s stress in her parenting role directly impacts on her perception of the quality of the marriage (Lavee et al., 1996).

The couple’s reaction and ability to cope with stressors has also been noted to impact the outcome of the marriage (Bodenmann, 1997). Couples who are able to engage in adequate coping skills such as re-framing or applying tension-reducing strategies like meditation were found to be more successful in their marriages than individuals that displayed dysfunctional coping skills such as blaming (Bodenmann, 1997).

Research reveals that one explanation for women initiating divorce more frequently than men is due to the fact that they often have more to complain about within relationships compared with their spouse. Due to the traditional gender arrangements of marriage, wedlock is found to have more benefits for men than women, who often find themselves responsible for the majority of house and child-rearing work (Amato et al., 1997). Typically, women have a greater responsibility for being aware of and responding

to the psychological and emotional needs of their children and partners and therefore “spend more time monitoring the status of intimate relationships” (Amato & Rogers, 1997, p. 615).

Additionally, research illustrates that couples who perceive an equal or fair distribution of housework are more satisfied with their marriage (Yogev & Beett, 1985). In other words, individuals who believe that there is a benefit to their marriage and that they are reaping the benefits of such a relationship will feel more satisfied with the relationship and inclined to stay.

Research has revealed that it is not the actual division of the housework that is of importance, but the *perception* of the division of the housework. If a spouse feels their contributions and work are being recognized and valued, they are less likely to take issue if they find themselves doing more loads of laundry or dishes than their partner. “If a person repeatedly invests time and effort in another person’s welfare, that person is assumed to benefit from (to place value upon) that other person’s welfare” (Emerson, 1981, p. 32). Perhaps this is the ultimate hope of marriage – that you will get back (at least in some way) what you give.

Finally, it is important to consider how each spouse may define marriage when examining the theme of marriage roles as a contributing factor to divorce. Arguably, the vast majority of couples enter into marriage with the intention of the marriage lasting and remaining committed to each other. However, factors such as one or both partners experiencing a previous divorce can impact current attitudes and considerations regarding a future divorce (Levinger, 1965).

Communication.

Lack of communication is frequently cited as a factor contributing to the decision to divorce (Cleek & Pearson, 1985; Dolan & Hoffman, 1998). The research reveals that meeting of emotional needs is a large contributing factor in the decision to divorce. Lack of emotional support, loneliness, communication, and social isolation along with mixed faith, disapproval of friends, and dissimilarity of background were all cited as reasons behind the divorce (Cleek & Pearson, 1985; Dolan & Hoffman, 1998). One often enters into marriage with the expectation of partnership and there are only so many times a person can play a lone match of tennis within their marriage before they go and look for a new teammate. Further to this point, lack of positive time spent together was found to be a contributing factor in divorce, specifically for women (Lowenstein, 2005).

Women may find themselves attempting to fill the emotional void with activities and interests outside of their marriage (work, extra-curricular), further contributing to the divide between them and their spouse (Baum, 2006). They may become very different women from who they were when they first married and find that while they are growing as an individual, their marriage has stayed in a stagnant place. As well, women are more likely to monitor the status of their relationship and articulate reasons for marital instability (Amato & Previti, 2003). Amato and Previti (2003) reported that 9.1% of men state "I don't know" as the cause of their divorce compared to 0% of women when asked the same question. This is an important point to note because research indicates that women have definite reasons for why they choose to leave and are able to clearly articulate those reasons. This may infer that women have perhaps thought more than men

about the state of their marriage and wrestled with the problems they perceive in their marriage.

Furthermore, a five-year longitudinal study reveals that couples who reported adequate communications skills at the onset of their relationship continued to report overall satisfaction with their relationship years later (Bodenmann, 1997). Additionally, a study conducted by Huston and Vangelisti (as cited in Bodenmann, 1997) found that negativity in communication was the best predictor of a marriage being unsuccessful.

Compatibility/Similarity-Difference ratios.

A typical goal of marriage is to find a partner that you are “compatible” with and share a life together. Research by Cleek & Pearson (1985) reveals that this is not always the case as incompatibility was ranked as a mitigating factor in the decision to divorce by both men and women, with incompatibility closely linked to “basic unhappiness”. This research is also corroborated by Amato & Previti (2003) who report that 19.1% of women cite incompatibility as a contributing factor in their divorce. I believe that this contributing factor is closely related to the idea of “know thyself” and is important to consider *before* making a vow of forever. Differences that may not seem significant while in a dating relationship may appear much more important and intense when negotiated and considered on a daily basis. Marriage truly is the merging of lives; even in cases where couples have healthy boundaries of independence, there still is a concentrated level of teamwork required.

