

THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF SEPARATION AND DIVORCE

A GROUP APPROACH

PRACTICUM COMMITTEE: JOE KUYPERS
WALTER DRIEDGER
JULIE BRICKMAN

✓ SARA AXELROD
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A GROUP APPROACH

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Introduction

Although divorce is involving an ever increasing portion of our population, there has been little concerted effort in the field of social work directed at examining this significant social phenomenon. The multiple effects of divorce are felt throughout society's established structures. The cost of divorce to business manifests itself in absenteeism, alcohol abuse, decreased productivity, time loss, and a host of related problems. The courts are overcrowded with divorce petitions and recurrent litigations involving maintenance, custody, and property settlements. Health and social services increasingly confront people who are in the process of readjustment and seeking counselling and health-related services, and schools are finding more and more children from single-parent homes who may be experiencing a short term crisis which the educators are inadequately prepared for. Finally, there are large numbers of people who feel marginal and alienated by a system that stigmatizes the divorcee.

Social workers have focused their efforts on emerging family concerns. However, in the area of divorce, there appears to be a lack of appropriate interventive techniques to help individuals and families through post-divorce adjustment. A review of the current reports on separation and divorce written for the helping professions indicates that we have not come to grips with the particular problems arising out of the divorce process. There is a tendency to employ some of the traditional techniques, such as family therapy and marital

counselling in a situation which requires a markedly different approach in therapy. (as will be discussed further in Chapter IV).

This report, arising out of field practice with individuals experiencing emotional stress in the separation process, will attempt to discuss the social, cultural, and historical context of divorce in an effort to understand the emotional impact of marital disorganization on individuals in our society. As well, a survey of current interventions for divorce and post-divorce readjustment will highlight some of the new work done in this area. Accordingly, the following topics will be discussed from the literature.

1. The family in a changing society. This section will review family functions, roles, interactions, love and mate selection, and marriage as a changing process.
2. Response of the family to change. This section will apply the crisis framework in order to view both the family's and the individual's reaction to radical change.
3. The emotional impact of separation and divorce. This section will contain a discussion of the stages in divorce: the legal complexities of divorce, children in the process of divorce, and the community, kin, and friend's response to divorce
4. Separation and divorce counselling. This section will look at possible interventions both during the divorce decision period and the post-separation period.

1. The Family in a Changing Society

Introduction

Much interest has been devoted to the future of the family in discussions of separation and divorce. Is the family, as we know it today, basic to our way of life or are family functions changing so radically that we may no longer require the nuclear family in the near future? Are changing roles of husbands and wives threatening family stability? Is the high rate of divorce a threat to society? Answers to such questions constitute the major part of family theory and these, in turn, reflect our changing attitudes towards marriage, family life, and divorce. Since divorce can be viewed as a specific response to marital dissatisfaction, the following discussion will review family functions, family roles, love and mate selection, and marital interaction and adjustment.

i) Family Functions

Universal family functions are those necessary functions that are performed by the family in every society. These universal functions appear to be reproduction, maintenance, placement, and socialization of the young (Adams 1975:85). Discussions in the literature revolve around the question of universality. There is general agreement that as societies are transformed to modern, industrialized, urban cultures, so are the family functions transformed from traditional functions to modern ones.

The traditional family system contained characteristics of authoritarian power, stability and permanence, perpetuation of culture,

compliance with predetermined roles, and the carrying out, as a unit, of numerous tasks such as economic, religious, recreational and medical functions (Adams 1975:86). The changes necessitated by industrialization and the high degree of modernization have resulted in numerous traditional family functions being transferred to specialized institutional settings. Economic production has been given over to the factory and office; education has been moved to the schools; religion to the church; recreational functions to theatres, stadiums, and television; medical services have been transferred to doctors' offices and hospitals. The result has been that the family's primary function today, apart from reproduction and some degree of socialization, is to provide affection and understanding for its members. The family, too, has become a specialized unit with its major purpose now lying in gratifying people's psychological needs (Adams 1975:89).

No longer an economic production unit, the family today functions as a consumer and plays an important role in adaptation. Vincent (1967:26) presents the argument that a specialized society such as ours requires individuals who can adapt to residential movement, to varied demands, and to rapid social change. It is within the family that one has the opportunity to learn this vital aspect of modern life. Therefore, although the family has lost some of its traditional functions, it has acquired some new ones to accommodate changing forces.

With the removal of kin as a source of economic and social control, the family structure comes to rest on a very fragile basis:

the mutual feelings of two individuals (Skolnick 1977:10). This dyad, being the most intimate of social relations, is also the most vulnerable. Accompanying the radical economic and functional transformations is the ideology of individualism, asserting that the goals of the individual are to be paramount (Udry 1971:3). Thus, much individual effort is focused on acquiring personal needs from the family unit, and much of the family's effort is focused on meeting its members' needs for affection and understanding. In fact, the family unit has become a major focus of emotional life and the husband/wife relationship has taken on the most significant responsibility for adult emotional security.

The values and expectations that characterize family life; i.e., happiness, adjustment, love, pursuit of individual fulfillment, and equality pose contradictory dilemma's for family permanency. The pressure to gratify people's needs for love, companionship, and emotional fulfillment is a heavy burden for any social group to bear (Adams 1975:95). The pressure is even greater given our contradictory morality stressing, on the one hand, self-fulfillment and, on the other hand, duty, responsibility, and life-long commitment. It should not be surprising, then, given the pressure and the contradiction, to find that many do not achieve satisfying relationships within their marriage and are breaking away to try again. The increasing rate of divorce may be viewed as a solution or any adjustment mechanism to an unhappy marital relationship.

ii) Love and Marriage

The reasons people give for getting married depend, to some degree, on who chooses the spouse. When people are free to choose their own mate, as in our culture, then individual motives come into play. Romantic love, sexual needs, loneliness, desire for children, and full adult status are some elements in the decision-making process (Stephens 1963:187). People also marry because society expects it and exerts pressure to that effect. In fact, the choice for most people is not between marriage or singlehood, but between available individuals with whom to get married.

Romantic love is the reason we normally give for getting married in our society (Adams 1975:215). Defining the emotion called "love" is seldom possible and those who attempt it are "notoriously open to attack" (Goode 1959:38-47). Nonetheless, love is considered the noblest motive for marriage and all will profess love even though they may have married for reasons of family pressure, material security, or some other combination of desires (Beigel 1951:326-334). As with every institutionalized emotion, individuals are socialized to expect to marry for love, to value love, and to organize their activities in order to maximize their opportunities to experience it (Udry 1971:162).

If we do enter marriage under false pretenses, proclaiming emotions which are made intelligible and describable largely through popular songs and literary writings, and adopt this language to express our needs to marry, then it becomes evident why disillusionment in marriage is so prevalent. Romantic love, in reality, serves as

a rationale for mate-choice. Stephens (1963:206) suggests one possible reason for the introduction of romantic love as a legitimation for marriage. Used as a rationale for marriage, "romantic" love has filled an ideological vacuum caused by the disappearance of arranged marriages", where love is unnecessary for selecting a spouse and for the success or failure of a marriage.

Two significant questions must be asked at this point. Is love a good basis for mate selection, and does love produce the kinds of marriages we want? De Rougemont (1959:451-453) argues that romance is by its very nature incompatible with marriage. The very essence of romance is to thrive on obstacles, delays, separations, and dreams, whereas the basic function of marriage is to reduce and obliterate these obstacles. Beigel (1951:326-334), on the other hand, argues that, seen in proper perspective, love has not only done no harm as a prerequisite for marriage but has, in fact, saved monogamous marriage from complete disorganization. Exposed to the high tensions of modern life, people seek relief in emotional satisfactions and "love" satisfies the most urgent psychological needs of loneliness.

In that "falling in love" is the reason we give for getting married, then naturally "falling out of love" is the reason often cited for divorce. Clearly, these explanations are insufficient for both situations, but they have become publicly acceptable and intelligible explanations for our decision to marry and to separate.

iii) Marriage as a Changing Process

Marriage relationships are blends of habit and change. Habit patterns mesh and role choices become fixed; yet these routines are seldom completely fixed.

"Every marriage is an undefined situation" (Waller and Hill 1951:254). Although patterns and roles are set early in the marriage relationship, abrupt and/or gradual transitions are constantly altering former fixed patterns. Abrupt transitions include parenthood, occupational change, departure of children, residential moves, retirement, and death (Adams 1975:246). These transitions demand new roles and adjustment, and some preparation can be anticipated and planned for to maximize coping abilities. Gradual transitions are those changes that cannot be fixed at a given point in time, yet nevertheless influence relations between husbands and wives (Adams 1975:249). Gradual transitions are those intrapsychic and biological changes through which people grow in their developmental cycle. Physical beauty, diminishing energy, and personality changes are some examples of gradual transitions. These changes, occurring slowly, necessitate adjustments and adaptations if the marriage is to be successful for both partners.

One important source of change in marriage is role differentiation. Conventional or traditional roles find the husband dominant and the wife subordinate. The Judeo-Christian attitudes towards marriage have been imprinted in our society and on our distinct socialization practices. Masculinity, "expressed largely through physical courage, toughness, competitiveness and aggressiveness" stands in sharp contrast to femininity, "expressed through gentleness,

expressiveness, and responsiveness" (Skolnick 1977:223). The separation of home and work have had a strong impact on these two stereotypes of men and women.

Jessie Bernard (1972) concludes that men and women experience their marriage relationships very differently. Her data supports the premise that marriage is, in fact, better for men than for women. In the past, marriage has represented for the woman a career in itself, and the foundation for personal and social identity (Washbourn 1976:80). More currently, the blurring of sexual roles, or "equal allocation of instrumental and expressive activities" (Zelditch 1955:338) and behaviors moved away from traditional-determined role expectations in favour of role choice. With alternatives and choices of husband-wife roles, it is incumbent upon the couple to define their roles in the family unit. Conflict is likely to arise in negotiating agreements. Problems such as: whose career will have priority? Will the wife relocate according to husband's needs? Will the wife have two jobs; i.e. career and home, etc.? pose problems for the modern marriage.

Since husband-wife relations do not remain static over the family's life cycle, such issues as power and decision-making, financial needs and desires, differing recreational requirements, sexual adjustments, and community involvement must be negotiated time and time again. Many interactional adjustment problems can be resolved through communication. However, Udry (1971:25) states that the general belief that open communication leads to marital stability is not supported by the facts and perhaps selective

communication is the key to adjusted marriages. When a married couple can no longer communicate to each other their needs and desires, the relationship may be headed towards disintegration and a crisis state may often ensue for the individuals concerned.

2. Response of the Family to Change and Challenge

When a marriage relationship becomes stressful and unsatisfying, marital disorganization often results. This section will look at the crisis experienced by the individual and the family, and at a theory of loss and change in order to identify elements of family disorganization and a number of personal reactions to it.

i) The Family in Crisis

Farber (1964:403-406) discusses the "crisis process" for families experiencing and responding to specific problems. The five stages of family adjustment to crisis are:

(1) An attempt to handle the challenge within the existing role structure. The family views the crisis as a temporary condition.

(2) If the situation is not righted, the problem is faced and the family commitment is tested.

(3) In the third stage, the problems become public and extrafamilial ties are altered.

(4) Role reorientation, or a new set of mutual expectations is developed and accepted by the family members.

(5) The last stage of adjustment to a crisis is "freezing out" or removal of the crisis-causing individual from the home so that the family unit can get on with its daily living.

Many crisis, however, do not fall neatly within this process. Marital separation is often the first stage in the process, followed by an admission that a critical change is occurring and subsequent reorganization is necessary. Furthermore, marital separation is often a voluntary decision by one member of the couple, and an imposition on the other. The degree of trauma experienced by various people in the family may vastly differ.

Burgess and Locke (Adams 1975:342) define a crisis as "any decisive change which creates a situation for which the habitual behavior patterns of a person or a group are inadequate". It is the response to an event, not the event itself, that constitutes a crisis for the family. Moreover, the response to an unexpected event is likely to evoke a substantially higher degree of disorganization than the response to an expected one, simply because of the lack of preplanning. Adaptation to the new situation is often carried out haphazardly and in a trial-and-error method.

