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Exploring the Lived Experiences of Adults Who Have Experienced a Parental Divorce: Identifying Collaborative Divorce Aspects as They Adjusted to Adulthood

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Exploring the Lived Experiences of Adults Who Have Experienced a Parental Divorce: Identifying Collaborative Divorce Aspects as They Adjusted to Adulthood

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Abstract

Divorce itself is a traumatic experience for everyone involved, especially the children. Studies have been conducted to focus on the effects on children, and ways to help with adjustment. Furthermore, researchers have delved into the long-term effects parental divorce has on children. Collaborative divorce is an approach to divorce that utilizes a specially trained team of family law, financial, and mental health professionals (MHPs) working together with couples to resolve issues related to the dissolution of their marriage, the co-parenting of their children, and the restructuring of their lives–without involving the court system. Some of the aspects of a collaborative divorce include a mental health professional working with the family, less conflict between the divorcing couple, and the presence of effective co-parenting.

There is a lack of exploration into identifying if collaborative divorce aspects are present or not as adult children adjusted to parental divorce after utilizing do-it-yourself divorce, mediation, litigation, or a collaborative divorce. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in this study, five participants were interviewed to explore the presence or absence of collaborative divorce aspects during a parental divorce and examine the child's adjustment into adulthood. Results of this study included the emergence of six primary themes: "child of parental divorce: adjustment," "conflictual divorce," "qualities of a peaceful divorce," "co-parenting: being present," "to seek therapy or not," and "effects of parental divorce on relationships." The study findings helped to narrow the gap in the existing research on the presence or absence of collaborative divorce aspects in the adjustment of children of parental divorce.

Keywords: parental divorce, adult children, collaborative divorce, IPA

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

I did not know what was going to happen next. I have seen it in movies before but never thought it would happen to my family. I thought my parents were going to be happy together forever. At first, I could not hear what they were saying, I just knew it was a serious conversation by the looks on their faces. It started as a calm discussion, but then they started yelling. I could feel my eyes tearing up. I felt that something life-changing was about to happen. This did not look or sound like any argument they had in the past. My dad hugged my sisters and I, and then he left our house. Sitting on the floor in a state of confusion, I cried for hours. Even though I was only nine at the time, I instantly knew that life as I knew it would shift dramatically.

My Lived Experience

As soon as I found out my parents were getting a divorce, I immediately felt broken in two. I began wondering if I would ever see my father again. I wanted to know if my paternal cousins would still come over to my mom's house for birthday parties and sleepovers. I became curious about who my sisters and I would celebrate holidays with for the many years to come. Many similar questions occupied my mind for months and even years later after my parents' divorce was finalized. I would worry about my mom and dad getting into arguments at my birthday parties or my graduations. I was concerned about having both sides of my family present at celebratory events due to the possible conflict that might arise. The issue of managing social gathering events with my parents was not the only issue I had to face after my parents divorced. I later realized that being a

product of parental divorce was not limited to only a person's childhood being affected, but their adult life as well.

I was nine years old when I realized my family structure was changing. I reacted by becoming introverted and for a few months, I became extremely emotional when anyone would say the word "Dad." My younger sister became the "strong" one and openly shared her feelings about the divorce. My youngest sister kept to herself. I noticed some of these same reactions with my cousins when their parents divorced. Once we entered adulthood, some of us expressed having a lack of trust in friendship and romantic relationships, while others struggled with committing in relationships. Regarding our professional lives, some of us have done very well for ourselves in pursuing higher education degrees and excelling in our careers. On the other hand, others have not been so successful.

One thing we all share is struggling with maintaining our romantic relationships and being able to trust others. We constantly question if we will also experience our own divorces and subject our children to go through the pain we experienced as children of our own parents' divorce. These same questions, obstacles, and other hurdles are faced by many adults who have experienced parental divorce during childhood (Ahrons, 2004; Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Cartwright, 2006; Cui & Fincham, 2010; Huure, Junkkari, & Aro, 2006; Riggio, 2004; Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004; Whitton, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2008). The immediate effects they experienced as children may have been resolved, but as adults, the effects of parental divorce may potentially manifest into new struggles.

Traditional Divorce: Litigation

Divorce itself is often a traumatic experience for everyone involved, however, divorce litigation adds another dimension to the situation. Each parent is directed by their attorney to fight for what is rightfully theirs, causing more tension, anger, and distance between the parents. This approach leaves attorneys profiting from the opposing parent's loss, and the parents both walking away not actually winning (Ahrons, 2007a; Ahrons, 2007b; Tesler, 2008; Webb 2008). Some parents are left with difficulty communicating with each other, ineffective co-parenting skills, and limited problem-solving skills. Many children believe they must choose sides. That is an impossible situation for a child to be thrust into and once attorneys and divorce litigation are added to the already complex situation, a child may feel compelled to decide between mother and father. Even if the questions were not being asked directly, a child of divorce often senses being pressed to answer questions a child should never have to answer. Questions such as: Who do I love more? Who do I want to live with more? Who do I trust more? All these and similar questions made me withdraw from both of my parents and retreat into myself. It was easier to be detached from them both than to cling onto one while being torn from the other.

Effective communication is typically prevented when litigation is occurring. The communication occurs between the attorneys. The attorneys usually have a desire to "win." This battle mentality has the chance to lead to more anger and disputes between the parents, which in turn imposes on the well-being of their children. The complications of litigation were discussed by Ahrons (1994), who noted:

The American way of divorce is war by proxy. Steeped in the stereotypical model

> of fiery-foes, each spouse hires a gladiator to do battle for them–a litigator. Those battle-hardened warriors treat spouses as angry enemies who need protection from the tricks and maneuvers of their ex-partners. (p. 178)

Litigation may ultimately lead to neither of the parents getting what they want, which is a major consequence of litigation. Final decisions about the presenting issues may be made by a judge. Anger and conflict may increase between the parents once all decision-making rights and control is lost to a judge's ruling (Hedeen & Salem, 2006; Pruett & Jackson, 1999; Tesler, 2008; Tesler & Thompson, 2007; Webb, 2008). Litigation has its financial burdens, but it also can be emotionally devastating and destroy the future of family relationships (Macfarlane, 1997; Pruett, Arthur, & Ebling, 2007; Pruett & Jackson, 1999; Tesler, 2008; Tesler & Thompson, 2007; Webb, 2008; Webb & Ousky, 2006).

Another Approach: Collaborative Divorce Teams

An alternative approach became available to divorcing couples and their families, so they did not have to select litigation. Minnesota attorney Stuart Webb and California attorney Pauline Tesler pioneered a movement called Collaborative Family Law (CFL) (Tesler, 2008; Tesler & Thompson, 2007; Webb & Ousky, 2006). Webb (2008) stated, "I saw the possibility of creating a settlement specialty bar consisting of lawyers who would take cases for settlement only" (p. 157). Litigation was not an option. DiFonzo (2009) stated:

> Collaborative practice aspires to alter the culture of lawyering by challenging the expectation that the lawyer's role is to solve the client's problems. Collaborative lawyers are engaged in shifting power in the legal system from lawyers to clients.

> The goal is to empower clients to achieve the resolution they view as most appropriate. (p. 103)

The focus is not on the lawyers' goals, but on the parents' goals. Attorneys using the CFL approach to divorce have an objective to settle the couples' matters cordially. Webb (2008) noted these attorneys "represent their clients as advocates with a collaborative mindset" (p. 158). In 1990, this new process was termed "Collaborative Law" (Webb, 2008, p. 156). The Collaborative Law process consisted of lawyers who believed that they will be able to settle their clients' matters harmoniously or withdraw from the case at the threat of litigation.

Systemic Approach and Collaboration

From a systemic approach, therapists try to get a clear picture of the entire system surrounding each of the clients. When systemic therapists achieve this, they can offer more tailored assistance to clients. When one event occurs in a family, it tends to influence every individual in that entire family system. One such event is divorce (Ahrons, 2004; Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Cartwright, 2006; Cui & Fincham, 2010; Huure et al., 2006; Riggio, 2004; Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004; Whitton et al., 2008).

Systems theory and collaborative divorce are built on similar philosophies. In the same manner as systems theory, collaborative divorce embraces and utilizes the multiple perspectives of individuals and believes in the strengths and expertise inherent in all the various parts of the team (Satir, 1985). The team consists of lawyers to represent each party, a financial advisor, and mental health professionals (MHPs). Each of the strengths that exist in the mental health professionals, the financial advisors, as well as in the

lawyers is acknowledged on a collaborative divorce team. Heller (2011) found that lawyers in collaborative practice groups theoretically believed:

> Including a mental health professional (MHP) on their team seems like a great idea: an ideal way to facilitate communication, promote peaceful resolution, and regulate emotions within and between the members of the divorcing couples and the team. They agree with the notion that an MHP could assist parents in developing and implementing an effective parenting plan in order to share responsibilities and time with their children; they even go on to acknowledge that the financial aspects of a divorce are as emotional as all other aspects, if not the most highly charged, and they welcome the support of an MHP to facilitate conversations around these matters. (pp. 11-12)

Both approaches incorporate the belief in the idea that the sum of the parts is greater than the whole (Bateson, 1972; Rose, 2007).

Collaborative divorce is also similar to systems theory in how the approach considers reciprocal interactions occurring between family members, the importance of multigenerational family patterns, and the implications of triangulations occurring to regulate and deflect anxiety in a system (Kerr & Bowen, 1988, Tesler, 2008; Webb, 2008). The reciprocal interactions and triangulations occurring between the collaborative divorce team and the parents are constantly monitored to make sure progress is being made. “The Collaborative Divorce team provides support to the resolution of the legal issues by containing strong emotions and difficult relationship dynamics and by providing specialized services regarding finances and children” (Gamache, 2015, p. 380). There is also attention on the co-construction of language to discover a more workable

reality (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Gergen, 2009). The emphasis in collaborative divorce is on collaborating to create a workable reality for both parties. In addition, a focus is placed on interactional cycles and being creative to find solutions (Tesler, 2008; Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974; Webb, 2008).

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this research was to gain rich descriptions of lived experiences of adults whose parents have experienced any type of divorce and identify if any collaborative divorce aspects were present or not during their adjustment. The intention for conducting this study was to explore the presence of any collaborative divorce aspect during a parental divorce and examine the child's adjustment into adulthood. To that end, the research question was: "What are the lived experiences of adults whose parents have experienced a divorce with collaborative divorce aspects present or not as they adjusted?" Some of the aspects present during a collaborative divorce include a mental health professional working with the family, less conflict between the divorcing couple, and the presence of effective co-parenting.

Marriage and family therapist and other mental health professionals within a collaborative divorce team help divorcing couples structure their co-parenting partnerships during the divorce and after. They offer parents more guidance on how to assist their children with adjusting positively to the divorce. These aspects may be present without parents proceeding with an official collaborative divorce team for their divorce. Collaborative divorce aspects may be present when parents proceed with divorce by either do-it-yourself divorce, divorce mediation, collaborative divorce, or litigated divorce. Do-it-yourself divorce is when the divorcing couple fills out divorce papers and

a judge then grant the divorce. Divorce mediation is when divorcing couples work with a neutral mediator who helps both parties come to an agreement on all aspects of their divorce. Collaborative divorce is when the couple agrees to work out a divorce settlement by using lawyers, a financial planner, and a therapist without going to court. Litigated divorce is when the divorcing couple has the issues of the dispute settled in a family court with their lawyers.

This study may provide implications for marriage and family therapists and other mental health professionals who work with children going through parental divorce of any kind. As divorces continue to occur, more families may seek general therapy. Marriage and family therapists and other mental health professionals should have general knowledge about the experience of children of divorce. Gaining information on the experiences of the adult children of a parental divorce might provide MHPs with knowledge of what collaborative factors present within any type of divorce may aid with adjustment. The findings from this study might shift the way MHPs provide services to their families who are experiencing divorce and seeking therapy as they adjust to this life change. Marriage and family therapists may gain knowledge which may shift how they work with this population.

Overview of Chapters

In Chapter I, I have discussed how my personal experience with a parental divorce as a child has affected me from childhood and now into my adult life. I have differentiated between different approaches to divorce. I also identified how systems theory and collaborative divorce are built on matching foundational ideas. I described the

purpose of this study. In addition, I explained why this topic and line of inquiry is relevant for the field of Marriage and Family Therapy.

In Chapter II, I begin by reviewing divorce statistics. I then discuss the history of divorce and litigated divorce. I follow with an outline of the various perspectives in the literature about the impact of divorce litigation on children. I continue by discussing the later life experiences of children of parental divorce as adults. Additionally, I discuss the literature that presents variables that led to a favorable adjustment of children of parental divorce.