Marriage is also an ongoing commitment to work. Happy marriages do not just “happen” or sustain themselves. Partners who find themselves in marriages that are not being maintained tend to find they are “growing apart”, living separate lives, and

becoming strangers to one another (Dolan & Hoffman, 1998, p. 101). As well, sexual compatibility has been linked to marital tensions and found to be a contributing factor in the risk of divorce. Research indicates that the partner with the lower sex drive tends to have “controlling rights” over the occurrence of intercourse “with a consequent increase in bargaining rights” (Lowenstein, 2005, p. 158).

Competing religious interests and endeavors have been shown to have a negative impact upon the success of marriage (Lowenstein, 2005; Heaton, Albrecht & Martin, 1985; Levinger, 1965). The explanation offered by research is that marriages receiving support from a religious community and sharing similar core values often fair better than marriages of interreligious beliefs that may experience added tensions and differing basic values (Heaton et al., 1985). Like religious values and beliefs can act as bonds in marriage and barriers to divorce (Levinger, 1965).

General differences between spouses (age, ethnic background, social origin, educational and occupational status) were also found to contribute to the risk of divorce. This is attributed to taste, preference, and social supports (Houts, Robins, & Hustin, 1996; Dolan & Hoffman, 1998). While one does not necessarily want to marry their twin and although opposites may initially attract, research has shown that content marriages happen when people find a happy medium between what is new to them and what is familiar.

Socioeconomic Status.

The context of socioeconomic status, higher education, income, and occupation assists in facilitating greater communication skills and ability to resolve marital conflicts.

In contrast, financial worries and disagreements can contribute to spouses being irritable and decreases their ability to provide emotional support to their partner.

The context of SES has been found to have different meaning for high and low SES couples. High SES individuals may have greater expectations and standards for their marriage, and thoughts of divorce may be triggered quickly when all is not going well. Research reveals that high SES divorced individuals were more likely to offer the following explanations for the break up of their marriage: lack of communication, changes in interests/values, incompatibility, and their ex-spouses' self-centeredness (Amato & Previti, 2003; Dolan & Hoffmann, 1998). Low SES individuals were more likely to report physical abuse, going out with peers, neglect of household duties, gambling, criminal activity and financial and employment problems as attributing to the divorce (Amato & Previti, 2003; Dolan & Hoffman, 1998).

Although the rise in the divorce rate has been attributed by some to the participation of women in the workforce, Dolan and Hoffman suggest it's too simplistic of an analysis and that a more likely possibility is that "when couples disagree over the woman's career interests there is an increase in marital instability" (1998, p. 98).

The last theme picked out from the literature was not outright named by the research but was readily and obviously apparent. This is the theme of "life". Marriage, like anything, can only be so planned, and there are many elements of surprise that go into creating a lifetime. When a couple is mapping out their life and dreams together, rarely does the fairytale include a sickness, or the traumatic death of a loved one, or a diagnosis that may bring one partner farther and farther away from the union. Since there is truly no way to know how one would respond to such events, it becomes somewhat

impossible to really prepare for them even if they are a part of life and require addressing at some point. The context of life is important to consider when looking at the contributing factors in divorce and why a woman would leave her marriage because sometimes there is no clear explanation. It would appear that sometimes divorce is simply a part of life and cannot be attributed to one or two or even twenty factors, but instead an intricate combination of events that create the history and story for two people (Rokach et al., 2004).

Discussion

Analysis

Going into my research, I had thought I began with a clear idea of what the literature would reveal, based upon my own assumptions about what made a marriage either a success or “learning experience”. I had assumed that the literature would reveal that women who married later in life, after they had an education, an established career and a solid understanding of “who they were” would fare better once married because they would not be seeking completion in another person and would never have to choose between contributing to their own growth and development and the growth and development of their couple-dom.

Material accumulated from my research can be divided into three main categories: *factors, process and context*. The categories each house various themes that have been extracted from existing research to help address my own research question of what factors contribute to why a woman may leave her marriage. While separating the contributing factors into categories and then themes was a useful way to organize my

own research, the realities surrounding the decision to divorce are much more complex and intertwined than such groupings may indicate.