The likelihood of crisis and trauma is greater if the stressor event originates from within the family as opposed to outside stressors such as flood or economic depression. The family is better able to withstand internal stresses "if it is embedded in a large kin network that can absorb some of the shock" (Adams 1975:343) Therefore, an unexpected external event is easier to cope with since the family unit is threatened by forces outside of its control.

The state of equilibrium reached in marriage is usually one of conflict and resolution. Events and reactions to them occur with predictable regularity and life assumes a certain tempo which people know, are secure with, and can respond to automatically. The element of predictability, however, does not presume that such a marital relationship is any more satisfying to family members. Small adjustments and revisions occur constantly and are adapted to within the security of a continuing relationship. While larger adjustments in the relationship may produce a certain amount of stress, the other spheres in the couple's life, such as kin, friends, and status in the community, remain relatively stable and undisturbed.

However, marital separation produces considerable disorganization for the individuals in the process because every realm in the person's and the family's established life patterns is disturbed. The following section briefly review the crisis response to the separation experience.

ii) The Individual in Crisis

According to the crisis literature, a crisis is defined as a "turning point" in the life of an individual (Getz 1974:16). The person faces a critical problem which cannot be easily resolved by utilizing "customary methods of problem solving in that past life experiences have not equipped the individual to cope with the current upset in his/her steady state (Caplan 1961, Korner 1973, and Rapoport 1965) The search for new coping mechanisms often builds

tension and anxiety if relief is not readily found. In turn, the more frantic and desperate the search becomes, the less likely it is that satisfactory solutions will be found (Aguilera 1974:1). Therefore, an unexpected event such as divorce or premature death of a spouse, which threatens a person's basic lifestyle, may evolve into a state of crisis mainly because the new situation calls for responses and perceptions which are unfamiliar and unpracticed.

Rather than emphasizing only the negative aspects, certain authors view crisis as a time of change, containing both anxiety and possibility. Sheehy (1976:19-31) writes that "it is a crucial period of both increased vulnerability and heightened potential", where within the passage from one state to another new responses are practiced and different interpretations applied, enabling the individual to grow and adapt to a new situation. Separation and divorce demand that radical changes be negotiated because, often, every aspect in an individual's life is affected, and reorganization entails not a return to old functioning but a rebirth into a different form of life.

Aguilera and Messick suggest that there are certain stressful situations which are potentially critical and through which certain people must reluctantly pass before an equilibrium is restored. Two events which are invariably stressful are bereavement and marital separation (Weiss 1974:213). The major difference being that whereas there are some institutionalized patterns for dealing with death, few exist for marital separation. In fact, separation, unaided by cultural supports, and socially stigmatized, can often be more problematic. The

choice to separate is also a clear rejection of the spouse and, therefore, emotionally damaging.

Marris (1975) explains that people acquire new experiences by placing them within an already existing structure of meaning. Searching for similarities which appear in the new situation and matching them with older experiences allows for a continuity of meaning in life. Moreover, meanings and purposes are learned in the context of particular relationships and settings which cannot then be easily detached or translated to a different context.

When a pattern of relationships is disrupted in any way for which we are not fully prepared, the thread of continuity in the interpretation of life becomes attenuated or altogether lost. The loss may fundamentally threaten the integrity of the structure of meaning on which this continuity rests, and cannot be acknowledged without distress. (Marris 1975:24).

Separation, then, disrupts continuity since the experience itself harbours a "newness" which is unlike any past experience. The existing structure of meaning becomes obsolete, unable to adapt to the new experience, as both the context and the relationship are irredeemable. A totally new context must now provide meaning.

Hart concurs with this view and further explains that the foreseen passages of adulthood are, to a large degree, universal and publicly supported. Thus, adaptation from one role to another is facilitated through prelearning, preparation, and public support. She states:

When one steps in paths well worn by preceeding travellers, there is an abundance of experience to draw on. . . and socially normal transitions are likely to benefit from the existence of institutionalized mechanisms for handling change. . . Some

status passages may constitute a disruption to, or even a reversal of an expected sequence; when the individual encounters an irregular or undesired status passage, his handling of the situation will be impeded by the relative absence of normative regulation, as well as by his own lack of preparation for it. (Hart 1976:12)

The behavioral manifestations of the crisis following a separation include sleeping irregularities, memory difficulties, poorer health, greater loneliness, and lowered work efficiency (Goode 1956:194). Carter and Glick's current survey (1976:336-339) demonstrates empirically that separated individuals have considerably higher rates of mental hospital treatment than those whose marriages are intact, as well as higher rates of imprisonment, chronic hospitalization, motor accident deaths, and suicide. To this list, Weiss (1975:50-51) adds appetite disturbance, irritability, increased consumption of alcohol and barbituates, desolation, and heightened euphoria.

In order to gain fuller insight into the state of crisis for the individual in the process of divorce, we will refer back to discussions of the marriage relationship and its meaning for people. People invest a major portion of their time and energy in their marriage. For most, this relationship effectively determines who they are, how they behave, and what they feel (Lee 1971:30). Marriage often determines where people live, where they work, who their friends are, where they vacation, what their specialized roles within the family are, and their status in the community.

In short, marriage shapes the person's total identity and, thus, marital separation disrupts every element in the person's life. There is a distinct gap in the literature on those people who

are able to maintain their own individuality within the marriage, and, consequently, how they handle separation and divorce.

3. The Emotional Impact of Separation and Divorce

This section will discuss the experiences accompanying separation and divorce, and will review the stages in the process, the legal aspects and barriers to divorce, the effects of divorce on children and reactions of kin, friends and community.

The first comprehensive study on the emotional impact of separation/divorce was Good's report on a sample of divorced women in Detroit (1956). The emotional consequences of divorce with which this paper is concerned was referred to by Goode as trauma. He found the period immediately following the separation to be the point of maximum trauma rather than the time of the legal decree.

...the filing of the suit is indeed a formal, public act, but the public concerned is an essentially distant, even artificial, entity not nearly so important as the social groups within which the future divorcee is known. The separation is a public act for the reference groups involved, even though it has no legal standing (Goode 1956:188).

Weiss (1975:4) concurs with this observation, explaining that although the divorce, as a legal act does have great emotional significance, it is separation that "disrupts the total structure of the individual's social and emotional life". Hunt (1977:4) writes that the moment of separation is a severe shock to most people because it is a wrenching transition from the known past into an unknown future. The separation period, states Bequaert

(1976:28) is a most painful and chaotic time, with many women feeling "...that the end of their marriages was like a death from which they would gradually recover, after a period of mourning".

Thus, it is during the initial period of separation that the "steady state" of affairs is disrupted and the individual experiences a state of crisis. Within this transition from being married to being single, new resources, different interpretations, and new meanings must be incorporated. However, since new experiences are most easily interpreted in terms of what is already known, the new situation cannot be adapted to easily or quickly.

A number of authors have focused on the processes of grief and mourning in an effort to understand the meaning of loss. Barton (1977:107) writes, "the process of grieving is a necessary part of the reaction to all levels of loss". This is not an attempt to draw out the similarities of death and divorce, because many differences do, indeed, exist. It is an effort to understand the mechanisms of loss. Marris proposes that reactions to all forms of loss or change, where a familiar pattern of relationship has been disrupted, are similar in nature. Furthermore, he notes that if we can understand grief and mourning, we can more clearly recognize the process of adjustment inherent in all situations of change.

One crucial aspect in discussions of marital separations and the process of mourning is the lack of ritual or ceremony to guide the newly separated. Our society has no ritual forms to express sorrow, loss, and personal crisis outside of the funeral. The grief reactions to a separation or a divorce are expected to be worked

out alone and without benefit of traditional rites (Bohannon 1971: 43). Ritual acts and conventional behavior in mourning articulate the process of grieving and bestow a specific status complete with rights and obligations. It is a recognition that the individual is in a state of transition and, therefore, in need of external guidelines to ease the stress and to allow the process of loss to be worked through. Separation and divorce are not as yet accorded this recognition.

1) Stages in the Process of Separation and Divorce

Bohannon (1971) sees the trauma of divorce as arising out of six different, yet concurrent experiences: (1) the emotional divorce; (2) the legal divorce; (3) the economic divorce; (4) the co-parental divorce; (5) the community divorce; and (6) the psychic divorce. These six distinct categories work together to create emotional distress and crisis.

The emotional divorce is the first one that occurs in the disintegrating marriage. Attraction and trust for one another are replaced with ambivalence and the partners often seek alternative ways to make the relationship work. Rationalizations for staying together may be employed, such as the children's welfare, financial considerations, wrong time of the year, too close to an anniversary, etc (Abbey & Owston 1977, tape). Wiseman (1974:206) states that the homeostasis in the marriage at this point may be inadequate to cope with more than the minimal of life stresses, and any major event can upset this delicate balance and throw the system into a marital crisis. The stressful event may be one that a stronger system could

accommodate, but the marriage that has already begun to deteriorate will often collapse simply because living together is the problem. But it is the verbal declaration that the relationship is problematic that dissolves the facade (and accompanying rationalization) and the individuals begin to fantasize about being single again.

This initial phase is marked with fear of what others may think of the separation. The recurring worry over how the children, the parents, the friends and the spouse will react to the news creates much anxiety. Coupled with the anxiety is a feeling of excitement that the heavy burden of the marriage will finally be lifted. Denial gives way to anger and hostile expression of all the hidden problems. Aggression may be employed to convince oneself that the relationship is really so bad that termination is indeed justified.

Viewing the process in stages, this would constitute the first phase of divorce, or "the pre-divorce decision period". Kressel and Deutsch (1977) discuss this phase as being a preliminary skirmish where marital dissatisfaction is acutely felt. Attempts at reconciliation may occur and there is a general decline of intimacy. The facade of the good marriage may even be lifted for public perusal.

The second stage of the process involves the decision period. This is a time when one or both partners firmly decide to divorce and physical separation usually occurs. If the decision to leave was favored by one party and not the other different reactions are likely to occur for the two. The reaction of the one who leaves may be one of euphoria and activity while the one who is left behind will often react with grief and despair.

Following closely in the process is the third stage, where a period of mourning, with feelings of anger, ambivalence, guilt, and self-reproach occur, followed in the fourth stage by a return to some kind of equilibrium or reorientation of lifestyle and identity. Hunt (1977:31) notes that for some, the breakup of a seemingly good marriage comes suddenly and without forewarning, but for most, the moment of separation arrives after a prolonged and agonizing process. By the time the couple separates, their fondness for each other will have dissipated. Some even question if it ever existed. But with love seemingly gone, a sense of being emotionally tied to each other may persist (Weiss 1975:37). Divorce does not necessarily terminate a marriage entirely, as the partners are bound together by practical aspects such as children, property, finances, all possessing an emotional content (Toomin 1972).

Separation distress arises out of the loss of attachment to a particular other, and is often at the root of much of the emotional ambivalence. Bowlby writes:

Each person builds a working model of the world and of himself in it, with the aid of which he perceives events, forecasts the future, and constructs his plane. A feature of this model is a definite notion of who his attachment figures are, where they may be found, and how they may be expected to respond. (Bowlby 1973:203).

Bowlby further explains that of the many fear-arousing situations a child or adult can foresee, none is likely to be more frightening than the possibility that an attachment figure will be absent or, more generally, unavailable when wanted (Bowlby 1973:201). Thus, separation distress stems from the inaccessibility of a specific person, the spouse, rather than from being alone. Distress may appear as tension, sadness, pining for the lost figure, anger at being

abandoned, and loneliness.

Some may initially experience relief and euphoria, feeling free to do things that were unacceptable while in the marriage. The person may buy different clothes, change hairstyles, smoke and drink, or luxuriate in activities which were fantasized about prior to the separation. This heightened euphoria is often short-lived as realization hits that there is no one with whom to share these pleasurable events. However, Toomin suggests that euphoria, especially in the extreme, may represent an avoidance of depression and grief. It is usually a fragile, unstable state that can give way to profound gloom and withdrawal when the realities of daily life are faced.