Next, I identify three different approaches to divorce: litigated divorce, divorce by mediation, and collaborative divorce. I describe the development of the Collaborative Family Law Movement and then discuss the formation of collaborative divorce teams. I proceed by highlighting the collaboration between the legal, mental health, and financial communities that began working with divorcing families to offer a different approach to the divorce process. Finally, I provide literature examining the experiences of children of a parental collaborative divorce. I continue by discussing the gap in the literature that my research aims to address.

In Chapter III, I reiterate the purpose of this study. I present my methodology for exploring the lived experiences of adults whose parents have experienced any type of divorce while identifying if any collaborative divorce aspects were present or not during the divorce. I explain and justify my choice of utilizing phenomenological qualitative methodology, specifically Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), to gather my data and explore my research question (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). In Chapter IV, I present the findings from the study and illustrate the themes and sub-themes I derived

from my analysis. In Chapter V, I review the strengths and limitations of the study, offer suggestions for further research and discuss the implications of this study for children of divorce, their families, and family therapists.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

"Traditional" Divorce

Many factors throughout the years have played a role in the statistics and laws surrounding divorce. Black (1968) defines divorce as "the legal separation of man and wife, effected, for cause, by the judgment of a court, and either totally dissolving the marriage relation, or suspending its effects so far as concerns the cohabitation of the parties" (p. 566). What leads a couple to divorce, the method utilized to obtain a divorce, and the type of relationship a couple has once the divorce is finalized is based on many factors.

History of Divorce

In 1629, the Colony of Massachusetts Bay created a judicial tribunal that dealt with divorce matters. It was one of the earliest instances of a divorce law. They could grant divorces based on adultery, desertion, bigamy and in many cases, impotence as well. By 1776, divorce law was less restrictive. An issue for women at that time was it was difficult for them to claim ownership of property or financial assets, which worked against them in the case of a divorce. New York and Pennsylvania passed the first Married Women's Property Acts in 1848. This act was of value to women entering marriage with property, but it did not change the common-law rule that gave a husband the right to the services and the earnings of his wife.

By the 1990s, with the onset of feminism and the general relaxation of views towards divorce from a societal and moral standpoint, divorce was becoming more common. No fault divorce was possibly the biggest change to divorce law in the 1970s.

With the change in the law, a divorce could be granted if neither party were at fault. This led to a reduction in the stigma associated with divorce and made divorce more attainable. On the other hand, Ahrons (2007b) noted, “the conservative response was that by making divorce easier, it threatened traditional beliefs about the permanence of marriage and the interdependence of family and marriage” (p. 3). Through the sensitive issues of custody and child support, custody disputes became the new forum for showing a spouse's shortcomings. “As women fought for more equality in the workplace, a men’s rights movement emerged, calling for more equality in the family” (Ahrons, 2007b, p. 3). This gender dilemma brought along the shift of parents now being joint custodians of their children after divorce. As Ahrons (2007b) noted, “While political struggles were increasing about these reforms, an absence of knowledge existed about the fundamentals of how parents could be helped to be civil in the midst of such profound family upheaval and, even more so, how they could function cooperatively across their newly structured dual households” (p. 4).

Knowledge has now increased about the ways parents could be helped to be civil and function cooperatively during a divorce. This knowledge has led to new practices like collaborative divorce. This process provides a more civil method for resolving disputes that arise in a divorce such as division of property, separation of financial assets, custody, and child support disagreements. One goal is for the parents to have less disputes during and after the divorce process. This provides hope that the children will be less impacted by a high conflict divorce. The researcher explored the experiences of adults whose parents have experienced any type of divorce (do-it-yourself divorce, litigation, mediation, or collaborative divorce) and identified if any collaborative divorce oriented

hiding in clinical when into the office aspects were present or not present during the divorce. The intention for conducting this study was to explore the presence of any collaborative aspect during a parental divorce and examine the child's adjustment into adulthood.

Divorce Statistics

The U.S. divorce rate in 1970 was 13 per 1,000 of existing marriages per year. The growing trend of divorce during the 1970s was an indirect consequence of the feminist movement. Societal changes, such as the feminist movement, affected both the function of marriage and attitudes toward marriage and divorce. "The contemporary feminist movement, the increase of women in the workforce, and the sexual revolution are often cited as contributing to the rapid increase in divorce rates" (Ahrons & Rodgers, 1989, p. 13). The fight for equal pay and access to high paying jobs allowed women to become economically independent. Many unhappy women learned that they did not have to stay in marriages due to be relying on a husband for income. The fight for equality in the workplace triggered many women to pursue equality in their marriages as well. If they could not find equality in their homes, then divorce became more of a viable option. Groups of women began realizing that they would be happier being independent, instead of being acknowledged as a housewife. Feminists exposed the oppressive stereotype that women were expected to be the submissive domestic housewife, and this likely created some spousal conflict in households. Ahrons and Rodgers (1989) noted, "Challenging assumptions of appropriate gender behaviors has caused a reexamination of women's and men's roles in the family" (p. 13). The feminist movement sought liberalized divorce legislation to provide options for unhappy or abused women.

By 1980, the rate of divorce had almost doubled to 23 per 1,000 of existing marriages per year (Ahrons, 1994; Coontz, 2007; Hackstaff, 2010; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992; Marcassa, 2013; Pearson, 1999; Ver Steegh, 2008; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Wallerstein, Lewis, & Blakeslee, 2000). By the eighties, there was less shame and stigma attached to divorce (Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992). With less shame and stigma, couples were more willing to consider divorce as an option. In addition, the rise that occurred in divorce rates in the 1980s is thought to be due to state laws shifting and the court system playing a major role in the decisions regarding a divorce (Coontz, 2007; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992; Marcassa, 2013; Pearson, 1999; Ver Steegh, 2008). A couple no longer had to consensually agree to a divorce. One partner could make that decision.

United States statistics show that the divorce rates have dropped since last data was collected in 2018 by CDC/NCHS National Vital Statistics System. The U.S. divorce rate in 2018 was 2.9 per 1,000 of existing marriages per year. Even with the drop-in divorce rates, however, divorces are still occurring, which means families are being affected. Gamache (2015) noted, "In Canada and the United States, roughly half of all marriages end through the choice of one of the spouses before the fifteenth anniversary, affecting 35,000 children annually in Canada and 1,000,000 children annually in the United States" (p. 384). Divorce will affect the children, however how the parents address and handle the divorce may decrease the level of impact on the child during childhood and adulthood. The aim of this study was to explore children experiences of adjustment into adulthood following their parents' divorce and identify if any collaborative divorce aspects were present or not during the divorce.

Role of Culture in Divorce

Various researchers have examined how divorce varies per cultural values. Divorce rates tend to increase as cultures become more individualistic and industrialized, and women become more educated and financially independent (Fan & Lui, 2004; Huang, 2005; Raymo, Iwasawa, & Bumpass, 2004; Simonsson & Sandtrom, 2011; Tilson & Larson, 2000; Tomassini, Glaser, & Stuchbury, 2007). Mullins, Brackett, Bogie, and Pruett (2006) found that divorce rates are lower when religion is a central part of the culture. However, with these findings, it is important to acknowledge that perspectives on divorce may differ within the same culture. Each culture, and the groups within each culture, understands and addresses divorce differently.

The collaborative divorce team considers cultural values of the parents and contemplates how their views and beliefs tie into the divorce process. Collaborative divorce respects the family's one-of-a-kind nature. By the team being aware of the family's culture, they can assist more effectively with getting the parents to experience a more civil divorce that fits the family's beliefs and needs.

The Court System: Their Hands in the Divorce Process

One way a divorce is addressed is through the court systems' use of divorce laws. At the end of the sixties, there were three dimensions along which the divorce laws changed: the introduction of unilateral divorce (vs. consensual divorce); the no-fault (vs. fault) based divorce; and, changes in financial settlements, more precisely property division, child custody, alimony, and child support transfers (Coontz, 2007; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992; Marcassa, 2013; Pearson, 1999; Ver Steegh, 2008). While the unilateral and the no-fault based divorce were introduced in some states, all American states were

involved in the new financial settlements. Specifically, states had a regular pattern of action before 1970 where property would be unequally divided, mostly in favor of wives. This practice began to change in all states by the end of the eighties when property was divided either equally or equitably between the spouses.

The original assumption was that mothers were favored as the full custodial parent after a divorce, and fathers were considered the primary source of financial support. This assumption began to shift as all states began to provide husbands and wives with equal rights to custody. Elrod (2001) examined and summarized qualitative and quantitative research conducted over the past 30 years regarding child custody. He noted that children were negatively affected by high conflicted custody cases. Elrod's (2001) review of the literature led him to conclude that these children experienced perpetual emotional turmoil, depression, lower levels of financial support, and higher risks of mental illness, substance abuse, educational failure, and parental alienation.

The idea that fathers did not need to be involved in their children's care, and mothers would not work to stay home and care for her children began to dissolve (Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992; Marcassa, 2013; Schoonmaker III & Schoonmaker IV, 2008; Ver Steegh, 2008). Even though husbands and wives were provided with equal rights to custody, mothers are still the full custodial parents in many cases. However, visitation rights to fathers are widely recognized (Marcassa, 2013).

Life After the Divorce: The Children

What about the Kids?

After finalizing if alimony will be given, dividing the rights to the properties owned, splitting the finances, figuring out the amount to be paid monthly for child

support, and settling custody and visitation rights, the children then experience life after a parental divorce. Negative effects are experienced by most children of parental divorce, just as most of the parents experience negative effects. The effects that are experienced by children vary to a certain degree.

Portnoy (2006) found that at least half of all divorces involve minor children and noted that forty percent of children in the United States will experience their parents divorcing. It was also noted that children of divorce experience conduct problems, are two to three times more at risk for engaging in delinquent behavior in adolescence than their peers from intact families and are at a higher risk for alcohol and drug use (Portnoy, 2006). The researcher also stated that when compared to other counterparts from non-divorced families, children from divorced families have lower academic performance, female children engage in sexual activity at an earlier age, male children who live with single mothers have earlier sexual activities, and adolescents experience their fathers as less caring (Portnoy, 2006).

Amato and Cheadle (2008) examined six behavioral problems, which included repeating a grade, getting in trouble at school, being suspended or expelled from school, having trouble with the police, seeing a doctor or therapist about an emotional or behavioral problem, and being particularly difficult to raise. The researchers concluded there was a significant association between divorce and behavioral problems in children (Amato & Cheadle, 2008).

Another researcher analyzed the effect of parental divorce on the development of children within three stages of divorce: pre-, in-, and post-divorce (Kim, 2011). The results indicated a decline in interpersonal skills during the in-divorce period, in self-

expression of ideas, feelings, and opinions in positive ways. Kim (2011) also found that children of divorce had higher incidences of anxiety, loneliness, low self-esteem, and sadness during the divorce phase when compared to children in intact families. The results indicated neither a heightening nor a decrease with the above concerns in the post-divorce phase.

Wallerstein et al. (2000) chronicled the experiences of children of divorce through interviews over several years. These children shared experiences such as taking on the role of caregiver to younger siblings, sitting up with an insomniac parent, and quitting school to undertake household responsibilities of grocery shopping, cooking, cleaning, and caring for a parent. Wallerstein et al. (2000) noted that the role of the child in the post-divorce family changes, as parenting by the adults often diminishes.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) found that children of parental divorce experience overwhelming shock, fears, and grief during the divorce process and beyond. In support of those findings, Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee (2000) studied the effects of divorce on children over a period of 25 years. Their findings indicated that children experience severe emotional and behavioral problems during the separation period and beyond. The researchers note that the children will model their parents' relationship in their adult relationships. Some researchers have criticized Wallerstein et al.'s (2000) study due to the sample consisting of parents with existing diagnoses of psychopathology, a study having no control groups of intact families, and its focus on negative findings (Ahrons, 2007a; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Kelly & Emery, 2003).

Amato (2000) found that children from divorced families scored lower on measures of academic success, conduct, psychological adjustment, self-concept, social

competence, and long-term health. However, just as with some adults, some children experience positive consequences from their parents' divorce. The positive effects occur if the parents who got the divorce were in a high-conflict marriage. After their parents' divorce, these children developed very close relationships with their custodial parent and were better off in a variety of outcomes (Amato, 2000). The role of the custodial parent is clear in promoting children's well-being, while the role of the non-custodial parent is ambiguous. These roles may affect the relationship with the children. Through Amato's (2000) study, it is perceived that not all effects of parental divorce are negative.

Wolman and Taylor's (1991) research focused on the impact litigated divorce has on children. Their research findings suggest that psychological effects on the child can persist with adequate severity to require psychotherapy or medical treatment five years after divorce disputes. Wolman and Taylor (1991) have also found that children of a litigated divorce will: (a) either consciously or unconsciously develop an involvement in their parent's marital hostilities; (b) engage in parent-child role reversals; (c) have increased stress from living in a situation for a long period of time where the parents and the children have little control over the legal events; (d) develop confusion resulting from two parents who have very different views of reality; and (e) develop disillusionment that accompanies the discovery that many family values that were taught have no bearing on the current situation.