For each piece of research reviewed I have highlighted keywords speaking to the factors that contribute to divorce from the perspective of women. The more material has been reviewed, the more important it has been to maintain an inductive analysis and allow the themes to emerge and use the literature as a means to support those ideas, rather than impose my own ideas. This can be challenging after reviewing many articles, as I have fought my own expectations of what the literature might reveal.

I have also been cognizant to not deliberately seek out material that would further support my findings, and instead allow the literature to lead me to my findings rather than manipulate it. This has been challenging at times, and I have become more aware that the social work journals used paid a limited amount of attention to researching issues from a primarily female perspective. To bridge the gap between material needed in order to answer my research question and material available to me, I have also included research material discussing contributing factors of divorce from a male perspective, all the while being careful to separate and distinguish the findings for male and female subjects.

An important piece of content analysis is the delicate dance between the collection of data and the interpretation and meaning attributed to the data. I suppose that one could potentially go on for an extensive amount of time, maybe even indefinitely, collecting material to review; however, I believe that I did reach a point of saturation with my research and have provided a thorough overview of factors that contribute to a woman's decision to divorce.

One finding that I expected to expose was the impact of the amendment to the divorce laws in Canada in 1985. I had anticipated this amendment to have an impact on research and that there would be evidence within the literature indicating a change in what women reported to be the contributing factors in the demise of their marriage pre- and post-1985. However, in my search for articles to include in my study sample, the vast majority of the articles found were American. These are clearly not able to comment on changes to divorce laws in Canada. While I obviously did not find that the amendments made to the divorce laws in Canada to have much impact on the American research reviewed, I continue to believe that it is valid and worthwhile to consider how context (in this case the legal and political context) impacts upon how decisions are made. I do think that this would be an interesting focus area for a future research project.

A common issue in qualitative types of research is determining how much of a sample is needed in order to speak to the topic of research in a reliable and valuable way (Luborsky & Rubinstein, 1995). Throughout my own research I found myself struggling at times with how many articles would be enough to address my research question. I have striven to make my literature sample as comprehensive as possible given my time constraints; however, there are probably some articles that have been missed during my search. These omissions can best be explained by my search strategy in that I allowed the research to guide me in selecting the articles for my sample and did not direct my search to specific authors or articles. My research, from beginning to end, has been a true process of learning.

In hindsight, I believe that the findings would have been strengthened had the criteria for eligible articles been more limited. By focusing on a more specific time-

frame to draw from, the findings may have been stronger due to an alignment of social contexts women experienced during their divorce and thus the experiences would have been easier to compare. In retrospect, it is somewhat problematic to group together and establish themes in regards to women's experiences from 1965 with women's experiences from 2005 and attempt to unitize those experiences without providing an in-depth analysis of how the context of each era may impact on the identified themes.

Overall, the research would have been stronger had I discarded the attempt to address the 1985 amendment to the divorce laws in Canada once I realized the articles selected would not speak my questions around the amendment's impact on the contributing factors in women's decision to divorce. For example, women in 1965 may have been experiencing different frustration in regards to "marriage roles" compared to women in 2005. The experiences would both be grouped under the theme of "marriage roles" and greater explanation of the context behind the frustrations would have been beneficial to best explain and support the findings. I believe that the meaning attached to divorce for women may have looked different in 1965, for example, compared to 2005 due to the social context of the time. While the factors may appear to be cohesive across the decades, the meaning attached to them may look different had the social context been analyzed in greater depth. This would be an interesting focus for additional research.

For the most part, the literature that I reviewed hosted a wealth of information and perspective focused on the discussion of women and divorce. The articles by Kim & McKenry (2002) and Dolan & Hoffman (1998) , along with three others that were included in my research sample, used surveys or questionnaires as a means of gathering data. Some issues and concerns that Finch (1991) raises regarding this means of

information-gathering pertain to the idea that they do nothing to create space for participants to elaborate on their answers. They instead create pressure to form something that is complicated, like the contributing factors in divorce or happiness in marriage, into something that is simple and measurable (Finch, 1991).

Additionally, there is a risk that survey questions can be reflective of a world in which women and their roles within society are viewed through a male lens and thus will not be able to capture the true perspectives or experiences of women (Finch, 1991). By employing an interpretive theoretical perspective it is my intention and goal that by attaching a context of meaning behind the factors that were found to contribute to women's decision to divorce, a better understanding of women's positions and assessments of what is important to them in regards to their marriage can be had.