The person left, usually the woman, (although this pattern is rapidly changing and men are left behind with the children), experiences a flow of feelings which are difficult to control and difficult to anticipate. The "leaver", too, may often experience ambivalence about the decision and may attempt to restore the relationship. This inability to take control of the environment perpetuates the crisis state.

Weiss (1975:79) states that people often become enmeshed in obsessive review and find their thoughts repeatedly returning to the events of their marriage, trying to identify precisely what went wrong and how events might have turned out had they acted differently. There is little energy left to be effective socially, at work, or with one's children, or to begin to reconstruct life actively. Concentration is usually focused on the negative aspects of the marriage, with an inability to extract any positive meanings or memories.

A general panic reaction ensues which immobilizes and renders the person helpless to deal with the incoming sensations of guilt, abandonment, tension and euphoria, and anger. Loneliness is paramount as the individual may have a sense of being half a person, or empty as if a crucial part of his/her being is missing. There may be a feeling of nostalgia upon reminiscing some of the good, warm times, and a fear of never having such good feelings again.

Coupled with the emotional intensity of inner brooding are the pragmatic demands created by the marriage breakdown. Issues of child custody, visitation, property settlements and financial arrangements, as well as the imperative need to learn to adjust very quickly to a new world, contribute to feelings of inadequacy.

ii) The Law and Lawyers in Divorce

This section will discuss the legal process of divorce and its subsequent impact on the family. Although in times of stability families are not experienced primarily as legal institutions, the law does participate actively in family affairs during divorce. The fundamental purpose served by the legal process is to create remarriageability by altering statuses and dividing property. However, lawyers and judges are also delegated a host of other matters; (i.e., child custody, maintenance fees, counselling, and attending to distraught clients), some of which may be outside the competence of the legal profession.

The Law Reform Commission (1975) provides us with the following historical overview of divorce laws.

Roman law asserted the freedom of divorce, marriages could be terminated at any time either by mutual consent or even unilaterally. Post-Roman divorce law of Western Europe passed through four distinct phases. The first stage, ending around the 10th century, regarded marriage and divorce as private affairs concerning only the couple and their families. A husband could rid himself of his wife by sending her back to her family with a written statement putting an end to the marriage.

From the 10th to 16th centuries, marriage came under the jurisdiction of the Church which regarded marriage as a sacrament and, as such, indissoluble. "What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder" (Mathew 19:6). Marriages were subject to annulment, but once consummated, the contract endured until death. A separation from "bed and board" could be had, but this did not sever the marriage contract.

From the second half of the 16th century lasting well into the 20th century, marriage and divorce passed from church to state in most Protestant countries. Marriage, no longer a sacrament, was now regarded as a "worldly thing" and divorce was regarded as a penalty for marital misconduct. Divorce could be obtained on the grounds of adultery and desertion.

Midway through this century, a fourth phase began. Society commenced to question the requirement of finding fault in one party and viewed marriage breakdown as a legitimate ground to terminate a marriage.

In Canada, the Divorce Act of 1968 finally provided Canadians with a uniform statute applicable throughout the provinces and regulating the circumstances in which persons can obtain a divorce. Prior to this Act, the B.N.A. Act assigned exclusive authority over marriage and divorce to the Federal Parliament and left the provinces to enact divorce procedures (Abernathy & Arcus 1977). Two major areas of grounds for divorce now exist: matrimonial offence (fault), and marriage breakdown. (See Appendix I on Grounds for Divorce) Both of these areas produce problems. The first problem with using matrimonial offence as the ground for divorce is that it is seldom really the reason for the divorce. As the Canadian Law Reform Commission (1976) states, "it has long been recognized that matrimonial offences such as adultery have in most cases only been used as a pretext to obtain a divorce. They have not been the cause of marriage breakdown, but the result" (1976:31). Moreover, it gives people extraordinary powers to coerce and blackmail each other in ways they would seldom dream of were such behavior not fostered by the system. Couples in conflict are at the mercy of their lawyers and the court which often makes the divorce complicated, costly, and ugly. Unresolved battles around child custody, property, and finances often become the weapons used in the divorce arena. And, in an atmosphere of precision and formality, the adversary system does not possess the mechanisms, nor the time, to alleviate the distress it provokes.

The "no-fault" divorce, designed to facilitate divorce without the traumatic burden of guilt (Gettleman & Markowitz 1974:158)

maintains that any man or woman can petition for a divorce on the ground that the marriage has suffered irremediable breakdown. This still empowers the court to pass judgement on the definition of "marriage breakdown" in the case where one party claims the marriage as being viable. Therefore, the success of the no-fault divorce depends to a large degree on the cooperation and mutual consent of husband and wife leaving basically untouched the problems of the contested cases. The Canadian Law Reform Commission (1975) recommends that the court should grant a reasonable time to allow attempts at conciliation or secure an independent investigation of the facts by qualified support staff attached to the court.

Another problem of major importance is that lawyers are generally untrained in family psychology and do not possess the skills nor the desire to deal with the emotional state of their clients. Bohannon (1971:45) reports that divorce and criminal lawyers rank at the bottom of the legal hierarchy simply because the emotional atmosphere and the energy required to resolve battles is so great for such small financial returns.

Shipman (1977) addresses some of these issues and urges integration of court proceedings with counselling services. As the no-fault divorce gains acceptance, lawyers and judges are looking to marriage and divorce counsellors to assess family relationships and make recommendations accordingly. Two areas of great significance arise out of this type of integration: (a) greater opportunities for safeguarding the rights of the individuals, and (b) providing therapeutic intervention with the cooperation of attorneys.

Weiss and Collada (1977) describe the family court procedures of Santa Clara County (California) whereby marriage and family counsellors work jointly with the court to resolve litigated visitation, custody and maintenance disputes. The separated family is reunited to assist the parents in negotiating an acceptable agreement. Following this session, the attorneys involved in the case are invited into the interview and the counsellor describes the solutions reached. A draft prepared by the attorneys is then brought to the judge for approval. The primary goal is conflict resolution by the parents themselves in an atmosphere conducive to this kind of process.

It is widely recognized that with respect to the emotional aspects of the divorce process, the role and responsibility of the lawyer is ambiguous. Sabalis et al. (1977) remark that there are few instances in civil law when there is as much of an emotional component as in divorce proceedings. It is important to have some knowledge of the psychological factors involved since settlements, both financial and property, can become new battlegrounds leading to intensified pain and anger.

It is clear that both lawyers and their clients are seduced by laws placing them "in a tough guy posture which frequently backfires and hurts everybody" (Gellelema & Markowitz 1974:185). There is some movement now to teach people to file their own divorce which proves less costly and faster when both spouses can agree on settlements. The "no fault divorce" and the "right" to divorce, recently adopted in Sweden, are gaining acceptance as alternatives to repressive laws stemming from archaic attitudes based on guilt

and punishment. The legal process should, ideally, enable couples to separate quickly and with the least amount of trauma possible. It is evident that lawyers, for the most part, are in need of some assistance from professional counsellors who are trained to work with people in crisis. Presently, the laws have not yet changed radically enough to allow for a healthy and growth promoting separation.

Attitudinal changes are necessary to revise the myth that divorce is destructive to society. If, as some sociologists suggest, the bedrock of society is built upon strong family systems, then our divorce laws must change so as to permit unhappy marriages to end quickly and cleanly. Despert (1962:5) notes that little good can be done by forcing a couple to remain married when they have tried and are unable to make the necessary adjustment. "Some divorces are, like some surgery, the only cure". A man and woman may have been unable to make a success of their marriage, but they can yet make a success of divorce. The legal process must reflect this attitude and cease to act as a barrier for forming new and better relationships.

iii) Divorce and Children

Numerous myths of the disastrous effects of divorce on children are being challenged in the current literature. The popular beliefs of the 1950's, suggesting that children of divorce lack discipline, become the delinquents of society, are subject to innumerable mental health hazards, and are on the whole to be pitied, have changed radically in the past decade. Current

studies suggest that most children can negotiate the transition from a two-parent household to a one-parent household quite successfully. Despert (1962:29) writes that not ^{necessarily} the divorce but ^{perhaps} the unsuccessful marriage is the destructive experience for the child. In the marriage that is emotionally sterile and empty for the parents, children may experience divided loyalties, become insecure and anxious about the uncertain and unexpected.

Bohannon remarks that the most enduring pain of divorce for the spouses is likely to come from the co-parental divorce. Guilt and worry about the children's development and future add significantly to the emotional stress of the parting couple. Some may come to resent their children for adding to their burdens in daily living. Furthermore, the parents have to deal with this aspect precisely when their own emotional condition is apt to be at its poorest. Krantzler (1973:172) writes that children react to major changes much like adults. They may engage in unfamiliar and outrageous behaviors during the initial period of confusion in their lives. Cassidy (1977:62), in a recent book, directed to men who are divorcing suggests that "the period following a separation can be an opportunity for growth for children if parents allow them to use it". He notes that younger children may regress to earlier behaviors, older ones may provoke fighting, some may withdraw into silence, become physically ill. If these emotional transitions are understood, viewed as being natural, and given support by parents, children can emerge, and usually do, without lasting traumas.

The custodial parent is faced with daily, round-the-clock responsibilities. The non-custodial parent's relationship with the children undergoes radical changes, with the basic conditions in ways of interacting and the role of parenting being transformed swiftly. Daily events in the children's lives are no longer a part of the parent's immediate experience. The goals of the parted spouses for their children may oftentime diverge, and disagreements about every phase of childraising may harbour new fighting and legal interventions.

All reports conclude that the most devastating effects of divorce on children arise out of the emotional and legal warfare between parents. Uncontested custody cases are usually the norm, as parents have jointly agreed on the matter before appearing in court. However, when both parents want custody, the court has ultimate power in the final decision. Alexander (1977) remarks that children under 14 years of age are not consulted nor have the right to legal counsel to represent their own best interests. Despert writes:

In most courts today the judge has no facilities to aid him in reaching a decision in the best interests of the children... The judge is virtually compelled to limit himself to deciding a point of law, or at best to do justice between two adult adversaries, without regard to what constitutes justice to their children (Despert 1962:207).

Finally, and perhaps most important, is the simple fact that divorce does not obliterate parental roles, obligations, and feelings.

Parents become kin to each other by virtue of the mixture of their genes within the child, and divorce does not end this relationship. As co-parents, the parted spouses usually remain intimately involved with the child and, through the child, with each other. For years there are continual meetings about visits, school, camp, health problems, and future plans which bind the co-parents together. They will meet each other on the child's birthdays, at school plays, graduations, and later at weddings, births, and grandchildren's birthday parties. This web of connectedness often results in anger and antagonism during the initial phase of divorce and sometimes even years later. Some co-parents can eventually meet as friends who share a common bond -- the child -- and common concern.

A number of family agencies, aware of problems that children in the process of divorce are experiencing, are now setting up specific programs to aid the children and their parents. Group counselling for children and group meetings for separated parents and children are bringing to light issues and concerns which are crucial to the child's welfare and to a growth promoting relationship with their parents.

7. Kin, Friends, and Community

When a couple separates, the reactions of friends, family, and community play a significant role in the subsequent adjustment of the individuals.

Weiss (1975:127) remarks that although relationships with kin differ from family to family, generally the association is

"close, but not too close" or somewhat guarded and unintrusive. Most family networks maintain a fairly regular pattern of contact, and keep up with each other's major life changes when they are geographically separated, and somewhat closer contact when living in close proximity. Because kin tend not to be informed about private matters within the nuclear family, news of separation may come as a shock. Individuals often dread breaking the news to them, anticipating questions, blame, pleas for reconciliation, and hurt.

Goode (1956:12-13) observed that the kinship structure, including close friends, fails to define clearly an acceptable behavior pattern for the divorce situation. There are no ethical imperatives for relatives and friends to furnish material support, emotional support, nor any clarity as to where the members of a divorcing family ought to go.