No Longer a Child: Life as an Adult after Experiencing a Parental Divorce

Once these children are no longer children, but adults, they display either positive or negative effects of their parents' divorce. These effects can be displayed in their psychological well-being, social adjustment, self-esteem or self-concept issues, or lower

relationship commitment and confidence (Ahrons, 2004; Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Cartwright, 2006; Cui & Fincham, 2010; Huure et al., 2006; Riggio, 2004; Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004; Whitton et al., 2008).

Huure et al. (2006) assessed whether adults who experienced parental divorce before 16 years of age differed in psychological well-being or life trajectories from those from non-divorced families. Results of the study show that parental divorce is an indicator of stress in childhood whose influences persist well into adulthood. The researchers found that the effects are more extensive among females.

Ahrons (2007a) examined data drawn from the Binuclear Family Project. Utilizing a semi-structured interview method, 173 children were interviewed twenty years after their parents' divorce. The adult children were found to maintain the desire for their parents to relate amicably. The findings revealed that parents whose relationship remained amicable tended to produce optimistic self-report in their offspring. The children also experienced continued positive relationships with their parents, grandparents, stepparents, and siblings. Ahrons (2007a) found that children whose parents were hostile to each other were most likely to report loyalty issues to one parent or the other, and a less than positive relationship with the father.

Duran-Aydintug (1997) examined sixty adult participants. These adult children all experienced parental divorce between the ages of five and eighteen. Results of this study indicated that participants whose parents divorced when they were between six and eleven years old recounted detailed memories and stated that they took the side of one parent (usually the mother) while blaming the other. Duran-Aydintug (1997) found that the participants also experienced childhood fantasies of their parents reuniting.

Riggio (2004) compared divorced to intact families by exploring the consequences of parental conflict on psychological and social adjustment in adults, independent of and in conjunction with the divorce. Their results indicated no sex differences in long-term effects of parental divorce and conflict. The study showed adults from high-conflict families experienced fewer available social supports and greater anxiety in personal relationships compared to those from lower conflict families. Results of the study indicated that parental divorce was found to be associated with lower effective quality and emotional support in relationships with their father. The positive outcomes identified in divorced families were that adults may experience close and satisfying relationships with their mothers, develop a marked independence, experience significantly greater numbers of perceived available social supports than adults from intact families, and have considerably lower anxiety about participating in personal relationships than those from intact families (Riggio, 2004).

Cartwright (2006) conducted life-story interviews with adults who had experienced parental divorce. The researcher examined the adults' own views of the impact of parental divorce on themselves and their lives. Five of the forty participants said their parents' divorce had no negative effects, and that they viewed divorce as beneficial. The remainder of the participants thought that they had become stronger, more mature or more independent, or that they had learned from their parents' experiences. Participants expressed the current impact on themselves as not trusting others, communication difficulties, being "too emotional," low self-esteem or self-concept issues, and feelings of distress related to the family experiences (Cartwright, 2006). The study showed that with intimate relationships, participants had hesitancy about entering

relationships, doubts about one's own ability to sustain a relationship, and lack of trust in partners. Cartwright (2006) found that while some participants acknowledged positive aspects of experiences related to parental divorce, generally they talked more fully and more frequently about the negative effects.

Whitton et al. (2008) assessed relationship commitment and relationship confidence, as well as parental divorce. They retrospectively reported interparental conflict in a sample of 265 couples engaged to be married for the first time. The researchers examined potential gender differences in associations between parental divorce and marital commitment and confidence. The main finding of this study was that "parental divorce was associated with lower relationship commitment and confidence for women" (Whitton et al., 2008, p. 791). Thus, when children are observers to their parents separating and divorcing, children may learn that marriage is impermanent. The researchers identified that there were no effects of parental divorce for men, but the parental conflict was linked with lower relationship confidence. Therefore, how the child is affected by their parental divorce may be related to the gender of the child. Whitton et al. (2008) reported, "Experiencing a parental divorce appears to have a stronger impact on women's than men's desires and beliefs about the future of their own marriages" (p. 792).

Correspondingly, one 17-year longitudinal study found that children with divorced parents have a higher risk of having their own marriages end in divorce, due to the children not holding strongly to the idea of lifelong marriages. Per Amato and DeBoer (2001), these children learned that "marriages do not last a lifetime, that people don't have to remain in unsatisfying relationships, and that divorce can provide

opportunities to seek greater happiness with alternative partners" (p. 1040). These ideas may stem from these children taking messages and learning relationship skills from observing their parents. One important finding the researchers noted is that "it is the actual termination of the marriage, rather than the disturbed family relations that precede marital dissolution, that affects children" (Amato & DeBoer, 2001, p. 1049). It may be concluded that what makes children have less faith in marital permanency is their parent's actual divorce rather than the conflict between the parents.

In further support of this finding, Cui and Fincham's (2010) study examined the association between parental divorce and adults' romantic relationship dissolution. After the researchers compared children from intact families to divorced families, they found that adults from divorced families demonstrated a more favorable attitude toward divorce and experienced low relationship commitment than those from intact families. The researchers also reported that interparental conflict and parents' marital quality before parental divorce influenced how the participants perceived parental divorce. Compared with adults of parental divorce that observed high parent marital conflict, the adults who observed low parent marital conflict had better relationship stability and were less likely to report relationship dissolution (Cui & Fincham, 2010).

Another study followed one hundred thirty-one children for 25 years. One pattern that emerged was that older siblings took on the responsibility of taking care of their younger siblings. They then took this caregiving role into their own adult relationships and sought out needy, troubled partners whom they nurtured to their own emotional detriment (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004). Many of them decided not to have children of their own. There were more occurrences of inappropriate behaviors as compared to those

whose parents were not divorced. The main finding of this study was that “divorce impacts detrimentally the capacity to love and be loved within a lasting, committed relationship” (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004, p. 363).

Ahrons (2004) acknowledged the negative effects experienced by some adult children of parental divorce, but she also observed many adult children not experiencing devastation from their parental divorce. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with adult children whose divorcing parents she interviewed twenty years earlier. Major findings from her study were most adult children of divorce emerged stronger and wiser, and they were very clear that their parents' divorce had positive outcomes, not only for their parents but for themselves as well. More than half felt that their relationships with their fathers improved after the divorce, and they feel connected to the step-parents and half-siblings who now make up their family (Ahrons, 2004). These findings provided the field with a more balanced view on the effects of divorce. Rather than focusing only on the problems of children due to divorce, she listened to these adults share their positive outcomes after experiencing parental divorce.

What Helped Children Positively Adjust as Adults?

Through the research, it can be observed that outcomes of parental divorce can be detrimental or favorable. The type of effects experienced by an adult child of parental divorce is dependent on different factors present while they were children who recently experienced the divorce. Researchers have conducted studies examining what factors assist with adult children positively adjusting to parental divorce instead of experiencing delayed damaging effects (Ahrons, 2004; Konstam, 2009; Thomas & Woodside, 2011).

Ahrons' (2004) 20-year in-depth study found that adult children of parental divorce fostered resilience if parents were supportive and nurturing, did not involve the children in their conflicts, stayed involved in the children's lives, respected each other's rights as parents, communicated with each other about the children's needs, and provided a stable and secure family environment. She interviewed over 200 adults whose parents and stepparents she had interviewed while they were going through their divorces 20 years prior. Ahrons' (2004) research also showed that adult children of parental divorce can increase their own resilience as well. The researcher found that not all parents are able to provide their children with the above-stated conditions.

Eldar-Avidan, Haj-Yahia, and Greenbaum's (2009) research supports Ahrons' (2004) findings. The researchers explored the factors that led to resilience, survival, and vulnerability for 22 young adult Israeli children of parental divorce. These now young adults' (20-25 years old) parents divorced during their childhood. Results of the study show that a positive outcome for these adult children depended on the relationship that they held with their parents, and the degree to which their parents took responsibility for providing a stable environment for them growing up. Findings from the study provided implications for mental health professionals to facilitate positive interactions between divorcing parents and their children to aid in the future adjustment of their children.

Resilience in adult children of divorce has also been studied by other researchers. Thomas and Woodside (2011) conducted a qualitative multiple case study exploring the experiences of resilience following parental divorce. The participants were interviewed to explore the factors related to the resilience of adult children of parental divorce. The researcher found that the participants all thrived despite adversity after their parents

divorced. The findings from Thomas and Woodside's (2011) research suggest that autonomy, competence, and relatedness contributed to the resilience of adult children of divorce.

Konstam (2009) explored what family therapists can offer to adult children of divorce to assist them with adjusting positively. Konstam (2009) conducted two qualitative interviews with adults who have experienced parental divorce as children to examine how the two adults "found meaning in loss and are able to actively engage with 'what is' and 'what will be'" (p. 31). The researcher explained loss as the loss of "what could have been" with their parents remaining married. It was discovered that how the separation is perceived and narrated plays a critical part in adult children's adjustment to divorce. The researcher stated there is power in assisting adults "to develop complex and integrated narratives that incorporate a sense of 'renewal'" (Konstam, 2009, p. 38). The adults in the study displayed having a narrative that privileged the current time and their future, as well as recognizing the importance and significance of the past.

Pruett and Jackson (1999) conducted a study examining the experiences of parents and children who had gone through a litigated divorce. Interviews were conducted with these participants and the researchers utilized a grounded theory methodology to identify themes about their experiences in the legal process. The results of their research were constant and primarily negative. Pruett and Jackson (1999) noted: "parental comments exuded disappointment, disillusionment, and frustration that permeated across all aspects of the divorce process" (p. 294). Parents in this study shared the difficulty they experienced when they tried to co-parent with ex-spouses who were noncommunicative. Pruett and Jackson (1999) stated, "Thirty-four percent of the parents

said that no aspect of the legal process helped bring about resolution, with the most prevalent feelings being that the process left parents out of the decision-making and fueled anger and conflict between the parties" (p. 295). Pruett and Jackson (1999) stated:

> The role of attorneys was perceived as contributing to parental rivalry and conflict by encouraging less communication between parents. According to the parents, they were told not to communicate directly, but rather to speak through their attorneys in order to reduce manipulations by the other party. (p. 298)

The researchers noted that more than a quarter of the sample did not perceive the litigation process as making things worse, but that it did not make anything better (Pruett & Jackson, 1999).

A Different Approach to Divorce

An Alternative Option- The Collaborative Divorce Process

The "traditional" divorce approach has left some parents battling each other within the court system and taking that battle with them outside of the court system into their children's lives. If a battle transpires between the parents and their lawyers, it leaves their children with metaphorical bruises that may stay with them through adulthood. For the parents who do not engage in the battle and provide a stable and secure environment, their children grow up fostering resilience (Ahrons, 2004; Eldar-Avidan et al., 2009; Thomas & Woodside, 2011).

One study examined the divorce process and the feelings about the decisions made during the process (Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992). The findings of their study began the shift in acknowledging the needs of families of divorce and the need for revisions in the system. They explored issues such as the division of parental responsibility, custody

and visitation, legal conflict, co-parenting relationships, and how these issues were being handled. The results of Maccoby and Mnookin (1992) research suggest that there is a need for families to get the opportunity to work together to find solutions instead of decisions being made by others outside of their system.

To offer another option to the traditional process, alternative approaches have been adopted by many. Divorce mediation is one of those approaches. Alba-Fisch (2016) stated, "mediation does offer a nonadversarial divorce process, but it is a problematic choice for couples with substantial power or competency imbalances or who cannot contain their hostility" (p. 444). With many taking notice of the need for something different to be implemented for families who are experiencing a divorce, Collaborative Family Law (CFL) is one of the alternative approaches to the court system approach that was developed. As of the 1970s, family law has transformed to a more collaborative approach (Hedeen & Salem, 2006; Herrman, 2006; Lande & Herman; 2004; Macfarlane, 1997; Schoonmaker III & Schoonmaker IV, 2008; Tesler, 2008; Ver Steegh, 2008; Webb, 2008).

Stu Webb was an attorney who had an idea one day to practice law in such a way that it would prevent the negative traits of litigation practice (Webb & Ousky, 2011). The origins of collaborative law came from the negative practices of litigation, such as: the discouragement of open communication, the emphasis placed on competition, the difficulty in developing true facts, the polarization of issues, the escalation of parties' feelings, the lawyer's alignment with a client's view of fact, the lawyer taking on the client's problems, the lawyer taking on responsibility for resolving conflict, and the diminishment of collegiality between lawyers.