Considerations

I do believe that a content analysis has been the most effective way to carry out and address my research question because I have had access to a broad range of data which, expanded over many years and decades, would have been difficult to obtain using research participants. Employing a content analysis for my means of research has allowed me to truly immerse myself in my topic of interest and become familiar with scholars that have spent a great amount of time investigating this topic area and has also aided in drawing understanding from their experience and understanding.

A content analysis is a method of research that is highly applicable to direct practice intervention, which is useful for me since I am interested in how research informs practice. The value in using a content analysis to inform direct practice is found in the great volume of research material can be condensed into a compact, concise and

accessible document, acting as a summary of sorts. In fact, the cornerstones of the client-practitioner relationship (practitioner empathy, warmth and genuineness) have been identified through a content analysis which reviewed extensive written and taped excerpts of therapy sessions (Rubin et al., 1993).

It has been my own professional goal that this research may contribute to practitioners' understanding of the contributing factors for women in divorce initiation. As well, I wish for these ideas to aid and assist practitioners in helping couples to respond to tensions within their relationship that if not resolved may result in divorce.

Typical considerations when conducting a content analysis includes maintaining an awareness of how wording is used. Authors may use synonyms to add spice to the article, losing the frequency of some words (Stemler, 2001). Previous research that has utilized a content analysis has indicated the importance of having multiple people review the data to ensure no information has been glossed over and forgotten (Bullock, 2005; Hedberg et al., 2009). A final consideration of my methodology is around personal time constraints in conjunction with the fact that I am only one person. This has limited the amount of research feasible to be reviewed in the time span allotted to complete this research project. In order to improve the quality of the research, more time to review all existing literature is required on top of all that has been done thus far. A content analysis would best be utilized either in tandem with the component of individual interviews conducted by the researcher, or with more people to take on the task of coding and analyzing the literature.

As my research question has centered on addressing the factors that contributed to a *woman's* decision to divorce her spouse, it has been important that the research material

reviewed highlighted women's experiences and factors contributing to their decision to divorce *from their perspective*.

The research has been mostly based on quantitative-type research pieces that employed surveys and questionnaires as a means of gathering data. Also included are some qualitative literature reviews in order to inform my own research and which has been helpful in locating the context of contributing factors. In studies that did not maintain a strict "women's only" perspective and included males into the sampling, I have been sure that the results for women and men were made clear and have separated these in order to use them to inform my own research.

One major shortcoming of each of the research pieces is that there is no true way to make a clear casual relationship between all of the above-mentioned factors and divorce. Due to the connection between social location and personal experiences that speak to individual's life context, it is very difficult to streamline the area of contributing factors in divorce to a few simplistic categories. In addition to not being able to define a true casual relationship, it is also difficult to generalize these findings due to the often repetitive characteristics of population samples. Most of the studies encountered speak to the experiences of primarily white, educated, women living in North America. By virtue of their social location, these women have more choices available to them compared to women residing elsewhere in the world. Perhaps this is what also makes this research most interesting – to see what women choose for themselves when they truly have some choice. Finally, linguistics plays a large role in how the findings are discussed within the research. For example, the way that one piece of research discusses "communication" may be very different than the ways in which the same word is discussed within a

different piece of material and may hold different meaning. This may also impact the way that respondents interpret the meanings behind such words as “abuse” or “neglect”. It is possible that women may have experienced these concepts, yet attached different meanings to them and so do not identify with them. For the most part, the studies did not go into detail in outlining in their research methodology and whether or not they addressed these concerns ahead of time with their subjects.

Nevertheless, despite the limitations of this research project, it is still valuable to the understanding of the factors that contribute to women’s initiation of divorce. Women’s lived experiences as initiators of divorce are unique from men’s and further research must be continued in order to fully understand and appreciate the reasons behind their decisions.

Appendix 1. Quality assessment of quantitative research studies

1. Focused primary question
2. Sample characteristics
 - a. Size
 - b. Representational quality
 - c. Participation rates (follow-up/attrition)
3. Did the author assess the rigor and design of the study?
 - a. Level of design (ie. RCT, cohort, longitudinal)
 - b. Blindness of researchers
4. Bias and limitations of study as *noted by the author*
5. Appropriate data analysis (type of testing; confidence intervals or p-values disussed)
6. Is the author's interpretation valid in light of results of data?

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