Some family members, having had no immediate experience with divorce, may react in anger, bewilderment, disapproval, and will immediately gather together in attempts to reconcile the couple. Some families may react with sympathy and support to one spouse while condemning the other. Divorce can diminish one's standing in the family. In fact, Anspach (1976) suggests that visiting former spouse's kindred drops very low, while contact with close kindred is more frequent, especially during the initial phases of separation. Various arrangements involving kin may have to be altered. The son-in-law who became partner in his in-law's business, the older parent residing with children, the holiday get-togethers which became an integral part of family life all have to undergo redefinition and ultimate changes.

Social isolation is a recurrent theme both in the literature and in personal reports of divorcees. Marital breakdown often induces people to move to a different city. But even for those remaining in their own environment, divorce causes alteration in friendship groups leading to loneliness and isolation.

Hart's data (1967:167-171) suggests that in a disintegrating marriage, both the couple and their friends tend to withdraw from joint social activity. The lull in interaction may often deter friends from socializing. Being newly separated, most feel they can no longer participate in a normal social life because they don't share common interests with their married friends. The emotional state, the lack of time, money, and energy to entertain or visit, added to which is a pervasive feeling of being different or outsiders in a couples' oriented society, will often find the divorcee socially secluded. Many couples, particularly during the child-raising years, maintain a small network of friends, many of whom are highly mobile. Some have segregated friendship networks; i.e., husband has work friends and wife has her own friends and only two or three couples with whom the couple socialize together. With the separation, this circle of friends is often divided. As well, women who are dependent on their husbands for all their social activities, which have revolved around his job, find they are no longer contacted (Hart 1976:163). Likewise, the husband who has depended on his wife to arrange their social life may find himself unable to plan social activities alone.

Friends may experience anxiety and fear, stirring them to reevaluate their own marriages upon witnessing the couple who are actually doing something about their dissatisfaction. Some may become bored with the lengthy details of the separation and the events of the marriage. Some experience conflict over allegiances and support one spouse only. Some may withdraw immediately, while others will provide support until common concerns and interests are no longer shared. Weiss (1975:155) writes, "The loss of friends always hurts. Even when the friends were primarily the spouse's friends, rejection by them is hard to accept. Rejection by one's own friends hurts even more". The status passage from being married to being divorced tends to be a very lonely business. Hart (1976:119) states that this may be due to a failure on the part of the individual to draw actively on the advice and support of close kin, or it may be due to kin and friends' withdrawal of support either because they disapprove of the status passage or because they lack the appropriate expertise to cope with it.

Feelings of being an outsider are pervasive among the formerly married. These feelings are reinforced by the mass media's use of the "happy couple" and the intact family in advertising. Singles often view themselves as occupying a position on the periphery of social life, having little in common with the majority (Hart 1976: 171-2). To be a full participant in our "couples" oriented society is most difficult for individuals who are no longer part

of a pair. The solution sought most often and with great urgency is to find another mate as soon as possible so as to allow reintegration into the mainstream of life. In the meantime, divorcees have to find new communities of people who, like themselves, share similar concerns and can offer emotional support and a new social life. The problem in finding this new community is compounded by the general lack of knowledge on the part of the married population as to where such organizations are to be found. Usually, people do not bother learning about the process of divorce nor about the social activities of divorcees. In the midst of emotional turmoil, people do not know where to turn or with whom to talk. Many of the separated people find a new world, complete with its own value structure and culture, existing and thriving in the midst of the larger society. It is a world where singles meet, socialize, date, and often find eligible partners to marry. However, it is also a world largely unknown to the married couples and, therefore, alien to the novice divorcee.

4. Separation and Divorce Counselling

Caplan (in Getz 1974:331) states that the goal in crisis counselling is to help the individual return to the level of functioning prior to the crisis state. The ideal goal in counselling the newly separated is to help individuals encounter the crisis in a way that will enable them to reach a higher level of functioning than was possible prior to the separation. The crisis period demands a new life style and new interpretations of the world and self. In separation and divorce counselling, the two most likely points of intervention appear to be: (a) helping the couple reach a final decision, and (b) post-separation adjustment counselling.

i. Separation Counselling

As the possibility of divorce becomes real and threatening, the purpose of counselling is to help the couple make the decision in a more rational and less destructive manner.

Toomin's (1972) structured separation approach is a form of crisis intervention counselling employed to minimize the shock reaction so common when separation is sudden and unexpected. The major goal is to help separating individuals understand their relationship, resolve their conflicts, decide on their future relationship, and grow through the separation process. The underlying assumption is that it is important to work through the separation carefully so that little unfinished business remains to interfere with their continuing relationship after separation, or in new relationships with others.

The separating couple is asked to make a three month commitment to explore themselves and their relationship before making a final decision. They are required to live apart during this time and not to arrange for any permanent decisions as to custody, property, and finances. The couple may get together only when both agree to do so. This period of separation allows the couple to contemplate and to face the real issues of living apart, to explore new freedoms, and, finally, to arrive at a decision based on a rational, fully explored, experiential life situation. The rationality inherent in this approach may come too late for some couples, and be too long a time period for those who already are secure with the decision to separate.

The counsellor's role is to structure the separation and to provide a safe space for the individuals to express the full range of emotions as well as to encourage individual freedom and risk-taking.

Shneidman (1972) maintains that an adequate period of crisis intervention need not exceed three months. Toomin's model of intervention is also based on the affective cycle lasting three months. Within this period the initial shock, depression, and/or heightened euphoria and increased energy are experienced and worked through to aid readjustment to the new status.

Kressler and Deutsch (1977), attempting to catalogue interventions unique to separation and divorce counselling, found two distinct foci: (a) helping clients decide whether or not to divorce, and (b) assisting clients to negotiate a final divorce. In the first stage, the therapists' roles are to develop a sense

of trust and confidence, to gather information as to the nature of the request for help (as often the client may request marriage counselling when, in fact, the real desire is to end the marriage). Therapist impartiality is crucial as bias towards one of the partners may destroy any effective outcome. During the decision-making phase, the therapeutic task is not to deny anger but reduce the level of hostility to more manageable levels, to clarify real sources of anger, to shift the focus from other to self by relabeling accusations, to encourage positive interaction and to concentrate on practical matters to be negotiated. Some therapists prefer to employ couples groups to inhibit destructive fighting; others prefer the format of co-therapy to enhance therapists' impartiality and to provide a model of constructive methods for resolving differences.

Once the decision to divorce has been made, the therapist's goals are to weaken attitudinal impediments to the divorce by addressing fears and apprehensions, to challenge the notion of one partner's shortcomings and blame for the failure of the marriage, to provide support and encourage growth. Joint sessions may no longer be necessary. However, some therapists favor seeing the separating couple together all the way through the process. (although this rarely lasts very long). Some sessions may utilize the support of family and friends as well.

As pointed out previously, problems arising out of the legal divorce can be mitigated by utilizing appropriate expertise, including marriage and divorce counsellors. Weiss and Colada (1977) suggest that decisions around visitation and custody, usually in the domain

of the courts, can be made more insightful with the aid of professionals who work closely with the family and have a better grasp of the total situation. The separation of the legal and the psychological aspects of divorce can, therefore, be reunited to provide a holistic service.

Of special interest is a program called "Friend of the Court" (Benedek 1977) operating in Michigan which was set up primarily to protect the rights of children in divorce. The primary objective is enforcement and collection of child support payments. However, utilizing a team approach, social workers, child psychiatrists, and attorneys work together for the benefit of all family members. They provide pre-divorce, post-divorce, and crisis intervention counselling.

ii) Post-Separation Adjustment Counselling

Individual crisis counselling following a marital separation necessitates unique forms of interventive skills arising out of a thorough understanding of the divorce process. Korner (1973) writes that the counsellor must be aware that events are occurring with overwhelming rapidity, and the main goal is one of helping the individual create constructive changes as rapidly as possible. Krantzler (1974:46) stresses that it may be important to explore the small accomplishments of daily living, seemingly trivial yet deserving notice, already happening in the person's life. It is usually necessary to aid the newly separating with child care arrangements, locating community supports, acting as a go-between with the lawyer to help the client understand the legal process, and, generally, help to reduce the practical impacts before going

on to the emotional disorganization. This, of course, means that the client's needs are acted upon as they are defined by the client. It is totally useless to help the individuals work through separation distress if they are in immediate need of practical assistance to manage the daily routine more effectively.

The analogy of mourning to the process of separation contains numerous parallels in attempting to secure a rational model for helping individuals in crises. Peter Marris emphasizes that with any disruptive life change, the process of recovery must be allowed to take its natural course. He suggests that, "...we need to allow some kind of moratorium on other business, so that people can give their minds to repairing the thread of continuity in their attachments" (Marris 1975:160).

This moratorium, translated into the process of separation, would permit people to work with the process rather than feeling pressed to seek new relationships in a great hurry. Simply offering reassurance that the crisis is natural and that resolution will evolve out of the process may allow people to gain new meaning of the emotional turbulence itself, and begin to construct a new life even sooner.

Weiss's (1974) "Seminars for the Separated" provide people with cognitive information, support, and an assured place in a temporary community. The cognitive materials are presented in lecture form to provide basic theory and data about the process in general. The aim of the lectures is to assure individuals that their reaction is both common and understandable when viewed in

the framework of various disciplines; i.e., psychology, sociology, social work and family studies. Separation distress and the ensuing emotional reactions of fear and ambivalence are explored, providing people with a better understanding of the separation process and the expected path it will follow. People can often tolerate distress and upset if they are provided a coherent explanation of why they are feeling as they are and how the process finally evolves into a potentially greater growth producing state.

The element of support, so crucial in any crisis, is of particular importance in separation. Divorce causes not only a change in the couple's living arrangements, but alters relations in the community. Some friends, some family members, and some community functions cease to provide support to the single-again person. At the same time, new friendships and new communities are not yet established. The smaller groups formed following the formal lecture provide the individuals with a temporary community of people in the "same boat". Krantzler's counselling groups enable participants to experience the

"I am not alone" feeling that is so essential for recovery. Each member of the group comes to see that, while his or her experience is in many ways unique, there are nevertheless common threads uniting them all (Krantzler 1973:29).

The group also provides a safe place to try new behaviors, to take risks, and to start building a new identity. The group is the support system, but ultimately, individuals recognize the fact that loneliness and being alone is a reality which must be worked through.

Goldman and Coane (1977) describe family therapy with the whole family after divorce has occurred. The goal is to re-define the family as including all members and especially the non-custodial parent. The task is to firm generational boundaries and to encourage parents to fight their own battles. The authors maintain that the family needs to experience a replay of the history of the marriage in order to correct developmental distortions which cause a polarization of children's loyalties to one parent and blame for the other. This approach, although a rational one, may be employed in a select group of people only since the majority claim not to want to see each other after the separation.

It is clear that divorce counselling occurs and, by all indications, is probably increasing. Nevertheless, well-defined training programs for specializing in divorce work are not available at present and recruitment to the field occurs largely through the disciplines of marriage and family counselling. With the steady rise in the rates of divorce, the helping professions are lagging in their skills and focus. Attention must be directed to the process of divorce simply because it is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the ramifications of divorce in contemporary society. The following chapter will document a group approach to post-separation and divorce adjustment.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to generate the relevant issues arising for individuals and families in the process of marital separation and divorce. An overview from the literature provided herewith will guide us in our choices for therapeutic

interventions and skills based on an indepth understanding of the numerous emotional and practical elements that interact to result in a state of crisis.

I. INTRODUCTION

The practicum consisted of two distinct phases; a) attempts to enter the Parents Without Partners Organization to recruit potential members into a separation adjustment group; and, b) Leading two such groups, one at the Y.W.C.A. and one at Family Services of Winnipeg. The greater part of this report will deal with group related issues and individual experiences that emerged in the two groups. Another significant learning experience consisted in the unsuccessful effort to engage Parents Without Partners, and this aspect will be given some thought as well.