CFL began with a small select group of lawyers who agreed to take cases, on a case-by-case basis, for settlement only. The understanding was that "if it were determined at any time that the parties could not agree and settlement didn't appear possible, or if for others reasons adversarial court proceedings were likely to be required, the attorneys for both sides would withdraw from the case and the parties would retain new attorneys from there on out to final resolution" (Webb & Ousky, 2011, p. 214).

By focusing on getting to an agreement for settlement and avoiding court, the lawyers and clients remained motivated to learn what works to achieve a settlement and how to problem-solve without getting over involved in the emotional content that led to a win-lose mentality. Settlement becomes possible because CFL clients can give a lot of input regarding a divorce. Tesler (2008) states, "Collaborative lawyers function as active legal advisors and negotiators alongside their clients at the center of the dispute-resolution process rather than on the sidelines" (p. 10). Everyone's voice is now heard and considered in the process. CFL supporters emphasize that communications go beyond the signing of a divorce decree and that continued support should be available to assist the couple to continue to share and co-parent their children in an effective manner (Nurse & Thompson, 2006; Tesler, 2008; Tesler & Thompson, 2007).

Interdisciplinary Collaborative Family Law: "The Dream Team"

During the early years of the collaborative movement, there was a shift from a lawyer-only method to an interdisciplinary model. Nurse and Thompson (2006) designed a team model for working with divorcing couples that included a group of lawyers and financial professionals. They recognized how bringing together professionals from the legal and financial communities could help families through the process of a divorce and

beyond. Nurse and Thompson (2006) have acknowledged how parental conflict affects the children.

In 1993, Nancy Ross began to work with a group of lawyers to create a partnership between mental health professionals and collaborative attorneys. Nurse and Thompson were later introduced to collaborative law process through Tesler (Webb & Ousky, 2011). Nurse and Thompson believed that the collaborative law concept was a perfect fit for the interdisciplinary model they were developing. Ross and Thompson then met and together with members of their respective groups began to develop the interdisciplinary collaborative practice concept (Webb & Ousky, 2011).

To reach a resolution with much less conflict between the divorcing couples, the interdisciplinary team approach of CFL incorporates the collaborative expertise of lawyers and MHPs, as well as financial professionals and child specialists (CS) when needed (Nurse & Thompson, 2006; Tesler, 2008; Tesler & Thompson, 2007; Webb, 2008). A collaborative divorce team utilizes a specially trained team of family law, financial, and MHPs that work together with couples to resolve issues related to the dissolution of their marriage, the co-parenting of their children, and the restructuring of their lives–without involving the court system. MHPs attend meetings, acting as the process facilitator, to support the parents. Gamache (2015) stated, "CSs are therapeutic professionals with a depth of training and experience of child development, child therapy, divorce, and so on. They are neutral to the parents and are a part of the therapeutic team" (p. 382). The CS has direct contact with the children and works with the parents to develop co-parenting skills. This "dream team" assists that family throughout the divorce

process and even way after the settlement is completed. As Webb and Ousky (2011) stated:

> Clients can meet with a financial professional to organize their financial issues for a two-hour meeting and have the attorneys join at the end of the meeting to help the clients incor- porate the financial information into their overall divorce agreement. Similarly, child specialists who provide feedback to parents about the needs of their children can have the attorneys join in some or all of the meeting to help clients process this critical information. (p. 219)

The Children of a Collaborative Divorce

Schatz's (1999) study examined four divorced couples' co-parenting relationships. The researcher found that these couples could move from their marital issues to function as effective co-parents. Schatz's (1999) findings led to the assumption that it is possible for families to remain families after divorce. Schatz noted that it is necessary to examine the divorce process and how it sets the tone for either effective or non-effective co-parenting. Schatz (1999) stated that results from the study "could be utilized by family therapists to help divorcing couples structure their co-parenting partnerships to define joint-related goals" (p. 152).

Assisting divorcing parents with effective co-parenting during and post-divorce is one of the characteristics of a collaborative divorce team that separates itself from the court system's approach to divorce. A collaborative divorce with an interdisciplinary team not only assists the parents with their finances but also offers parents more guidance on how to assist their children with adjusting positively to the divorce. A collaborative divorce team includes a lawyer for each party, one neutral MHP or a MHP for each party,

a neutral financial specialist, and if determined necessary, CS. "CS meets the children, sees how they are doing, and determines what they might need from their parents in the process of family reorganization" (Alba-Fisch, 2016, p. 452). With collaborative divorce providing a much more prevalent focus on the children of the parental divorce, researchers have examined children's adjustment after experiencing a parental collaborative divorce.

Pruett et al. (2007) studied families involved in the Collaborative Divorce Project (CDP). The CDP is an intervention program wherein divorcing families with children under the age of six are guided through the divorce process in an amicable way and provided with parent education and skills for co-parenting in divorce. CDP utilizes legal and mental health professionals to provide support and information to everyone in the divorcing system. The researchers found that "maternal gatekeeping" (the degree to which mothers encouraged and held a positive attitude toward fathers' participation in time sharing and child rearing) was a significant factor in the development of the parent-child relationship after divorce (Pruett et al., 2007, p. 737). The results of their longitudinal study indicated that CDP is effective in increasing parent-child relationships, decreasing conflict between parents, increasing the incidences of shared parenting arrangements over time, and supporting better child adjustment.

As an Adult: The Years Following a Parental Collaborative Divorce

The above studies discussed the major effects of the litigation approach to divorce on children and on those children as adults. Researchers have examined how to assist children with adjusting at the time of the parental divorce (Amato, 2000). A surplus of researchers have identified the experiences and struggles of adult children of parental

litigation to divorce (Ahrons, 2004; Ahrons, 2007a; Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Cartwright, 2006; Cui & Fincham, 2010; Huure et al., 2006; Riggio, 2004; Wallerstein et al., 2000; Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004; Whitton et al., 2008). Researchers have also presented factors that should be present at the time of divorce that may be successful in decreasing the delayed negative effects for adult children of parental divorce (Ahrons, 2004; Eldar-Avidan et al., 2009; Thomas & Woodside, 2011).

As previously discussed, once the effects of litigation were identified, other approaches to divorce began to emerge. Collaborative divorce is one of those approaches that came about (Nurse & Thompson, 2006; Tesler, 2008; Tesler & Thompson, 2007; Webb, 2008; Webb & Ousky, 2011). Researchers have examined the divorce process from a collaborative divorce team approach and have identified its positives for families (Alba-Fisch, 2016; Gamache, 2015; Webb & Ousky, 2011). Studies have also been conducted where parents focused on co-parenting after a divorce, and other families who participated in the Collaborative Divorce Project have experienced positive adjustments after a parental divorce (Pruett et al., 2007; Schatz, 1999).

By exploring the experiences of children of litigated parental divorce, researchers are now able to identify how to assist these children with adjusting at the time of the parental divorce and know what factors should be present to decrease the delayed negative effects during adulthood. Extensive time has been spent on exploring the experiences of adult children of litigated parental divorce. Divorce mediation and collaborative divorce have been developed to offer divorcing couples alternatives to litigated divorce.

The collaborative divorce process includes three requirements that differentiate it from other types of divorce: a team with an objective to settle their clients' matters harmoniously or withdraw from the case (Nurse & Thompson, 2006; Tesler, 2008; Tesler & Thompson, 2007; Webb, 2008), mental health professional on the team working with the family (Alba-Fisch, 2016; Gamache, 2015; Webb & Ousky, 2011), and assistance provided to divorcing parents for effective co-parenting during and post-divorce (Nurse & Thompson, 2006; Tesler, 2008; Tesler & Thompson, 2007). These requirements of collaborative divorce have aided couples and their children with adjusting during and after a divorce (Alba-Fisch, 2016; Gamache, 2015; Pruett et al., 2007; Schatz, 1999; Webb & Ousky, 2011). However, examining if these aspects are present within any divorce has not been explored.

While the use of a collaborative divorce team is a fairly new approach to divorce, collaborative divorce aspects may be present in do-it-yourself divorce, divorce mediation, collaborative divorce, or litigated divorce. The aspects present during a collaborative divorce include a mental health professional working with the family, less conflict between the divorcing couple, and the presence of effective co-parenting. The adjustment of children into adulthood whose parents have experienced any type of divorce with collaborative divorce aspects present or not has not been explored. This study addresses this gap in the research.

Summary

This chapter provided a historically and culturally situated overview of the existing literature on children of divorce, focusing on adjustment after their parents' divorce and explore aspects of the collaborative divorce process. The literature reviewed

for this chapter will contribute to the interview questions used in this study, further enriching the study's results. In Chapter III, I present the methodology used for this study, including information about the sample, the data collection methods, and the IPA approach I employed.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The goal of this research was to gain rich descriptions of lived experiences of adults whose parents have experienced any type of divorce and identify if any collaborative divorce aspects were present or not during the divorce. The purpose in conducting this study was to investigate the presence of any collaborative divorce aspect during a parental divorce and examine the child's adjustment into adulthood. Interviews were conducted to gather information about the adult children's lived experiences. I will cover qualitative research, phenomenology, IPA, the methodological requirements of the sample, data collection, and the data analysis. Trustworthiness and ethical guidelines will also be presented in this chapter.

Qualitative Research

There are several approaches to qualitative research. Among these are narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies. For Creswell (2012), the foundations of qualitative research are assumptions and the usage of "interpretive/theoretical frameworks to inform the research study of problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 44). Qualitative researchers collect data in the participant's natural setting and use inductive and deductive analysis to find themes and patterns. Creswell (2012) has noted that qualitative research is best utilized to conduct studies that provide a place for those who have not been able to tell their story, when exploration of a problem or issue is needed, or because there is a need to study a particular population or group. The final report of

findings and results focuses on the participants' own words, the researcher's reflections, and the interpretations and description of the problem being studied.

Qualitative research is utilized to get closer to producing a rich, deep description of the phenomenon being studied. Creswell (2012) described qualitative research as "an inquiry process of understanding based on a distinct methodological approach to inquiry that explores a social or human problem" (p. 300). The researcher believes it is important to conduct research that is mindful of the context in which participants are situated, to arrive at a richer, more complex understanding of the research phenomenon. Per Creswell, this is done as "the researcher builds complex, holistic picture; analyzes words; reports detailed views of participants and conducts the study in a natural setting" (p. 300).

To gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences, open-ended questions are used to provide the participants with an opportunity to describe their lived experiences. Qualitative research employs the use of words and meanings from participants as data in the methodology (Kvale, 1996). Like qualitative researchers, family therapists explore their clients' reality by using words and meanings clients place on their experiences (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988). Kvale (1996) reports that in qualitative research, "the purpose is to describe and understand central themes the subjects experience and live toward" (p. 29). Also, "qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). Family therapists and qualitative researchers both analyze words to identify common themes so that they can form meanings (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

This qualitative study utilized an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach to explore the lived experiences of adults whose parents have experienced any type of divorce and identified if any collaborative divorce aspects were present or not during the divorce. A qualitative research method was selected for this study due to its concept of gaining understanding from the detailed view of participants (Creswell, 2012), which resembles the family therapy approach of gaining understanding from the client's reality.

Phenomenological Methodology

Phenomenology is concerned with the study of experience from the perspective of the individual who had the experience. Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), a German philosopher, created the concept of phenomenology. Husserl believed in treating a person's reality as a pure phenomenon and as the single data to start with. Phenomenological research seeks essentially to describe rather than explain and to start from a perspective free from hypotheses or preconceptions. Smith et al. (2009) stated:

> For Husserl, phenomenology involves the careful examination of human experience. He was particularly interested in finding a means by which someone might come to accurately know their *own* experience of a given phenomenon, and would do so with depth and rigour which might allow them to identify the *essential* qualities of that experience. (p. 12)

Phenomenological methods are effective at accentuating the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own perspectives. Husserl believed that we should ignore anything outside the person's immediate experience (Groenewald, 2004).

The aim of a phenomenological approach to qualitative research is not to generate theories or models of the phenomenon being studied, but to describe accurately the lived experiences of people. Smith et al. (2009) holds the belief that "when people are engaged with 'an experience' of something major in their lives, they begin to reflect on the significance of what is happening and IPA research aims to engage with these reflections" (p. 3). This phenomenological study aimed to engage children of parental divorce with their reflections on this experience and its significance on their lives currently. Moustakas (1994) reported that phenomenological study describes "the common meaning of experiences of a phenomenon (or topic or concept) for several individuals. In this type of qualitative study, the researcher reduces the experiences to a central meaning or the 'essence' of the experience" (as cited in Creswell, 2012, p. 285). Phenomenology focuses on descriptions, experiences, meaning, and essence of the participant (Creswell, 2012). A phenomenon is "the central concept being examined by the phenomenologist. It is the concept being experienced by subjects in a study, which may include psychological concepts such as grief, anger or love" (Creswell, 2012, p. 285).

Per Moustakas (1994), "the phenomenal experience becomes increasingly clarified and expanded in meaning as the phenomenon is considered and reconsidered in reflective processes" (pp. 50-51). The phenomenon of the adult child experience of their parents' divorce became increasingly clarified and expanded in meaning as the researcher reflected on each of the participants' experiences. The process uses science and philosophy to unfold the phenomenal consciousness towards absolute knowledge (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). Phenomenology, per Moustakas (1994), "is concerned with

wholeness, with examining entities from many sides, angles, and perspectives until a unified vision of the essences of a phenomenon or experience is achieved" (p. 58). The essence of the phenomenon in this study was pursued by interviewing multiple adult children who have experienced a parental divorce. Creswell (2012) states the phenomenological research method "describes the common meaning of several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon" (p. 76).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

The phenomenological approach for this study focused on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA): "Interpretative phenomenological analysis is an approach to qualitative, experiential and psychological research which has been informed by concepts and debates from three key areas of the philosophy of knowledge: phenomenology, hermeneutics and ideology" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 11). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis "is committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is phenomenological in that it is concerned with exploring experience in its own terms" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 1). This type of research provides a holistic explanation of the experience, problem, or issue being investigated (Creswell, 2012). The explanation is not from a linear cause and effect stance, but instead identifies the complexities of the interactions of the experience. Per Smith and Eatough (2007), IPA focuses on the in-depth investigation into the lived and personal experiences of people, and how they deal with that experience. The researcher was interested in the lived experiences of the participants, and how they made sense and continue to make sense of that phenomena. The interpretation of the related data in this research process was appropriate for IPA,

because it was used to explore and examine how the participants made sense of their parents' divorce.

Participant Criteria

Once approval from the Nova Southeastern University's Institution Review Board (IRB) was attained, the researcher began the process of seeking respondents. Participants were recruited by utilizing sampling that was purposive in nature as that leads to a more narrowly defined group for which the research question and phenomenon hold meaning (Smith et al., 2009). Qualitative research is constructed on non-probability and purposive sampling rather than probability or random approaches. The sampling plan for this phenomenological study was purposeful sampling. The concept of purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research. Per Creswell (2012), "the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomena in the study" (p. 156).

In IPA, the researcher makes sure that the participants selected are appropriate for the question or topic being addressed, and as such, the researcher in this study ensured homogeneity in choosing the participants. Each of the study participants were able to answer in the affirmative that their parents experienced a divorce before they were 18 years old. Homogeneity of the sample was an important consideration in this process. Smith et al. (2009) noted that deciding on a sample that is homogeneous can potentially be affected by the ability to find people who fall within a large enough population for whom the study phenomena has sufficient meaning. When utilizing IPA, there is a necessity for in-depth, detailed exploration and data analysis.

The participants who were recruited and chosen for this study, were English speaking adult children (21 years old or older) whose parents experienced a divorce while the children were 17 years old or younger. Ethnicity was not a consideration in this study. The current study was designed to include 5 participants for whom the lived experience of their parents experiencing a divorce was significant.

To recruit participants, two methods were utilized. First, social media was utilized to lobby potential participants. The recruitment flyer (Appendix A) was posted on the researchers personal Facebook page. The flyer was made public for Facebook users to share with other Facebook users if they wish. The flyers included information that directed interested potential participants to contact the researcher directly to protect their identities and maintain their privacy. The researcher had the intention to post the flyer in relevant Facebook social groups after receiving permission from group administrators to recruit from their group, but the researcher was contacted by enough potential participants before needing to recruit in Facebook groups. The researcher provided the interested potential participants with the invitation letter (Appendix B). The potential participants reviewed the invitation letter which explained the nature of the study and invited them to participate in the study if they met the criteria.

Second, once participants were identified, those participants informed others about the research study who they believed met the study's criteria, a technique known as snowballing (Creswell, 2012). Snowball sampling is when researchers request currently enrolled participants to recruit additional participants. This non-probability sampling technique is used to identify potential subjects in studies where subjects are hard to

locate. Using this sampling method, the researcher was able to reach more adult children of divorce.

There must be consideration of minimal risk when using this sampling method. The researcher did not request participants to provide names and contact information of potential participants. Using such a method could result in the participants disclosing information about a third party without that party's consent, and the researcher obtaining information about an individual that is sensitive and private without their permission. To prevent a breach in confidentiality or an invasion of privacy, the participants were provided a recruitment letter (Appendix D) asking whether they were willing to pass along flyers (Appendix A) with the study information to people they thought might have been interested and eligible. The potential participants contacted the researcher directly if they were interested in more information and possible inclusion in the study. The researcher provided the interested potential participants with the invitation letter (Appendix B). They reviewed the invitation letter which explained the nature of the study and invited them to participate in the study if they met the criteria. Participants did not receive incentives or compensation for referrals.

A sample size of 5 participants were recruited for this study. As noted by Smith et al. (2009), a large sample size is opposing to the process. "IPA utilizes small, purposefully-selected and carefully-situated samples . . ." (Smith et al., 2009, p. 29). A sample size of 3-6 is suggested to researchers that are new to IPA. Smith and Osborn (2007) reported a small sample size allows for a deeper level of engagement with each participant, as well as a more detailed look at similarities and differences. This study's objective was not to maximize numbers but to become "theoretically saturated" with

information on the topic that was explored (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 205). Sampling decisions were made for the explicit purpose of gaining the richest possible source of information to answer the research question.

Inclusion criteria for the study were English speaking adult children (21 years old or older) whose parents have experienced a divorce while the participants were 17 years old or younger. Exclusion criteria for this study was anyone who did not complete and submit the informed consent form, anyone not willing to share their experience, and anyone that did not meet the inclusion criteria. Individuals interested in participating in the study were asked to contact the investigator by phone or electronic mail. The purpose and methods of the study were explained to all candidates. The researcher ensured that all questions and concerns about the study were addressed or explained.

Informed consent forms (Appendix C) detailing the guidelines of the study were sent by email to each participant for his/her review and signature, so participants were able to clearly decide whether they wished to participate. A brief demographic questionnaire (Appendix E) was sent by email with the informed consent forms for each participant to respond to and email back to the researcher. Potential participants were asked to email or telephone the researcher with their questions and/or concerns, or to advise of their willingness to participate after they read the informed consent and had no questions or concerns. If needed, a structured time was set for further discussion of additional questions and concerns. The forms and any pertinent study documents with identifying participant information were stored in a locked box and kept in the researcher's personal home office. The researcher addressed additional questions from respondents during the process openly and honestly.

The willing participants were asked to sign and return a copy of the consent form (Appendix C) to the researcher via email in a PDF format. The researcher then signed the form and supplied the participants with a copy in PDF format via email. The researcher kept a copy of the signed informed consents for the records. Following the signing of the informed consent by both parties, a date and time was set in collaboration with the participant for the interviews. Telephone interviews were conducted in the researcher's secured home office to adjust for the participants' location and personal preference. Date and time of the interviews were set based on availability of participants.

Data Collection

The investigator conducted an in-depth interview with each respondent. The researcher planned for one additional interview if the first interview was interrupted or incomplete, but no second interview was needed for any of the participants. The participants were informed of this possibility in the recruitment letter and informed consent. The goal of data collection in IPA includes development of a process that garners rich, detailed stories, thoughts, and feelings of the participants.

In a phenomenological study, interviews are conducted to build a sufficient dataset to look for emerging themes and to use other participants to validate the findings. A one on one conversation fosters rapport with the respondent, which is necessary in discussing such personal and potentially sensitive information (Smith et al., 2009). As the researcher, I took the position of a researching therapist. I used my therapeutic skills to create a non-judgmental, trusting, and respectful alliance with participants. This encouraged the participants to share their lived experiences openly.

Since the primary source of data was the lived experience of the individual being studied, in-depth interviews were the most prevalent means of data collection. Semi-structured interviews were the form of in-depth interviews that were used in this study. Semi-structured interviews offer the opportunity for the researcher and respondent to engage in a conversation and develop additional/modified questions based on participants' responses (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

This type of interview is open and allows new ideas to be brought up during the interviews because of what the participant says. Using this approach permitted the researcher to ask all the participants similar questions, while also allowing the researcher to respond flexibly to the unique responses each participant shared. Despite basing the interviews on a prepared list of questions (Appendix F), the researcher found that she was able to engage in a casual dialogue with the participants that flowed naturally while producing a large amount of valuable information. Each interview session lasted less than one hour with the goal of discovering the participants' lived-experience of their parents' divorce, how they make/made sense of it, identifying if any collaborative divorce aspects were present, and their perception of the experience, along with possible additional related thoughts on the phenomena.

The format of the interviews was over telephone. Although telephone interviews did not allow the researcher to experience such nuances as body language and facial expressions, it was still a feasible method and is often used by researchers when participants are not available locally (Creswell, 2012). The interviews were recorded, and notes taken by the researcher. Every effort was made to ensure privacy and security by conducting the interviews in a private room in the researcher's secured home office.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis interview questions are general and open-ended, since the researcher's goal is not restricted by a set hypothesis but is rather focused on exploring the phenomena in a flexible yet thorough manner (Smith & Osborn, 2007). During the interviews, each respondent was asked the same open-ended questions, with unique follow-up probe questions based on the individuals' response to the base question (Appendix F). Per Creswell (2012), qualitative research has the potential of shifting and changing during each phase of the process. The questions did change, and additional/new questions were generated as a result of participant's response.

As meaning making is a key construct of IPA, the researcher paid close attention during the interview to the meaning each respondent assigned to his/her lived-experience, and attempted to avoid allowing personal biases, and the introduction of leading questions, into the process as much as possible. In qualitative research, the researcher's role of interviewer, behavioral observer, and examination of documents make him/her a key component in the process. Bias is unavoidable in any form of qualitative research; it is something to be mindful of, not something to be avoided. While the researcher's central interest was the 'lived experiences' of the participants, she was aware of the impact her own parents' divorce could have on the study. Per Creswell (2012), to set aside the researcher's own experience with the issue being studied, in phenomenology, the researcher "brackets him/herself out of the study by discussing personal experience with the phenomenon" (p. 78). In phenomenological research, bracketing is an integral part of the research process.

Keeney (1983) noted the concept of the observer being a part of the observed. The researcher was placed contextually within the system. To address this concern, the

researcher journaled her reflections, observations, questions, ideas, biases, and feelings that surfaced as she related to the data. The researcher maintained her journal throughout all aspects of the research process. By writing down her thoughts and ideas that naturally arose for her throughout the process, she was able to set aside her personal assumptions and biases in an effort to be open to the unique experiences of the participants in this study. From the initial contact with each participant to the final steps of the data analysis process, the researcher employed bracketing in order to ensure that the results of this study were not caught up in any of her personal ideas, beliefs, or assumptions.

The researcher aimed to honor the voices of the participants and their perspectives throughout the analysis and presentation of findings. The researcher hoped for her personal bias to not influence the study findings, or valid research would have not been produced. Pannucci and Wilkins (2010) stated, "Bias occurs when systemic error is introduced into sampling or testing by selecting or encouraging one outcome or answer over others" (p. 619).

A digital audio recorder was used to record the participants' responses during the interviews. The interviews were then transcribed by the researcher on a Microsoft Word document for processing. The process of transcription helped the researcher become more intimately familiar with the data she collected from each of the interviews. This familiarity aided in the data analysis process. The researcher transcribed the interviews, using headphones to listen privately, and conduct Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the data.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Nova Southeastern University, the dissertation chair, the dissertation committee, and the researcher had access to the

transcripts. The transcription was then categorized into essential themes and what constitutes the essence of the participants lived experiences for data analysis (Creswell, 2012). The transcribed documents were kept safe on the researcher's encrypted computer in her home office. The researcher's computer had firewall protection, anti-virus software, file share option disabled, and the computer and files were password protected. All copies of the transcripts, the digital audio recorder, and the reflective journal were stored in a locked box in the researcher's home office. The electronic copy of the transcripts will be kept on the computer for three years after the study ends. All emails of consents and demographic questionnaires were deleted as soon as the researcher received the documents from the participants and printed hard copies. The consents, demographic questionnaires, recordings, reflective journal, and transcripts will be erased/destroyed after the three-year period. The electronic and any hard copies will be erased/destroyed by deleting electronic copies and shredding hard copies.