Chapter I will analyze an abortive attempt to develop a small group experience within the Parents Without Partners Organization (to be referred to as PWP). Chapters II and III will describe the Y.W.C.A. group and the Family Services group. Highlighted will be issues arising in group work, and individual issues unique to the separation process. Included as well will be feedback and evaluations from the groups. Chapter IV will compare the two groups and draw out the similarities and differences which were of significance. Some thought will be given to the organization in which the group is embedded and discussion will revolve around the potentials and limitations derived from the agency setting affecting the group's development. Chapter V will conclude the report and attempt to pull together theory and practice, as well as some recommendations for practitioners in this area.

i) Attempts to Enter PWP - An Abortive Attempt

The original practicum proposal evolved out of a desire and an invitation to work with PWP and attempt to organize a small group for separated and divorced individuals who were undergoing emotional distress. The following proposal was drawn up and attempted to follow through.

Objectives:

- a) To study and understand the effects of marital separation from a theoretical and an experiential perspective.
- b) To develop a form of group intervention specific to the experience of marital separation.
- c) To develop competence as a group worker.
- d) To alleviate the crisis proportions of individuals in the experience enabling them to understand, work through, and emerge from this transition with a higher level of functioning.
- e) To evaluate the theory and method chosen and address the limitations and effectiveness of the practicum experience.

The practicum would consist of:

- a) Recruiting potential members during the "Initiation for new members" meetings at PWP.
- b) Potential members would be those males and females widowed, separated, or divorced one year or less and experiencing stress and emotional upset related to the separation.
- c) Two groups were to be organized, to run six sessions after which time they could continue as self-support groups while using the leader as a resource person.
- d) Feedback and evaluation from first group would be used in planning the second group.
- e) Comparison of the two groups, as well as group content, format and effectiveness would be documented and analyzed.

PWP is a self help organization providing valuable services and support to the single-parent community. Comments and observations about this particular chapter are not generalizeable to the total organization.

It became apparent to me that PWP is riddled with contradictions and struggling to maintain its self-help ethic. PWP's stated goal is to provide a base of support to single parents through meetings, discussions, and social activities. However, the public stance projected and the private goals and activities of the members are contrary. Although the organization emphasizes parent-child concerns, there is subtle recognition that many people seek out PWP primarily for meeting other eligible singles. Adult social functions are encouraged privately but played down in the face of public pronouncements. Structured presentations to newcomers stress the idea that PWP is not a "dating marketplace", nor a "lonely hearts club", and that these motives for joining the chapter are inappropriate and unacceptable. However, the informal gatherings followed formal presentations, witness numerous sexual overtones in interactions and conversation.

Another contradiction becoming obvious as my dealings with PWP evolved was that the leadership, composed of seasoned PWP members, was feeling threatened by professional involvement, while openly declaring their desire and openness to outside professionals. This had the effect of opening the door to me enticingly and then shutting it abruptly.

Efforts to recruit potential members into a small group were frustrated on several occasions. During the first "initiation meeting", the Chapter President introduced me as a "student who is not one of us, but

is here to learn from us about being single and write it up for her courses". Thus, a barrier was erected between those assembled and the outsider. Some people later commented that they did not want to be "guinea pigs", while others stated that I could not possibly know their experience since I was married and not in their situation. Furthermore, my request followed the initiation speech stressing parent-child concerns as being of primary importance to the organization. My own focus on individual adjustment and personal growth was viewed as contrary to the goals of the leaderships' statements.

During the second initiation meeting, the speaker forgot my presence, suggesting that coffee and informal mingling was to follow. Interrupting and asking people to remain seated for my delivery was, again, viewed as being different and confusing. I was the outsider, invited to work with PWP, yet held in abeyance.

Of greater significance than the formal presentations were the casual discussions with individuals and small groups around coffee and cake. I learned of their individual struggles with the separation situation. A few were able to articulate the kinds of help and support they were looking for. I learned that most people searched out PWP a year or more following the separation simply because that first year alone was the most difficult time to bear, and emotions were too unstable to seek any form of social activity. Although the practical day-to-day problems of single parenting were the obvious common bonds that brought people to PWP, the emotional upheavels were at the root of coming to the organization.

After two such meetings, and numerous conversations with members

and leaders, I emerged with eleven women who were interested in a small counselling group. Of these only six said they would attend when I later telephoned, and three of the six found the University of Manitoba location to be inconvenient. Moreover, my contact person, who was a central figure in negotiating with the organization on my behalf left PWP. Needless to say, his own interest and commitment to the proposed practicum dropped. Other chapter leaders were not sufficiently motivated to promote the idea further, and I was left with the realization that I would have to alter my plans.

Other factors contributing to this abortive attempt related to my own personal make up. Perhaps, had I pursued my plans with more vigor, attended the large general meetings, and been generally more aggressive in finding other paths to interest the leadership, the practicum may have eventually gathered support. However, time constraints, impatience, and a feeling that I was not welcome contributed to my retreat. Moreover, my primary goal was to gain experience in group work. Negotiating the system, a large part in organizing groups, were frustrating.

I maintained close contact with the six PWP members who remained committed to the group. I also began to seek out community agencies for a more central location and for referrals. Through telephone calls and letters, keeping these women informed of new developments, some of them were able to join the subsequent groups.

ii) Insights Gained from PWP Experience

The phase devoted to PWP was very valuable as I had the opportunity to observe, discuss, and learn first hand about the experience of

separation and divorce. Most of the members verbalized their needs, their hopes and their past histories quite freely when given the opportunity. This information, along with the theory gained from books and articles, served as the basis for the two groups which I later led. Four major themes emerged from PWP.

- a) Loneliness: People's stated and unstated reasons for entering PWP were that they felt lonely and socially isolated in their new status. Their married friends could no longer share the single parent's interests, nor provide a suitable social life. New singles were difficult to meet and PWP provided people with the hope of meeting and talking to others "in the same boat". Some felt that only other single-again individuals could really understand the stresses of separation, feeling that the organization held promise for remarriage, friendship, and a social life.
- b) Emotional Distress: Because of the public projection and statements to the membership that PWP was not "the place to cry", and "we're interested only in those who can move on", the atmosphere was one of forced happiness. There was joking, polite laughter, and surface conversation. However, in smaller circles and in one to one discussions people expressed their fears, inability to control their emotions, crying fits, panic and despair. PWP did offer discussion evenings where these issues and concerns could be explored, however, these meetings were too large, usually 30 people or more, and unorganized because of a lack of trained leadership.

- c) Adult Social Activities: Dances and socials were held regularly. Numerous individuals commented that these events left them depressed and that they preferred smaller group meetings. It seemed that those who attempted to enter into a new life too quickly, and without adequate time to attend to the separation process, failed in their first attempts and were wary of trying again. They were looking for a place to talk to others, to compare notes, to have an evening out, and to meet eligible others.
- d) Children: Many people stated that they joined PWP primarily for the family oriented events sponsored by the organization. Again, issues and concerns brought to the organization by the single parents could not be handled easily in large groups. PWP did make use of professionals to run better parenting courses, and to give talks on child related issues. As well, some of the weekend, holiday and special events organized were attended in large numbers. However, PWP seemed to lack a small group format wherein parents could explore child care issues more fully, and relate their own circumstances and worries.

During the last phase of working with PWP, the practicum committee met and we decided to explore other alternatives. We concluded that steps be taken to contact other community agencies in efforts to locate a central space, and to recruit more members. Contact with PWP ended as energy was directed into the new venture.

I contacted various agencies such as the Fort Garry Information

Centre, University of Manitoba Counselling Services, Psychological Service Centre, Klinik, Y.W.C.A. and Family Services of Winnipeg. Several typed announcements were distributed to agencies, and I telephoned and met with various professionals to explain my endeavours. After a few weeks of negotiating, the Y.W.C.A. invited me to do a group in their organization, and Family Services agreed to provide space and referrals for a group in their agency.

II. The Groups

This section will provide a description of the Y.W.C.A. groups and the Family Services group. Discussion will highlight some of the relevant issues arising for individuals in the process of separation, and some issues related to group work in this area, as well, a comparison of the two groups.

i) Y.W.C.A. Group

Contracting with the Y.W.C.A. was a simple procedure since the organization is constantly in search of new ideas and leaders. Moreover, since I was to be unpaid, a graduate student, and had group experience, I was offered the opportunity immediately. I was asked to send in a description of the group and this was edited and published in the winter catalogue as follows:

Divorce - A New Start

For women who are separated or divorced or about to be, this course may help you during this difficult period of transition. Then be able to take a more positive look at yourself, the situation and your children, family and friends.

ii) Group Issues

- a) Membership: Ten women attended the first session and only six remained for the duration of the group. Two women having separated from their husbands two and three weeks felt that the group was inappropriate to their needs. Both cried and were unable to control their emotions. I contacted these two women and encouraged them to seek a counselling group or individual therapy. Another newly separated woman felt that her problems were different from the others, and asked that such a group be organized at the University. (This was attempted but failed to materialize.) One woman was of native background and attended the first and third session but was a silent onlooker both times, and did not return. Of the six remaining women, five attended regularly and one came on her off-duty evenings. Two of the women were still in their marriage, one was beginning the process of divorce, and the other one was contemplating this route.

The women ranged in age from 33 years to 59 years of age. Their jobs encompassed two secretaries, one nurse, one student and two housewives. Only one woman was childless, and the oldest woman's children were grown and away from home. The others' children were between 7 years and 13 years of age.

- b) Time: The Y.W.C.A. group co-ordinator felt that five sessions would be sufficient for this type of a group, especially since it was experimental in nature. I, on the other hand, argued for a minimum of eight sessions. We settled on five with the option

to continue if so decided by the group. The group met Tuesday evenings, from 7:30 - 9:30 p.m. This time limit played a big part in shaping the nature, format, and content of the group into a socioeducational group. (to be discussed further)

- c) Goals: Schopler and Galinsky (1974:126) stress that clients and workers must mutually understand and agree on appropriate goals to be pursued. Since the group was labelled "course", and groups at the Y are publicly known as classes, members' goals and expectations diverged from the leader's. There was no prior contact with individuals and the leader's own goals had started taking form before the group met. Goal setting was crucial to the first meeting. Each woman was asked to describe why she came to the group, what she hoped to accomplish, and the way in which she wanted to pursue her own goals. Some women expected a teaching format and arrived with notebooks and pens; some women expected a teaching format and arrived with notebooks and pens; some women stated they were looking for a group experience where they could share feelings and learn from others how to better cope with the practical and emotional problems of divorce, and a few expected to hear professionals in the community discuss various aspects of divorce, i.e., lawyers and psychologists.

The leader's goals were to facilitate a personal growth group revolving around specific problems experienced in marital separation. Sharing, support and learning from others were to be vehicles to gain

self-awareness and an understanding of the separation process. However, while listening to the members voice their needs and goals, my own objectives were altered as I attempted to open myself to their needs. The one area I was certain of, was that I did not want to conduct a class, or lecture to them on the divorce process.

After each person stated their expectations and told the group some of her background and current situation, we explored the possibilities for the group. Towards the end of the first hour, we outlined the following goals for the group.

- 1) To explore and understand the separation process through individual input of personal experiences as well as from the literature and outside resources.
 - 2) To create a safe place where trust and support would facilitate personal adjustment, self-awareness, and the building of new relationships.
 - 3) The leader would be flexible and open to the group's needs and arrange for resource material and professionals as requested by the group. In addition to being a resource person, the leader would also facilitate interpret and provide leadership skills.
- d) Screening: Due to lack of prior screening of potential members, some problems emerged in the group. The members were at different stages in their divorce process. One woman was legally divorced for one year with a prior separation of two years. Another woman was separated for

a few months while two were still married and the remaining two were separated for more than a year. Although the members could learn from each other, those who were separated for shorter periods of time were more needy of support. During the final evening, one woman confessed that she had tried to sign up into two other groups but they were filled and, therefore, joined our group. Although she was a contributing member the group could not fulfill her needs. Lack of prior screening was also at the root of four women dropping out upon discovering that the group could not provide what they needed.

- e) Socioeducational Group: In the midst of leading this group, I was not certain what type of a group it was. Upon analyzing the experience later, I put the label of "socioeducational" group on it. The group incorporated some aspects of a treatment group, an educational group, a consciousness-raising group, and a problem focused group. The term "socioeducational" connotes the importance of member interaction and knowledge input. (1974:90) The YWCA group evolved into such a group as it became both the medium and the target for change. Radin writes;

"Social forces within the group such as peer pressures modeling, and group norms are used to obtain and maintain individual change; and extragroup means of influencing are used to facilitate the attainment of individual goals" (1974:91)

The critical aspect in leading this type of a group is that the program is developed around the members. There is no prescreening process since the invitation to attend is extended to a large target population,

and the leader works with whoever comes. (1974:94) Emphasis is not directed at problems unique to individual members. Rather there is a need to pull together the share experiences of the group.

The curriculum for the weekly sessions was left up for group discussion and decision-making. Therefore, for the second session, some members asked that I bring in material on the psychological impact of separation. For the third session the group wanted to bring in a lawyer to explore the legal aspects of divorce. Members were encouraged to share with the group books and articles which they had found helpful. At the same time, discussing personal experience, reactions, and feelings were an integral part of the group process. Had there been more time, we could have used films, tapes, and other professionals such as a child psychologist, family therapist, and feminist leaders.

The hardest part for the leader lay in maintaining an open approach and following the group where it wanted to go. In the role of facilitator, the power struggle was evident more between members deciding what was important to do next, rather than between individual members and the leader. My role was to facilitate decision-making, explore reactions, and act as the resource person for the group as a whole.

iii) Individual Issues

The content of discussion in the group revolved around the emotional hardships of separation, and the practical difficulties in being a single parent, a single woman, and an outsider to the mainstream of society. The following issues were the most salient ones for this group.

a) Lawyers and the Law

Much time and energy was directed to the legal process and individual lawyers. This topic served two purposes: firstly, it was a safe way to introduce one's painful experience without feeling pressured to divulge intimate details early in the group's life; and, secondly, the legal process was viewed as being archaic and inhuman, enabling the women to share a common ground for discussion and ventilation. Those who had gone through the legal process provided valuable insight to those who were just at the start.

Complaints were voiced about the lack of time, lack of sympathy, and lack of information provided by lawyers. All had retained male lawyers and felt they were treated in an inferior way to their husbands simply because they were female.

We invited Marilyn Magonigal, a lawyer for Legal Aid, for one session, and this proved to be enlightening and powerful. Marilyn discussed her own divorce experience, answered legal questions, and helped one woman go through small claims court without retaining a lawyer. An abused wife who was frightened of leaving her husband was given names and telephone numbers of lawyers who would help. Most important was the way Marilyn acted as a role model, a person who had successfully overcome an unhappy marriage and was now a single parent pursuing a relevant career and doing well in society.

b) The Emotional Impact

The women talked about loneliness, depression, feeling abandoned and isolated. Those who were left for younger women felt bitter,

unattractive, inadequate. Those whose decision it was to separate, felt ambivalent and questioned the decision especially when social loneliness as paramount in their lives. Anger was expressed towards the husbands, the in-laws, and friends who deserted. Some were seeing psychiatrists and taking medications; others had been through that route and were attempting to make it on their own.

The women expressed surprise and relief upon discovering the shared commonalities in the ways they were feeling and reacting to the separation. The loss and readjustment process was now viewed as being natural.

Many discussions focused on feminist issues. We talked about a woman's early training, society's expectations, and the pressures women were experiencing. Towards the end we talked about some of the advantages of being single, of being female, and of living unattached to a male counterpart. Some became interested in feminist literature and we discussed their reading. The Book Passages was popular and we related this information back to personal experiences and individual feelings.

Now when we talked of loneliness and social isolation, it was clear that not only male/female activities could provide the answer. The women began to seek each other's company for coffee and movies and found that they enjoyed the comfort and ease of interacting with each other. They knew each other quite well and valued the support and confidence they could share.

c) Children

The group members expressed a full range of emotions about their children and single parenting. Some felt bitter and overburdened, while others felt closer to their children than was possible prior to the separation. Parents with teenage children found them to be hostile, angry and pained about the separation. Some began to stay out late, others remained at home constantly, some turned to shoplifting, did poorly in school and became very unmanageable. The younger children clung to their mothers, were whiney, irritable and demanded much time and energy.

Problems around father's visitations compounded the emotional stress felt by the mothers. Some husbands popped in to see their children without prior notification, would miss appointed visiting schedules, or keep children out later than agreed upon. Once the children were back at home, the readjustment to father's absence was difficult and had to be dealt with by the mothers alone. Some fathers in new relationships tended to favour the other children while being harsher with their own. Child maintenance payments were often late or never arrived and mothers had to make do without or go back to the courts.

The group members discussed their fears and worries for their children's future. Single parent families, headed by women were regarded as negative and damaging. Some felt guilt ridden and sad about not being able to provide better for their children.

Organizations such as PWP, Step by Step Parenting, and Parent Effectiveness Groups for single parents were discussed as supports as well as other resources available in the community. Also, articles and

books describing common reactions and behaviors of children at different ages were of benefit. Most important was the awareness and comfort of not being alone, and the opportunity to explore problems with others in similar situations. Discussions provided the members with information, understanding, and suggestions from others who had gone through many of the same problems.

d) Looking into the Future

While the past held pain and confusion, the future was viewed with both fear and possibility. Looking into the future meant dealing with the ever present anxieties about careers, new directions in self development, rethinking marriage, and re-evaluating self.

The search for a new mate and a meaningful relationship was paramount in the daily thoughts of the members. Some stated that they were not interested in remarriage, but nevertheless, were eager to meet the "right man" in the near future. The "single again" status, and the pervasive feeling of being outsiders and peripheral to society, motivated the women to view remarriage as the only way of regaining entry into society. Moreover, the need to find someone who could reaffirm their desirability, femininity, and sexuality was located in finding a man who would fulfill all these needs.

The group setting provided the arena wherein members could jointly explore these feelings, question themselves and each other, and, finally, emerge with newfound insights and strengths provided by the other women. The urgent need for a male counterpart lessened as the

group found that women together could experience a closeness and intimacy that was heretofore unrealized.

Re-evaluating present jobs and future career possibilities was an exciting venture. Two women were enrolled in courses at the University, others began to examine night school, while one felt comfortable staying at home for the time being. We talked about careers that seemed interesting, new skills and knowledge to be learned, and explored the felt risks inherent in this process.

Interwoven into the group process was an emphasis on revealing oneself, and providing open feedback to others. It became important to the members to learn how they presented themselves and how the others viewed them.

Although time was short and limiting, individuals made good progress in becoming aware of themselves and more at ease in their status. As a group of women sharing a common life situation and a common bond, the energy generated in discussions proved to be valuable in altering perceptions and gaining confidence in themselves and other women.

e) Advantages and Disadvantages: Feedback from the Group

As is true of numerous life experiences, the limitations and advantages were far clearer at the end of the group, although some issues surfaced in the group.

One major limiting factor that became evident near termination was that only half of the separation experience was brought into

the group. Initially, the women assumed that the men were leading far better, more exciting, and less burdened lives. They felt that men were not as prone to go through the emotional upheaval and could find female company much quicker. Therefore, with the expression of anger, disappointment and hurt at their ex-husbands, the gulf between them widened. However, ventilating these feelings and finding that others felt similar emotions, allowed the members to work through the anger together. Near the end of the group, members began to take a real interest in what it was 'really' like for men. After the anger was unleashed and drained, the group was able to become genuinely concerned about the total reality and about the men. Only then did it become clear that the other side was missing.

For all, this was a first encounter of an all-woman's group. Feedback was very positive. Cognitive material and outside resources were thought to be most helpful. However, the opportunity to express feelings and listen to others was viewed as being of most benefit.

Time was felt to be too short, and yet, all preferred a "clean good-bye" and a definite termination date rather than continuing or "hanging-on". In reaction to marriages that dragged on far too long, or feelings of a need to hang on one more month or one more year to an unsatisfying relationship, the decision to terminate on the appointed date was one that could be accomplished more effectively. Perhaps because termination was always too close, the sessions were packed with relevant and involved discussion. Most sessions went way past 9:30 p.m., and some women began to go out for coffee after the meetings.

A number of women have maintained close contact after the group ended. One woman entered the Family Services group which began in the summer. The woman who was married while in the group, is still married now, four months later. One woman went back to her nursing profession, and another is taking a Bachelor Degree in Education, while two are still engaged in legal battles.

The group at Family Services began three weeks later than the "Y" group and will be discussed next.

III Family Services Group

My goals for leading a group at Family Services were as follows; To lead a group composed of males and females, who were separated less than one year, and experiencing stress in post-separation adjustment. The group, scheduled to last ten sessions, would explore issues and individual problems related to separation and divorce in order to relieve some of the immediate distress, gain an understanding of the natural healing process inherent in this situation, and enable people to enter the single life better prepared. The Family Services group and the Y.W.C.A. group would be analyzed and compared to further our understanding of group dynamics and to formulate some clear interventive skills unique to the separation adjustment group.

The potential group members were prescreened by Family Services agency staff, and were informed of the nature of the group. Screening involved assessing the person's emotional state, duration of the separation, and immediate problems. For those who had been in individual

counselling, a brief history was provided to the leader. This prescreening was significant as the group had no dropouts, (except one who was transferred to Toronto by his firm), as well as in the compatibility of the group members and the ultimate success of the group experience.

i) Group Issues

a) Group Composition

Six people were referred to the group, three males and three females. Their ages were 23 to 38 years old. Only one woman was separated over one year, while two were separated three weeks, and two closer to one year. Children of these individuals ranged in age from $2\frac{1}{2}$ years to 17 years old. The females had custody of their children while the males did not. One woman was childless. The two men were in government posts, and the three women worked as secretaries. Educational levels for men and women ranged widely as the two men had Ph.Ds and the women had only completed high schools. Nevertheless, compatibility was positive in that the life problems faced by the members were held in common. Marital separation and the process of adjusting provided an immediate base for meeting others on equal ground. The members recognized their shared experiences, and although personal histories varied, there was recognition of the similarities that existed for all.

A mixed group proved to be most effective for a number of reasons. Firstly, the men and women explored the similarities of feelings, reactions, and behaviors and began to understand that the healing process was similar to both sexes. The women, in particular, were surprised to learn that men, in this case unburdened by child-

ren and occupying careers of high status, were nonetheless experiencing loneliness, guilt, depression and abandonment. Some myths about the free swinging male or the fulfilled mother were eradicated. One woman battling with her husband for almost a full year, came to understand some of his behaviors towards her, and negotiated a more sympathetic relationship with him as a result of the group. On the other hand, a man who refused to accept the finality of the separation and held on to a fantasy of reconciliation was eventually led by the group to face reality.

Secondly, the men and women were able to rehearse new ways of behaving and communicating with others in the safety of the small group. Towards the end of the group, coupling began to occur as people met for coffee, movies, and rides home. This is inevitable in a group like this and a positive step towards building a new life. However, the original ground rules must make explicit what information is to be brought into the group in order that group development not be hindered.