Data Preparation and Analysis

The researcher analyzed the data for "significant statements, meaning units, textual and structural descriptions, and description of the 'essence'" (Creswell, 2012, p. 105). To capture the respondents' information, it was necessary for the investigator to spend time engaging with the text in the interpretation process (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Qualitative researchers collect multiple forms of data including interviews, observations, and documents, which they review and analyze to come up with similarities in themes and patterns across sources. After conducting each interview, the researcher listened to the audio recording several times and reviewed all handwritten notes taken during the

interview. The researcher then transcribed the audio recording into Microsoft Word. Using the Track Changes feature, the researcher filled the margin with her initial reactions, assumptions, curiosities, and interpretations of the transcribed data. From these initial comments, she derived the primary themes.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis data analysis provides a great deal of flexibility, and there is no right or wrong way of conducting this analysis (Smith et al., 2009). There are six steps that the researcher followed to analyze the data (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Eatough, 2007; Smith & Osborn, 2007), including read and re-read, initial noting, note developing emergent themes, search for connections across emergent themes, move on to the next case, and look for patterns across cases.

Reading and Re-reading

Analyzing IPA data involves the researcher's self-immersion into the transcripts. Reading and re-reading the data is the first step. This process warrants that the participant will become the focus of the analysis. The researcher connected as closely as possible to the data by listening to the audio recording of each interview several times, in order to re-live, as much as possible, the original interview experience. Once the researcher transcribed the interview, she read the transcript several times, taking notes on her recollections of the interview experience and her reactions to the participant's responses. This step is meant to assist the researcher with entering the participant's world while resisting the temptation to jump to conclusions or make reductive assumptions about the data. I engaged in this initial step with each individual transcript. The goal was to gain the deepest interpretation possible of the participant's experience.

The researcher started with the first participant's transcript. "Imagining the voice of the participant during subsequent readings of the transcript assists with a more complete analysis" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 82). The researcher was able to enter the world and experience of the participant by using a stance of active engagement with the data. Smith et al. (2009) also noted that "repeated reading also allows a model of the overall interview structure to develop and permits the analyst to gain an understanding of how narratives can bind certain sections of an interview together" (p. 82).

Initial Noting

The aim at this stage was to establish a comprehensive and detailed set of notes and comments on the data gathered. Through note taking, the semantic content and language used was explored and examined. The researcher focused on remaining curious and open minded while noting anything of significance or interest in the transcript. This process led to a deeper level of familiarity with the transcript and "begins to identify specific ways by which the participant talks about, understands and thinks about the issue" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 83). Descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments are key stages of this step. The researcher attended to, deconstruct, underline and wrote down anything of interest (Smith et al., 2009).

In analyzing the transcript, the researcher took note of key words, phrases, participants' real-world experiences, and information of value to participants (Smith et al., 2009). This level of note taking required being aware of the participants' experiences related to their connection to that which is the focus of their lives. Smith et al. (2009) noted deeper meanings may arise as the descriptive analysis develops. The first stage of note taking, descriptive comments, are made initially to highlight the "objects which

structure the participant's thoughts and experiences" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 84). These exploratory comments are used to describe content. Content and language use may appear interconnected and important to point out. The second stage of note taking, linguistic comments, is concerned with language use. It was important to pay attention to "pronouns, pauses, laughter, functional aspects of language, repetition, tone, degree of fluency (articulate or hesitant)" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 88).

Noting the use of metaphors was also necessary. Metaphors can be "particularly powerful component of the analysis . . . because it is a linguistic device which links descriptive note taking . . . to conceptual notes . . ." (Smith et al., 2009, p. 88). The final stage of note taking is conceptual comments. Conceptual comments are more interpretative. Smith et al. (2009) explained that conceptual comments involve "a shift in your focus, towards the participant's overarching understanding of the matters that they are discussing" (p. 88). During this stage of note taking, there is an element of personal reflection.

The researcher wrote notes on each transcript that were amplified with subsequent readings of the text. The notes were interpretative in nature, aimed at helping her understand the participant's experience in context. The researcher wrote descriptive comments by taking participant's responses at face value; linguistic comments to focus on how participant's words convey meaning; and conceptual comments to shift my focus to the participant's understanding of the research phenomenon. By attending to language and getting curious about any abstract concepts that surfaced in each interview, the researcher attempted to position herself to make sense of the participant's sense-making.

Developing Emerging Themes

Qualitative data analysis is concerned with analysis of codes, themes, and patterns in the data. After becoming deeply familiar with the data set, the researcher began the process of locating and developing emergent themes. The original data collected from the participant's interviews have grown significantly by this point from all the note taking. The researcher's task and focus shifted to simultaneously decreasing much of the data, while maintaining its complex nature. Smith et al. (2009) explained this stage as the researcher mapping the interrelationships, connections, and patterns between exploratory notes: "This involves an analytical shift to working primarily with the initial notes rather than the transcript itself" (p. 91).

The researcher began moving from the concrete to the abstract, focusing on discrete portions of the transcript while also considering the notes and comments written throughout the transcript. The researcher created a table with three columns to illustrate each portion of data from the transcript, initial comments on that data, and the theme that emerged from her interpretation of the participant's original account. This process helped the researcher to identify themes in each transcript that reflected the participant's original words, while also incorporating the researcher's own interpretations of those words.

Connections Across Emergent Themes

In attempting to identify connections across emergent themes, the researcher listed the emergent themes and noted the connections found (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Emergent themes were then placed together, and a structure was produced that provided for the most interesting and important areas of the participants' lived experience (Smith

et al., 2009). The researcher brought together existing themes and organized them according to the patterns and connections among them. There are many ways to look for patterns among emergent themes. The researcher did so by typing a list of the themes that she derived from each interview, and then using the cut and paste feature in Microsoft Word to arrange those themes into various columns based on the relationships among the themes. The researcher took her time on this step, exploring the various ways in which the themes relate to one another. This step required the researcher to move further away from the participant's original words and rely heavily on the researcher's own interpretation to flexibly organize and connect the various themes.

Moving to the Next Case

Once on this step of the analysis, the next participant's transcript was analyzed using steps one through four (read and re-read, initial noting, developing emergent themes, and search for connections across emergent themes). Each case was treated on its own terms and based on its individuality. "This means, as far as is possible, bracketing the ideas emerging from the analysis of the first case while working on the second" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 100).

It was challenging to focus on each transcript individually and engage in the first four steps of analysis while moving on to each case. As Smith et al. (2009) point out, when moving to the next case, the researcher is inevitably influenced by what he or she has already found in the previous transcript(s). To bracket the ideas that emerged from the researcher's review of the other interviews, she continued to utilize her journal. She wrote notes about thoughts that surfaced about previous interviews or connections that she was making between each individual interview and the combination of all the

interviews she had conducted up to that point. This journaling process helped the researcher to maintain her focus on the transcript at hand.

Looking for Patterns Across Cases

At the sixth and final step, the researcher located patterns across the themes that derived from each case. The goal was to identify connections across the experiences, how they differ, and the most powerful themes. This helped lead the analysis to a theoretical level as themes present in one participant's experience also represents concepts that were like other participants' experience. Smith et al. (2009) noted IPA possesses the ability for this dual quality of identifying how participants represent a unique idiosyncratic position, and how that idiosyncratic position is shared with other participants. Primary themes, also referred to as superordinate themes, were first identified. As the exploration progressed, the researcher identified subthemes, also known as subordinate themes, within the primary themes. Usually, there are two types of themes, collective themes that occur across the group of participants and individual themes that are unique to one or a few individual participants.

The researcher created a table in Microsoft Word to arrange all the themes she derived from the five interviews. This enabled the researcher to see the relationships among the themes and, therefore, to generate some information about how the participants' unique accounts connected with one another. She used the cut and paste feature in Microsoft Word to list the themes under a higher level of organization, thus developing a series of primary themes and corresponding sub-themes. The researchers work on this step was more than a simple arranging of themes; it involved interpretation and required the researcher to develop theoretical connections among the various themes.

Quality Control

Trustworthiness

The researcher developed a quality control plan for managing ethical, safety concerns, and self-of-the-researcher. This was essential for the validity and reliability of the study. The researcher carefully observed the specifics of qualitative research and quality control. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) suggested that four factors must be considered in establishing the trustworthiness of findings from qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability.

Credibility. Credibility refers to the confidence one can have regarding truth of the findings. Credibility was established by member checking and use of reflective journaling. With member checking, the participants were asked to read the transcripts of their interview. Here the emphasis is on whether the participants consider that their words match what they intended (Creswell, 2012). The researcher solicited participants' views of the accuracy and credibility of the researcher's interpretation by reaching out to the participants through email with the transcript of their interview for the participant to review and edit if they found necessary (Appendix G).

A reflexive journal was utilized to document observational notes. The journal allowed the researcher to describe their feelings and identify biases that arose while conducting research in this area of study. Researchers are encouraged to keep a journal to determine how their personal views may have influenced their interpretation of findings. Per Morrow and Smith (2000), the use of a reflexive journal adds rigor to qualitative inquiry as the investigator can record his/her reactions, assumptions, expectations, and biases about the research process.

Transferability. The second factor to trustworthiness is transferability, which means that other researchers may apply the findings of the study to their own. To provide for transferability, the current study presented a sufficient thick description of the phenomenon under investigation. This permits readers to have a proper understanding of the phenomenon, thereby enabling them to compare the instances of the phenomenon described in this research study with those that they have seen emerge in their situations.

Dependability. The third factor of trustworthiness is dependability, which refers to the stability or consistency of the findings over time. The processes within the study will be reported in detail, thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, if not necessarily to gain the same results. An audit trail was used to accomplish dependability. For the current study, the dissertation chair served as the "auditor." The auditor checked if the researcher made mistakes in conceptualizing the study, collecting the data, interpreting the findings, and reporting results.

Conformability. The final factor in trustworthiness is conformability to the internal coherence of the data in relation to the findings, interpretation, and recommendations (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Confirmability is the qualitative investigator's comparable concern to objectivity. Steps were taken to help ensure as far as possible that the study's findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the participants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher. A key criterion for confirmability is the extent to which the researcher admits her own predispositions, which this researcher focused on remaining aware of her biases and inclinations by using a journal and bracketing herself out the study.

Ethical Considerations

Creswell (2012) reported that during the process of planning and designing research, one must remain aware of ethical issues which will likely arise. To acknowledge the ethical guidelines of the field of Marriage and Family Therapy, qualitative research, and IPA, the researcher solicited participants and gave each participant in the study a clear outline of the study, its intention, and procedures after full approval from the Nova Southeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained. The participants were informed that participation in the study was voluntary and they were free to leave the study at any time as they saw fit. Participants were permitted to ask questions for their clarity and complete understanding of the nature and procedure of the study. Since the researcher did not compensate the participants in this study, the researcher openly and honestly discussed the potential intangible benefits of participating, as well as the possible risks.

Since participants were sharing personal experiences, the researcher anticipated that some participants might experience discomfort as a result of participating in the study. The researcher attempted to attend to such discomfort by conducting the interviews with the same empathy and patience she uses in her work as a therapist, giving space for participants to take their time and respond in whatever ways allow them to feel safe. However, she was mindful of staying in the role of researcher and not acting as a therapist in her exchanges with participants.

The anonymity of each participant was carefully respected, stored safely, and protected. De-identification was used to protect the identity of the participants. Each participant was assigned a number used to differentiate the case files and protect the

participant's sensitive information. In addition, pseudonyms were put in place of participants' actual names to protect their privacy. The pseudonyms were used in all transcripts and written materials. The researcher referred to the participants according to their pseudonyms throughout the study.

All emails of consents and demographic questionnaires were deleted as soon as the researcher received the documents from the participants and printed hard copies. All collected data, copies of the transcripts, the digital audio recorder, and the reflective journal were maintained in a locked box in the researcher's secured private home office where there was no access by others. Upon completion of (or withdrawal from) the study, consents and collected data (digital recordings, consents, demographic questionnaires, transcripts, and reflective journal) will be maintained for three years and then destroyed/erased. All participants were treated fairly, given the same questions, the same length of time for the interview, and treated with the same respect.

According to Smith et al. (2009), the practice of ethical research must be monitored throughout the data collection and analytic processes. The researcher attempted to abide by the principle of avoiding doing harm, which is a firm research principle. The informed consent and open, honest discussion of the study was paramount in conducting this research. In IPA, informed consent covers not only participation in data collection, but also extends to results of data analysis. The researcher remained open to revisit the issue of consent if it arose during the interview process and potential emergence of particularly sensitive topics. The participants were informed that if they were to experience extreme discomfort and choose not to continue with the study, the researcher would promptly conclude the interview and discard any records taken for that

participant up to that point in time. In addition, the researcher let the participants know—both verbally and in the Informed Consent document—that if they wanted to speak with a professional about any discomfort experienced during their participation in the study, the researcher would offer a minimum of three mental health practitioners/practices for consult. Neither of these scenarios occurred with any of the participants in the study. Rather, they were all open and eager to participate in the interviews and share their lived experiences. The researcher also practiced self-care by consulting with her dissertation chair as needed.