Thirdly, feelings, opinions, and attitudes about oneself and others were helpful in examining how others see the person and becoming aware of the desired change in one's behavior and personality. The members began to value themselves as individuals through group feedback.

b) Time

The group was scheduled to meet 10 times, for two hours in the evening. The two hours did not suffice as we found ourselves in session for up to three hours and more. The 10 sessions, however,

proved to be an effective time period to allow the group to develop into a mutual support system, and to enable individuals to work through some major issues in their own situation which were impinging on their adjustment process. Some members asked to continue longer, however, this was a response to termination and separation, and was dealt with in the group.

c) Goals and Focus

The two first meetings were employed in setting the goals both for the group and for individual members. Each person described his/her life situation, problems faced, and what they hoped to achieve in the group. Most found difficulty in verbalizing their needs and hopes. The leader's role was to interpret, draw out, and bring to light common issues and shared feelings, and to state these in terms of workable goals to be worked on by the group. The following list of goals was arrived at:

- 1) To learn about self and others;
- 2) To learn about the separation process;
- 3) To share emotional experiences;
- 4) To provide support and safety wherein people can be honest and critical of self and others;
- 5) To experiment with new ways of thinking, behaving, and relating to others;
- 6) To explore the positive, growth-promoting aspects of the separation and the marriage relationship;
- 7) To share new information through reading and discussion.

A verbal contract was set up whereby people were expected to arrive on time, to let the leader know in advance of being absent, and to commit themselves to 10 weeks of attendance. There was no mention of expected ways of behaving towards each other outside of the group,

nor to report outside activity involving group members to the group. This omission created some problems, and, I believe, should have been explored at the onset. As it was, we found it necessary to discuss this aspect later on as two individuals started seeing each other outside the group and were reluctant to bring this information to the members. This caused some discomfort both to the group and to the two people involved, as we had no set guidelines in how to deal with the situation.

d) Group Content

Group sessions were held in the group room at Family Services. This room is comfortable, intimate and safe. Large floor pillows, and darkened lighting provided a suitable atmosphere for getting together and people began to call it "our room". Prior to every session, the leader prepared a large pot of coffee, and we milled around in the coffee lounge. This 15-minute period prior to the session provided for time to talk about the week's events, general news, jobs, relatives and various endeavours. When we moved into the group room, the expectation was that discussion center on the separation, personal emotional adjustment, and weekly developments related to the legal and practical matters faced during the week.

The leader's role was to encourage and direct people to express their own feelings rather than enter intellectual discussions as a way of avoiding self disclosure. One individual who tended to alienate others through intellectualization was confronted. The feedback was honest, direct, and proved to be beneficial to the person. During the initial sessions the group was not yet cohesive

enough to challenge, however, after this incident the group became both more supportive and more challenging. The confrontation, initiated by the leader, served as a role model whereupon, individuals were less hesitant in providing negative feedback and challenged others to do the same. This became a valued norm in the group.

Some group exercises were employed, such as relaxation methods, assertiveness exercises, and gestalt techniques stressing present centeredness to help individuals get in touch with immediate feelings and to become aware of verbal and non-verbal communication.

e) The Leader's Role

A most difficult task is one of analyzing oneself as a leader. It is difficult in the process of relating one's skills, attributes, and limitations, we are attempting to describe those things learned cognitively, those things that are a part of the person's makeup, and those things that have been learned but are so thoroughly integrated that it becomes difficult to separate them.

The cognitive learning skills came from a thorough review of written material on the emotional effects of separation. It was an attempt to understand as fully as possible what constitutes the experience and the subsequent readjustment. Reading on group work helped to shape the basic principles and guidelines for the work. Yet, much of the actual endeavour rested on an integration of the learned material with the personal makeup of the leader. Those elements that surfaced in weekly sessions were for the most part unplanned, unrehearsed and difficult to document. This, somewhat lengthy explanation,

will hopefully serve the purpose of exempting the writer from discussing those things which are as yet undiscussable simply because they are largely unknown at this time.

The two crucial points of departure in analyzing leadership potentials are: a) a prerequisite desire to lead a group; b) a genuine belief that a group encounter is, indeed, therapeutic for a particular situation. In this case, both were true. Although a certain amount of anxiety existed within myself, I was certain that gaining experience in group work was what I wanted to do for the practicum. Furthermore, the literature search propelled me towards group therapy as the most functional method of helping people with the readjustment process. I firmly believed that social isolation and loneliness, so common in the initial period of marital separation, was the cause of much anxiety, and that the sense of being alone and feeling strange could best be overcome within a group of people undergoing a similar experience.

It was important to allow, and often encourage, people to journey into the past, to dwell on events, and to help them string together incidents and issues which led up to the final separation. All the members devoted many hours to this endeavour. Through a rehash of the past, they were able to interpret problems in the present and give new meaning to things that were previously misunderstood or left unsaid. Thus, past problems standing in the way of present functioning became more amendable to a different understanding and finally, to closure. Some problems were shared by other group members and individuals began to see that, even where no final answers existed, unburdening, ventilating, and feeling

that individual problems were not unique, lessened the impact of emotional isolation. The leader's role in this phase was to keep members on topic until it was finished by all. As well, drawing out the similarities allowed the group to gain strength from a shared situation. There was a constant effort to direct people to give meaning to past issues in present terms of awareness. Rather than just telling about a problem, I encourage members to describe what meaning that particular problem held for them in their present functioning.

Drawing out the quiet members, and pressing the more vocal ones to express feelings rather than "stories" eventually became a valued norm in the group, and the members themselves began to redirect questions and suggestions to this effect. Although silent members were allowed to remain so for some time, without too much overt pressure, the group itself began to press for more sharing.

Empathy, direct feedback, support and mediation were the tools employed by the leader, and later adopted by group members. There was no pre-planned agenda, and the leader facilitated and helped the group move in the directions it needed. There was seldom any hesitancy in getting the sessions started as members were often eager and waiting to report on the events, feelings, gains or losses of the past week.

Challenge to the leadership role occurred repeatedly in the first sessions. The particular individual, recently separated from his wife who was in the MSW program with me, felt uncomfortable, threatened and unwilling to participate as a group member. Time and time again, he attempted to exhibit that his leadership skills were far above mine, and discredited my status. This he attempted to do by avoiding

questions and making remarks to others that he could, in fact, do a better job. At one point, he openly declared the group was not meeting his needs because the leader was incapable and the group members too self-involved. His interaction in the group was of a surface, intellectual nature, and he persisted in refusing to join as a member, he was alienated from the group through his long monologues containing large words and meaningless conversation.

My own limitations in this area was that I was lax in picking up the signals, and more important, too slow in reacting openly to him. Feeling insecure, I allowed this member to disrupt the group process without providing him or the group with my own assessment of the situation.

Support from my committee in the form of role playing, discussing alternate ways of handling the situation, and just plain venting and encouragement enabled me to confront the individual directly about what I was feeling. This was no simple task as I did, in fact, feel threatened and afraid that my perceptions were different from others in the group, and that I stood to lose my leadership status. My worst fantasy was that the whole group would disintegrate. As it happened, other group members felt like I did and with the impasse finally opened up, a rush of feelings emerged. The member stayed away from the group the following two sessions and came back to a group that was now open and accepting of his attempts to practice new ways of relating to others. Therefore, the group as a whole proceeded to become far more able to give and receive direct and honest feedback, and the group became more cohesive and powerful because of it.

ii) Individuals Issues

The beginning sessions saw much energy directed towards the past. People were analyzing their marriage relationships, reviewing the subtle changes in communication, warmth and intimacy, and feeling angry and betrayed that these signs were more apparent to one partner than the other. Events that led up to the final separation were dissected and diagnosed repeatedly and in different ways. Questioning others, listening to their accounts and attempting to understand their own situation was the group's method of dealing with a confusing and painful life experience. People talked about hopes and dreams for their families which could never be achieved, and about the panic of starting again. This "obsessive review" was therapeutic. As old hurts and fresh pain was flushed out, rearranged and redefined, individuals gained new insights into their past and began to move towards shaping a new life. The struggle consisted of a need to bring some closure to the separation and thus, free them to view themselves and their experiences as providing meaning to their present and future endeavours. We talked about other situations where loss and radical life changes, akin to separation, effects people in similar ways. Understanding the human response to situations wherein the basic pattern of life has been radically altered, and the human need to protect predictability in battle with the equally human response to restore the past, providing the groundwork from which people could begin to work through the experience. The "working through" of the separation distress entailed this lengthy and painful rehash and re-experiencing of the past. A new construction of the marriage and the individual response to its finality was now necessary to allow people

to start their new lives based on a meaningful and intelligible past.

Those separated longer were able to arrive at closure sooner than those more newly separated. This was encouraging as individuals witnessed that a finality to the ambivalence, pain, guilt and emotional upheaval, was indeed possible. The newly separated, enmeshed in obsessive review is apt to bore and alienate friends and colleagues through constantly attending to the marriage and the details of the separation. However, this is integral to the adjustment process and the group can provide the most conducive setting.

In reviewing the past, people dwelt on changing values of husbands and wives. Most could view growing apart only in retrospect. The men talked about their wives' stated needs to become more independent, to pursue careers more seriously, and their own feelings of being threatened by this need to change. They described their own needs for a stable family life, critical career plans, and a need to hold on to established ways of living which were no longer acceptable to their wives. The women described their marriages as being stifling, unaccommodating to personal goals, and being taken for granted. Some felt they were "mothering" their husbands and carrying total responsibility for the family. Members became aware of the other side of the coin, and struggled to understand and come to terms with a two-sided reality - his and hers.

Competing emotions of love, tenderness, longing to be reunited, and excitement with a new future, alternated with hate, repulsion, anger and hopelessness. These feelings varied from week to week, and those

who had experienced a good week provided strength and hope to those who had lived through a depressing week. Reporting a positive experience was satisfying while retelling a sad one brought relief and empathy from others.

Issues of child-raising were brought into the group. Mothers with custody learned of the longing of fathers to be with their children, of the empty, silent homes, and of the guilt and pain felt by the part-time fathers. The fathers heard of the burdens of a single parenting, of the lonely, hesitant decisions to be made for the children, and of the dire need for relief. These insights were valuable in changing attitudes and behaviors towards ex spouses. Individuals brought to the group practical problems around child rearing, relocating, school problems and financial hardships. These topics were brought to the group to solicit advice and then reported on the following week.

One session was devoted to a discussion of suicide. Three of the five members had attempted suicide while still in the marriage, and one man had experienced strong urges on several occasions. The feelings of helplessness and "no way out" culminated for some in a cry for help through attempting suicide. Sharing these feelings was emotionally draining and the group became closer as a result.

In later sessions, much time was spent exploring the future. Fears and doubts about being attractive, unloved and unable to sustain another intimate relationship were expressed. Speculating about future mates and marriages allowed individuals to begin to think about new values and qualities to be looked for in mate-choice, and in all

relationships. People wanted to know where singles could be found, what to do on dates, and how to behave sexually. Being out of touch with the dating scene was referred to as feeling like "teenagers again", and experienced as both exciting and frightening. Exploring these emotions and sharing feedback provided individuals with the momentum to start out again and recognize themselves as attractive, sexual and valued people who could hope for an intimate relationship. Loneliness and social isolation was, thus, viewed as temporary as the group provided a temporary community.

Other issues related to the separation included problems with in-laws, reactions of married friends and their support or withdrawal, and establishing new friendships. Sexuality was one topic not fully explored. Perhaps because the group was mixed, and people began to see each other outside of the group, this topic was taboo.

The subject of group termination began as early as the sixth session. Various members mentioned, joked about, and despaired about the few remaining weeks to be shared. For most, the group became an occasion to go out socially as well as a therapeutic setting. Conflicting feelings were voiced about individual's attaining some of their goals and of the loss of the group's support which had become so important in their weekly lives. The need to break the bonds that were created out of trust, sharing, and positive feelings, reminded members of their previous separations. The role of the leader was to guide members away from the group by exploring alternative avenues from which individuals could gain meaningful experiences. We talked about other groups available in the community, social activities that would

be of interest, and new-found relationships that some members were engaged in or seeking. We spent time talking about what had been learned and experienced in the group, about interpersonal relationships, and how some of these skills could be carried over to new settings and new relationships. The wine and cheese brought by the members to the final session produced a meeting that was different and symbolic. It was a ritual to mark the end. However, there was expectations that members telephone and see each other outside of the group and this was done by various members. Furthermore, the written evaluations of the group provided members with a period for reflection on the past experience. Discussions in the last session centered around reminiscing about personal growth and group effectiveness. The last hour spent together was very mellow and we stayed later than expected.

iii) Evaluations - Family Services Group

a) Group Evaluations

Group evaluations were drawn up by the leader. (See Appendix II). The eight questions were distributed to the group prior to the last session and were returned on the final evening. This questionnaire provides the members' subjective evaluations of themselves and of the group. As a result of this group, the leader was invited by Family Services to lead another separation adjustment group for the summer on a contract basis, as it was regarded by the agency as a valuable intervention.