Providing the Richest Possible Findings

In conclusion, to get close to the richest possible finding of these adults' experiences, the researcher utilized the qualitative research approach described, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The primary source of data was the descriptions of adult children experiences of parental divorce. The interpretation of the data in this research process is appropriate for IPA. IPA was used to examine the lived and personal experiences of the adult children of parental divorce, how they responded and continue to respond to that experience and identified if any collaborative divorce aspects were present. Qualitative research provides rich descriptions and gives more understanding from the detailed view of the adult children. The researcher aimed to accentuate the adult children's experiences of their parents' divorce and gained their perceptions of its significance on their lives currently. The researcher identified if any collaborative divorce aspects (family seeing a mental health professional, less conflict between divorcing parents, and the presence of effective co-parenting) were present during these children's lives as they experienced their parents' divorce.

Phenomenological research fits this goal by seeking to essentially describe rather than explain by conducting interviews. The interviews produced a sufficient dataset of emerging themes, that led to the richest possible finding. In Chapter IV, I present the findings from this study, using extracts from my interviews with the participants to demonstrate the various themes and sub-themes I derived from my analysis.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Parental divorce has been a common experience for many children, but the experience can be different for everyone who goes through it. These children then go into adulthood with the effects of this experience. The individuals in this study volunteered to speak openly about their experience as children of parental divorce with collaborative divorce aspects present or not. This chapter illustrates the primary themes derived from the analysis of the captivating stories shared by the participants of this study. The themes and sub-themes I present and illustrate in this chapter emerged from my analysis of the complex data and are representative of the perspectives shared by the participants. The process entailed reviewing the data, describing exploratory comments, journaling my thoughts and interactions with the data as the researcher, and identifying themes within and across cases.

The excerpts selected for inclusion in this chapter gave voice to the participants personally and collectively. While each case revealed variations in reactions to life with the phenomenon, there were both subtle and noticeable shared experiences. The researcher conducted 5 over the phone audio recorded interviews to adjust for the participants' location and personal preference. Semi-structured interview questions (Appendix F) were used to guide the conversation with each participant, with additional questions based on participants' response. Table 1 displays the participants' demographic data. Table 2 displays each of the primary themes, along with the sub-themes included under each one. Throughout the chapter, I explain the meaning of the themes by including excerpts from the original data. I weave the participants' original voices

through my own description of the themes and sub-themes in an effort to clarify the lived experience of the adult children of divorce with collaborative divorce aspects present or not.

Table 1

Participants' Demographic Data

Pseudonym	Gender	Race	Age at Interview	Age at Parents' Divorce	Marital Status
Von	Male	Black	41	10	Married
Salena	Female	Black	35	2	Single
Micah	Female	Black	34	2	Single
Cassidy	Female	White	29	7	Single
Charmaine	Female	Black	33	4	Divorced

Table 2

Primary Themes and Sub-Themes

Primary Theme	**Sub-Themes**
Child of Parental Divorce: Adjustment	• Too Young To Be Impacted • Parents Lived Experience: Sharing with Children • Self-sufficiency • Changed View of Parents to Individuals • Shifted View of Fathers

	• Improved Communication with Age
Conflictual Divorce	• Child Support • Not Taking Care of Responsibilities • Stuck In The Middle: Remaining Loyal as a Child
Qualities of a Peaceful Divorce	• Dad Being Present • Able to Speak Up
Co-Parenting: Being Present	• Mom Primary Caregiver • Dad Was Around
To Seek Therapy or Not	• Therapy Not A Factor • Presence of a Support System
Effects of Parental Divorce on Relationships	• Trust Issues • Relationship/Marriage: Not A Priority • Protective Barriers • Concerns with Marriage

Child of Parental Divorce: Adjustment

In the process of recalling and describing their adjustment process, the participants in the study conveyed some of their personally held ideas about what it means to experience a parental divorce. In different ways, the participants all shared their

perspectives on parental divorce, which they derived from their personal experiences. The views they shared on their parental divorce, help to contextualize how they made sense of their unique processes of adjustment.

Too Young To Be Impacted

The existing literature on the experience of children of parental divorce has conveyed how children of parental divorce are impacted, either positively or negatively, by the experience (Ahrons, 2004; Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Cartwright, 2006; Cui & Fincham, 2010; Huure et al., 2006; Riggio, 2004; Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004; Whitton et al., 2008). However, the response from one participant in this study suggest that a parental divorce can be experienced without feeling any impact. Micah spoke about going through her parents' divorce at the age of two.

> Micah: It just, it feels so normal to me because I only, you know, I grew up with them being divorced.
>
> Researcher: Mm-hmm
>
> Micah: So, I have, it's not like I can have something before and after to compare it to.
>
> Researcher: Mm-hmm
>
> Micah: So, I don't, I don't really feel like it did impact me.

Micah did not have an experience with her parents before the divorce. With no experience to compare her parents' divorce to, she did not believe to be impacted either positively or negatively. Micah's parents not being together, was her "normal" since the day she could remember.

Micah: It was just, that's just the way my life was, or is. It's just, I don't sit and think about it like uh this could be different if they would have stayed together, I don't.

Researcher: Mm-hmm, hmm

Micah: I really don't think about the divorce at all.

Researcher: Hm, ok so it's basically like they, since you were so young, if it's, like this is how it just always was?

Micah: Correct. Like that's, that's all I grew up knowing so I didn't feel like I missed anything.

Von, who was the oldest at his parents' divorce compared to the other participants, recalls his parents' divorce with much detail.

Researcher: Okay, and what do you remember about their divorce?

Von: Uh, 1988, I was ten years old. Fifth grade, um, going from private school to public school. My sister was a senior in high school, 18 years old. Uh, yes that's how I will always remember 1988. I was ten years old. I was in fifth grade. That's the year my parents got divorced.

Researcher: Got it.

Von: But I don't remember nothing else, but I remember that date, that's for sure. I don't know the actual date, but I know it was 1988 and I was in 5th grade and I was 10 years old.

Experiencing his parents' divorce at an older age may suggest a different level of impact on his life. He also shared how his parents delayed the divorce. He believed they choose to delay it thinking the children would be able to handle it better.

Von: um, I remember they said they got divorce when they did because my sister was a senior in high school and I was five, I was in the fifth grade, and they felt that was the right page that we both could handle the situation. So, I guess in hindsight it was something that they been was talking about, but I think that they delayed it until we was of age to handle it.

Reflecting on this experience of the delayed divorce, further exploration could have been done on Von's idea on how he believed he handled it at that age.

Parents' Lived Experience: Sharing with Children

On the other hand, Cassidy was also two years old when her parents were separated, and seven years old at the time of their official divorce. Even though she was too young to personally recall her parents' relationship before the separation, her mother described life before the separation, so Cassidy was able to compare her parents' marriage to life after the divorce.

Researcher: Alright, so tell me about your relationship with your parents before their divorce?

Cassidy: Um, so I was very young, um, but I put in my documents that my parents they split up when I was around the age of two.

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Cassidy: So, I don't really remember a time when my parents ever lived together.

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Cassidy: If that makes sense.

Researcher: Yeah.

Cassidy: Um, so I'd say, it's hard. I can't really answer kind of my relationship before they got divorced because I was a baby. [laugh]

Researcher: Of course, yeah.

Cassidy: Um, but I can tell you kinda of what my mom has told me.

Researcher: Okay.

Cassidy: Um, kinda about their dynamic if that will be helpful.

Researcher: Sure. Mm-hmm

Cassidy: Okay. Yeah, so, um, my parents, just to give you some context, my parents were married in April of 1990-

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Cassidy: and I was born in May of '91.

Researcher: Okay.

Cassidy: So, um, they had me very quickly after they got married.

Researcher: Yeah.

Cassidy: Um, it was like a happy surprise as they called it.

Getting her mother's experience of how the marriage was before they were separated and officially divorced, gave Cassidy a glimpse of her parents' relationship that she did not personally witness.

Parents sharing their experiences of life before and during the divorce with their children was a common event with other participants in this study. Sharing these experiences appeared to impact the child's adjustment. One participant, Von, expressed his parents sharing these experiences to give their side of the story and express negative opinions about each parent.

Von: There's my mom side, my dad side, and then there's the truth. I always got my mom side and I tell people when they're divorced, when you're divorced, especially as a little kid you tend to be with one parent more than the other and depending on the parent-

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Von: they may put in your mind, oh well, you know, so my mom, oh your dad walked out on us. He was no good. He was blah blah blah blah blah, but my mom would always dog my dad. But I would tell people to this day, my dad has never dogged my mom, never called her out her name. He won't let me disrespect her, he never disrespected her. So, my mom painted this narrative about my dad that I only got her version of it because that's who I'm living with.

Duran-Aydintug's (1997) study explored how children took the side of one parent (usually the mother) while blaming the other. This experience that Von described may be related to what leads some children to take sides after a divorce.

Self-sufficiency

One aspect of a child's adjustment after a parental divorce that has been identified in previous research is a child becoming more independent and taking on more responsibilities (Wallerstein et al., 2000). One participant supported the previous research as he shared how going through his parents' divorce led him to become self-sufficient at an early age.

Von: I kinda like raised myself-

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Von: to a certain point, because my mom was going to college, but I got paid to pay the cleaning lady to clean, the lawn man. Honestly trying to take care of myself-

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Von: from like middle school all the way because I use to wake up five. Uh, let me see, in high school my bus I woke up 4:30 because my bus came at 5:50.

Researcher: Yeah

Von: So, in middle school I was waking up at 5:30 and catching the bus at six. Yeah because my mom wasn't up when I was in middle school. My mom wasn't up. I was on my own, kinda like you know doing my homework-

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Von: you know washing clothes. I had to learn all of that in elementary school, like washing my uniforms and all that stuff. So, I was kind of self-sufficient actually. She just paid the bills and I kinda just did me actually.

Previous researchers have identified children, like Von, who have expressed taking on a new role and responsibilities in the family dynamics that help the family adjust after a parental divorce (Wallerstein et al., 2000). Von is the only participant in this study who expressed becoming self-sufficient as part of his experience.

Changed View of Parents to Individuals

Von also expressed an interesting aspect of his experience that helped with his adjustment to his parents' divorce. He described how changing his view of his parents helped him to adjust and deal with the divorce.

Von: I'm able to remove myself from looking at them as their son-

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Von: and as my parents, and look at them as two twenty something year old individuals, and be like, okay you know you're in your mid-twenties, however old they were, okay I get it. Do I agree with it? Nope but I totally understand-

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Von: because I was once twenty-two, twenty-three years old and I get it. So, um, you know, I just, how it affects me now, I look at them totally different. I still respect them as my parents, but I'm able to look at them like some people off the street, not in a bad way, but I be like, okay, I see the situation. Do I agree with what went down? No, um, did it affect me? Oh, yes.

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Von: Um, but you know, you just look at them and be like, ok, well I get it like ya'll was in ya'll twenties.

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Von: I get it. Do I agree with it? Nah, but I get it and you know, you just try to move on, move on from there. That's how I dealt with it.

He discussed this change in view as occurring when he was an adult. He was clear on expressing that the divorce did affect him, but as an adult with what he suggests as more life experiences, he was able to see his parents as just individuals and not hold them to a higher standard because they were his parents. This change in perspective appears to have helped him with dealing with his parents' divorce.

Shifted View of Fathers

Another change in view occurred for Salena. She explained how her view on a father's role and appreciation for fathers shifted.

> Salena: Um, I think I see fathers differently. Um, like this Saturday I was having headaches and I had to call my doctor-
>
> Researcher: Mm-hmm
>
> Salena: Um, who is for whatever reason he just likes me. Um, who would just talk to me like this father figure.
>
> Researcher: Wow.
>
> Salena: Um, and I could see it, like I can get why, I guess people appreciate fathers.
>
> Researcher: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm
>
> Salena: Um, but I imagine that divorce, I guess their divorce made me understand what I did not have.

As an adult, Salena has developed an appreciation for fathers, and is now aware of what she did not have from her father. It appears that these shifts and changes in views will continue to occur throughout the stages of life and as new experiences arise for these children of divorce. These new views now can play a role in how they adjust as adults after the experience of a parental divorce. Reflecting on Salena's thoughts on fathers, whether she appreciated fathers at all before this shift, could have been explored more in depth, as well as asking specifically what Salena felt that she did not have.

Improved Communication with Age

Another participant who shared changes that occurred as she got older was Charmaine. Charmaine identified how communication improved between her parents as she got older.

Charmaine: Um, I felt like I was stuck in the middle. They didn't really want to communicate with each other.

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Charmaine: But, as I got older, the communication got better.

After reviewing Von's, Salena's, and Charmaine's experience, it appears that adjustment to a parental divorce continues to shift as the children age and experience new events in their personal lives. Their experiences suggest that the effects of parental divorce and adjustments are constantly occurring as they age.