Most of the replies were returned in essay form, some up to eight pages long, and not necessarily relating back to the specific questions.

Reactions from the members will be presented in edited form to provide a general overview of the evaluations.

The following statements were written by members:

"I feel I have made progress as a result (of the group) because it was a first attempt to take myself out of my own circle and risk allowing myself to express myself to others. . . ." (Woman)

"When I listened to the men's point of view, I could see where I had been incorrect in my reasoning as to why my husband reacted in the different ways that he did." (Woman)

"Groups such as this give each of us more insight into ourselves. . . and through this we can understand more about others" (Woman)

"It was gratifying to finally realize that I needn't punish myself for the breakup and for putting people through an upheaval. That I had a right as an individual to leave an unhappy situation, as others did. I learned from the group to feel better about myself..." (Woman)

". . . I was, at times, bored by long narratives. However, I also realize that it was necessary to that particular member to discuss it openly in order to sort it out in his or her own mind. For this reason, I very much regret not having found such a group when I was first going through my torments of separation." (Woman)

"The leader helped me personally when seeking me out for individual comment. When you begin to say out loud how you feel about things, it brings that feeling, whether good or bad, to the fore, for you to examine. I sometimes felt this could have been done even more." (Man)

"Especially, if joined right after a separation, this group could be beneficial to everyone. To realize that they are not alone in their feelings and find that by discussing them, they would understand them better and be able to cope better and sooner". (Woman)

"Honest feedback and being confronted were especially helpful because with everybody being nice and polite, one often fails to see oneself as seen by others. In fact, one develops defences which insure that one will not see oneself. It's important to go beyond these even though this may cause anxiety and anger." (Man)

"Personally, I found these sessions a great help and attending the group has been a highlight in my life for the past months. I found it most helpful to be able to talk openly to accepting ears - a good sounding board to test my changing philosophy and mood. It was also good to listen to others . . . and to note the similarities in all of us despite our apparently quite different backgrounds and lifestyles". (Man)

b) Tape Recordings

All the sessions were recorded for ongoing weekly evaluations of the progress in the group. Both group development and individual issues were taken from the recordings and written into a log. As well, supervision by committee members of the leader's role and progress were facilitated by listening to excerpts from the tapes. This was helpful tool for personal learning, group monitoring, and committee's evaluations.

IV. Comparison of the Two Groups

Since a group is usually imbedded in a formal organization, it is insufficient to analyze the group from a purely clinical practice model which focuses primarily on client change. The organization has a strong impact on the entire change process, defining the client population, the role of the worker, the physical environment, as well as having some input into the goals to be accomplished. (Hsenfeld 307-8)

The reputation of the organization influences the "pool" from which potential clients are drawn and the motives that propel potential members to the group. The YWCA, well known in the community for educational, developmental, and physical exercise groups, draws its clientele by maintaining and developing these goals. It is not a counselling agency, although some counselling does occur, nor is it problem-oriented. The written description of the separation adjustment group as a "course" corresponded to the Y's reputation, however, it did not conform to my own goals for the group. The struggle to narrow the gap between the goals of the organization and the leader occurred as soon as the group met. Moreover, although

the Y co-ordinator allowed me free reign in shaping the group, the nature of the organization was such that only a certain kind of group could be viably incorporated into the system.

Group composition and size were, likewise, influenced by the organization. The Y attempts to recruit as many members as possible and advertising is city-wide. Thus, with no prior screening, the group leader must accept all who sign up to the particular group. The consequences, as already mentioned, were that the group could not easily accomodate the varied needs of the individuals. Some who entered should have been referred elsewhere, one signed up only because other groups were already closed, while a few had expectations which were more in line with the purpose of the group.

Family Services group was initially difficult to get started because of client-organization relationship. Family Services is generally accustomed to dealing with clients individually rather than in the group format. Although group work is an integral part of the agency, the natural interaction between client and worker is through individual, couple or family counselling. Group work is marginal. This is reflected in the intake process, staff experiences, and the general caseload of workers. Referring new clients to groups, at the intake level, or transferring caseload clients to groups is not a natural customary path simply because group work is somewhat outside the usual scope of daily activity for most workers. Nevertheless, group therapy, once established, is easily accomodated by the agency and accepted as a valuable therapeutic intervention.

Potential group members were pre-screened, either on the

telephone or in person by agency staff, and provided with adequate information about the group. Clients' expectations were, thus, compatible with those of the leader and the organization. This enabled work in the group to be started early in the group's life. Whereas, the YWCA did not seem suitable for crisis intervention, and those individuals in crisis had to withdraw, the Family Services group was the proper place for a separation crisis counselling.

The time limitation played a role in shaping the groups. The five sessions at the YWCA were just enough for a socio-educational group to get started, to identify and explore areas of need in the separation experience, and to skim the surface of personal histories. The third and fourth weeks saw the group moving towards self-revelation and sharing of emotional experiences, but termination was an awareness that held everyone back from fuller commitment. Moreover, the option to continue longer was viewed by members as "hanging on" and unfavourable. The five sessions provided us with sufficient time to discuss broader issues and concerns about divorce, begin to experience the power of an all woman's group, and initiate some new friendships and supports.

The ten weeks at Family Services was a good period for group development and for individuals to work through their crisis in a therapeutic setting. Members had time to reveal themselves to others, to share painful experiences, and to build trust in self and others, as well as to begin experiencing the positive and exciting aspects of being single again. The group was also able to move through the various stages of group development in a slow, unhurried pace.

Group composition contributed to the differences in the groups. The male/female groups was able to explore and experience issues which were unavailable to the women's group. In the Y group, the women were motivated to discover the positive strength available from interacting with other women. Discussions revolving around women's problems and impressions were concentrated on to a degree that the women in the mixed group could not attempt to achieve.

The leader's role in the two groups was markedly different. Because the YWCA group was composed of females, my role was both as a facilitator and as a woman sharing herself with other women. I felt more open, less threatened, and more secure in being able to open myself. The role of facilitator and leader was often blurred as I attempted to discover my own womanhood and as the group allowed me to join as one of them. I allowed the group freedom to move in the directions it chose and moved with it. In a way, we all shared a very basic element, our sexual identity, and this altered the power relations between the group and the leader.

The Family Services group, on the other hand, composed of males and females sharing a separation experience, placed me more in the role leader. I was the outsider who held a unique position in the group. Moreover, the power struggle which ensued between a male member and myself arose, in part, from our sex differences and from the roles assigned to us. The struggle was, thus, one of male/female and leader/member. The lines between leader and group member were, therefore, quite distinct as I exposed little of myself and carried out my role of facilitator and leader.

V. Conclusion

Throughout the literature search and within the actual practice, three major themes have emerged as being of primary importance in working with people who are in the midst of a separation experience. This concluding chapter will highlight and pull together the following themes: the crisis situation; effective group work; and, the individual in the situation.

Marital separation is experienced by many individuals as a crisis. Those who had little forewarning to prepare for the event as well as those who had been aware for some time that separation was imminent, are likely to experience a crisis when the event actually takes place. Moreover, although the "leaver" may undergo different reactions than the "left behind", both will feel confusion, sadness, guilt, loneliness, and a sense of helplessness. It is primarily a reaction to facing a totally new situation which requires responses and daily activities hitherto unknown, unrehearsed, and therefore, threatening the basic continuity of life's meaning. Perceptions, activities, priorities and general habits acquired from and through a marriage relationship must undergo radical reorganization at the point where a marriage relationship is broken. Reorganization now entails embracing a life status which is so new in every life facet that it is a slow and painful process. The tension and anxiety inherent in the frantic search to adapt quickly to the new experience, produces more tension and anxiety as the individual is unable to find comfort in new solutions. The state of crisis in marital separation, therefore, ensues out of a break with an established way of life which ceases to provide meaning. The physical manifestations arising in this state are akin to a

clinical depression. People find that they no longer know who they are, how to respond to situations, and fear that they are going crazy. Sleep and eating patterns may undergo radical changes until a balance is returned.

Crisis counselling entails helping people understand that what is happening is natural in the readjustment process. With a better understanding of why they are feeling and reacting the way they are, they can tolerate the pain and ambivalence much easier. Reassurance that the separation distress is time limited, natural, and understandable enables the individual to confront the experience in a less frantic, and more stable manner.

Because marital separation disrupts every facet of life, the individual finds that friends and community may no longer exist as supports. New friends and a different community are not easily found, and social isolation is paramount. Group counselling, thus, provides a temporary community for people undergoing similar life problems. Because of the common bonds of experience, members can offer support, sympathy and understanding during this critical transition period. Learning from each other, comparing notes, socializing and practicing new ways and new behaviours, provides members with the essential base of support and challenge to grow together. Individuals no longer feel isolated and gain better understanding of the process that will take them to a new life.

The leader's skills must rest on a thorough understanding of the process of loss and radical change. Because people are in a state of flux and do not understand what is happening to them, the leader must have both the information and the empathy to lead them through the various stages of readjustment. Bringing out the common experiences shared in the

group, encouraging members to dwell on the obsessive review, and finally directing them to look at their futures, enables the group to gain personal awareness and a closure to the crisis.

Individuals in the separation experience find themselves immersed in a flood of emotions which are oftentimes contrary and unrecognizable. Euphoria may alternate with bouts of deep depression and helplessness; children's needs will compound the emotional distress, and the legal process may cause deep anger and hurt. These issues, when shared with others in a group, will lose some of their negative impact if individuals can see that others have gone through, survived and have even negotiated a more satisfying life than was possible prior to the separation.

SARA AXELROD,
605 Silverstone Avenue,
Winnipeg, Man. R3T 2V6
269-0309
/jk/js

APPENDIX II.

PLEASE ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS ON A SEPARATE PIECE OF PAPER
AND RETURN NEXT WEEK. ANSWERS AND COMMENTS WILL NOT BE
DISCUSSED IN THE GROUP UNLESS SO REQUESTED. PLEASE EXPLAIN
AS COMPLETELY AS YOU CAN.

- 1) Do you feel you have made any progress as a result of your involvement in this group?
- 2) What kinds of things were especially helpful to you and why?
- 3) What kinds of things were not helpful or hindered you in the group?
- 4) Was the leader helpful to you personally? How?
- 5) How could the leader have been more helpful to you individually, and to the group as a whole?
- 6) What areas were not dealt with in the group that were important to you?
- 7) What would you tell a newly separated friend who was interested in joining such a group?
- 8) If you had to do it all over again, would you join this group? Why?

SARA AXELROD
605 Silverstone Avenue
WINNIPEG, Manitoba
R3T 2V6
269-0309
/jk/js

Appendix I

Section 3 provides that the following matrimonial offences are grounds for divorce:

- a. adultery
- b. sodomy, bestiality, rape, or homosexual act
- c. going through a form of marriage with another person
- d. physical or mental cruelty of such a kind as to render cohabitation intolerable

Section 4 supplements the offence grounds of Section 3 with grounds for divorce based on marriage breakdown:

- a. imprisonment of the respondent for a designated period of years
- b. gross addiction of the respondent to alcohol or narcotics for a period of not less than three years
- c. disappearance of the respondent for a period of not less than three years
- d. non-consumation of the marriage for a period of not less than one year by reason of respondent's impotence or refusal to consummate the marriage
- e. living separate and apart for a period of
 - i. three years, if the separation of the spouses occurred for some reason other than the petitioner's desertion of the respondent
 - ii. five years, if the separation occurred by reason of the petitioner's desertion of the respondent

Source: Divorce Working Paper 13,

Law Reform Commission of Canada, 1975

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