Conflictual Divorce

As the participants shared their experiences, the type of divorce their parents utilized (litigated, mediation, or collaborative) was not a factor. It seemed that none of the participants were aware of the specifics of their parents' divorce process. They were all more entwined with the conflict between their parents, their parents' presence in their lives, and the effects their parents' divorce had on their own relationships.

An emphasis on less conflict between the divorcing couple is a focal point with the collaborative divorce process. The focus on conflict and peace between parents after their parents' divorce has been experienced by all the participants in this study. Each participant identified moments of conflict, and moments of peace between their parents. Moments of conflict included issues regarding child support, a parent not taking care of

responsibilities, and some participants feeling as having to choose between their parents. Salena spoke about the moment she was aware that her parents' divorce was conflictual.

> Salena: Um, I know that it was conflictual because my mom wasn't working at the time and he pretty much said the lights are gonna be out on Thursday and I'm leaving-
>
> Researcher: Mm-hmm
>
> Salena: and took the car that was in my mother's name and left.
>
> Researcher: Mm-hmm
>
> Salena: Um, so I, I think their divorce made things very uncertain. Um, cause my mom was a housewife up until that point, and so we had to move pretty quickly. Um, and my mom had to kinda figure stuff out.

Child Support

One theme that continued to surface for multiple participants is child support and how it continued to add to conflict between parents. Salena explained how custody was used to try to avoid paying child support.

> Salena: I remember him kind of dropping in. I knew that he wanted, um, custody of me so that he could avoid child support.
>
> Researcher: Mm-hmm
>
> Salena: Um, but then didn't do much with the custody that he gained. Um, I know both of them to be volatile-
>
> Researcher: Mm-hmm
>
> Salena: So, I imagined anything that they kind of fought over probably followed suit.

Von also shared how his mother focused on child support. Von stated “I will tell you to this day my mom knows exactly how much my dad owes in child support with interest.” Von, being 41 years old today and his parents divorcing when he was 10, conveys how seriously his mother viewed child support.

One experience that the researcher found interesting is Salena’s mother trying to be fair with child support. Salena spoke about this with what appeared to be agitation in her voice.

> Salena: Um, she made sure that child support stayed relatively low because she knew that he had two other children.
>
> Researcher: Mm-hmm
>
> Salena: Um, after he got divorced again that he would be paying child support for, and so she felt like it would be fair to him but ultimately it was really unfair for her.

Salena seemed to not agree with her mother’s decision to keep child support low. She may have been against her mother’s decision due to what she has seen her mother experience. The mention of her father getting another divorce indicated that he is one of the parents who got remarried. Ahrons’ (2007a) study identified the impact of fathers’ remarriage being associated with adult children’s father-child relationship quality. Salena’s experience of her father’s remarriage could be described as leading to a strained relationship with her father.

Not Taking Care of Responsibilities

Another theme that surfaced that was expressed as an area of conflict between parents was a parent not taking care of responsibilities. Charmaine stated, “the confliction

would be, uh, um, him not taking care of everything that he should have been taking care of." Reflecting on Charmaine's comment, questions could have been asked about what her father was not specifically taking care of. Identifying those aspects may have led to other themes becoming apparent.

Stuck In The Middle: Remaining Loyal as a Child

Conflict between divorced parents led to some participants experiencing a question of loyalty. One participant expressed her struggle of being stuck in between her parents and feeling like she must choose between them.

Charmaine: Um, and for me I felt like I had to choose.

Researcher: Hmm, tell me more. What made you feel like you had to choose? What made, what gave you those, those, that idea that there was a choice to be made?

Charmaine: Uh, just they're, um, talking out of frustration.

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Charmaine: Your mom did this, so your dad did this.

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Charmaine: And it was just, um, I just felt stuck in the middle, in between both of them.

The hesitancy in her voice when she spoke of how hard it is to be in the position of choosing between parents and feeling stuck in the middle, was evidence of an underlying emotional difficulty with the experience.

Von, also was placed in the position of choosing between his parents. He expressed how his mother threatened to stop supporting him financially if he ever

decided to live with his father.

> Von: because he owed child support she was very adamant about if I ever went to go live with him, she would cut me off because she's taking care of me all this time.
>
> Researcher: Mm-hmm
>
> Von: Which is one of the reasons why I never went to go stay with him because my mom had the money and I ain't stupid.

The researcher found it interesting how a parental conflict led to a child having to make a choice between parents. The experience of children feeling stuck in the middle and having to make a choice between parents can be impactful in their lives.

Qualities of a Peaceful Divorce

One of the aspects present during a collaborative divorce includes less conflict between the divorcing couple. Most of the participants in this study shared peaceful experiences of their parents' divorces. The researcher found it interesting that each participant had certain indicators for what made their parents' divorce peaceful. Cassidy identified her parents' divorce as peaceful due to not seeing them fight.

> Cassidy: I would say peaceful.
>
> Researcher: Peaceful and-
>
> Cassidy: For the most part.
>
> Researcher: Okay. Okay.
>
> Cassidy: You know I didn't really see them fighting about things or, um, especially when it was going on with me being so young, I really wasn't involved in it at all.

Micah expressed her parents' divorce as being peaceful because her parents communicated about her and her siblings with no unpleasant interactions.

> Micah: Like they communicated about us, but they, you know my mom is snarky, so they would have like comments about each other, but it wasn't, it wasn't particularly unpleasant or something that I remember like, oh gosh I don't wanna see them together or anything like that.
>
> Researcher: Okay.
>
> Micah: They got along for the, for the most part-
>
> Researcher: Okay.
>
> Micah: even if they weren't friends.

Dad Being Present

One of the sub-themes that became apparent in relation to a peaceful parental divorce was the father being present. Some of the participants related their dad being present as a sign of peace. Micah shared how her father coming over to her mother's house to pick up her and her sisters was an indicator of their divorce being peaceful.

> Researcher: Okay, and in your view would you describe your parents' divorce as highly conflictual or peaceful, and how did that affect you, if it did?
>
> Micah: It was somewhere in the middle, because my, my dad would still come over and like pick us up and talk briefly to my mom, but it wasn't like blatant animosity between them.

Von expressed repeatedly how he saw his father all the time and how that meant his parents did not have a messy divorce.

Von: Like I still saw my daddy all the time. So, maybe it was different because it wasn't like I wasn't seeing him. I was seeing him damn near every day. He just wasn't physically living in my house.

Researcher: Okay.

Von: So, that's why I was like I don't think it was like no messy divorce, and you know, no we have to pack up and move away or restraining order or nothing like that, it was just he wasn't in the house.

Researcher: Understand.

Able to Speak Up

Charmaine shared a shift that occurred as she got older and was able to speak up. In her experience, being able to speak up led to her parents' relationship becoming more peaceful.

Charmaine: the peaceful part I guess, um, once I got old enough to voice my concerns or, uh, speak.

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Charmaine: On behalf of certain things, things started to calm down.

Researcher: Okay, and how old were you when you felt like you were able to speak?

Charmaine: Um, well I would tell whatever I was told to say, but when I felt like I had a voice of my own-

Researcher: mm-hmm

Charmaine: I would say I was like fifteen.

Researcher: Okay, okay, so once you were able to say, your, say how you felt and voice your opinions, you felt like it was, that's when it became, it started getting peaceful?

Charmaine: Yes, yes.

It appeared that once she felt she had a voice and able to share her concerns, she was not stuck in the middle anymore.

Co-Parenting: Being Present

Another aspect present during a collaborative divorce includes the occurrence of effective co-parenting. This was a theme that resonated deeply with all participants. Each participant in this study shared the common experience of their mom being the primary caregiver while the father was present in some form or fashion.

Mom Primary Caregiver

Charmaine shared the experience of the day when her mom left her dad. Charmaine's mother then became her primary caregiver.

Charmaine: And the last argument I remember, um, when we moved out.

Researcher: Mm, mm-hmm

Charmaine: Um, they got in, they were yelling back and forth and we ended up going to live with my grandmother.

Researcher: Hmm, okay and who was we? You moved out with your mom or you moved out your dad?

Charmaine: My mom

Each of the participants in this study lived primarily with their mother.

Cassidy reacted by laughing at the mention of co-parenting. She explained that her mother was the primary parent and her dad was more hands off as a parent.

Researcher: Okay, and how would you describe your parents co-parenting skills.

Cassidy: Co-parenting, oh that's a good one. [laugh]

Researcher: [laugh]

Cassidy: Um, my mom was definitely the primary parent.

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Cassidy: Um, I would say my dad style of parenting was very hands off-

Researcher: mm-hmm

Cassidy: and he was, uh, like your stereotypical fun parent.

Researcher: Yeah.

Cassidy: Like you know, we would, he would take me to the movies or like we would go bowling together when we would spend time together.

Cassidy explained that her father "checked out" once her mom got pregnant.

Cassidy: When my mom got pregnant, she told me that my dad kind of, um, really threw himself into his work.

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Cassidy: My dad has always been very, uh, career oriented and he owns his own business.

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Cassidy: So, um, he just kind of, there was like something that clicked in him once my mom got pregnant. He kinda just lost interest in the family a little bit.

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Cassidy: That's how she describes

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Cassidy: Um and so he was kind of emotionally checked out I think for most of her pregnancy, and she described it as like a real chore to get him to help with anything after I was born.

Based on Cassidy's experience it appears her mom's role as a primary caregiver was there before the divorce. Her father's limited parenting role continued after the divorce.

Cassidy: all of the discipline really fell to my mom, like he didn't have an active role-

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Cassidy: in my parenting I would say. So, he kinda just defaulted to whatever she wanted and didn't really care.

Researcher: Mm-hmm, Mm-hmm

Cassidy: Um, so I guess if you call that co-parenting. [laugh]

Researcher: [laugh]

Cassidy: I call that the mother parenting and the father not really caring.

Researcher: [laugh]

Cassidy: But that's exactly what it was.

Salena expressed a similar experience on how her mom did all the parenting. She stated, "how my mom co-parented was that she did all of the parenting, but, um, allowed him to pick me up when he wanted to." Salena elaborated, sharing "Um, I guess he was involved, but it definitely wasn't what custody was. He was not there fifty percent of the time." These experiences are supported by Amato's (2000) research that identified the

role of the custodial parent as being clear in promoting children's well-being, while the role of the non-custodial parent is ambiguous.

Von and Micah also identified their mom as the primary caregiver. Micah stated, "So it was basically like I only live with my mom, and I just saw my dad sometimes." She identified her mom as a single mom as her dad visited and sometimes took her and her siblings out.

> Micah: my mom was mostly a single mom. I saw my dad, my dad had visitation and he would come and get us and take us to church, and like sometimes, like run errands but we very rarely, we didn't live with him-
>
> Researcher: Mm-hmm
>
> Micah: and we would very rarely like spend the night with him.

Dad Was Around

One theme that was reiterated within all participants' experience of their parental divorce was their dad being around in some way. Cassidy expressed how she would go see her dad whenever she wanted even though she primarily lived with her mom.

> Cassidy: So, I lived with her-
>
> Researcher: Yeah
>
> Cassidy: and then my dad, I would go see him, um, kind of it was whenever I wanted to type of situation. I remember being like five, five and six, and we would do like the every other weekend type of thing.
>
> Researcher: Yeah.
>
> Cassidy: Where I would just stay with him, um, but then I remember being like around seven and that just wasn't working anymore. So, it just became I lived

with my mom full time, and then whenever I wanted to see my dad I would just call him, and then he would like come pick me up and we would like go do things together.

Micah expressed a similar experience when she stated, “So it was basically like I only live with my mom, and I just saw my dad sometimes.” Charmaine and Salena also expressed seeing their father sometime. Salena identified how her father would “pop in” and how he would consider that as effective co-parenting.

Researcher: Yeah. Um, and how would you describe, um, your parents co-parenting? Was it present at all, based on after he left?

Salena: Oh, I mean he would pop in and he would say so.

Von repeatedly shared how he talked to his father all the time and saw his father a lot ever since the divorce.

Von: even when he did move away to take care of my grandma, I still talked to him all the time so it’s kind of a different thing for me, you know, it wasn't he left and-

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Von: I never saw him or I went like we didn’t, they didn’t have no arrangements, like I stayed with him on the weekends and I stayed with her during the week, or I go with them over the summer.

Researcher: Hmm

Von: It wasn't that, he would still come pick me up on the weekends because literally like his best friend literally lived in front of my house.

He seemed persistent with conveying this information about his father being present

every day of his life since the divorce. His repetition regarding his father's presence in his life conveyed the importance of this experience for him.

> Von: Like I tell people, my parents' divorce, I'm forty-one, so my parents' divorce was different. Like I know people who don't know their dad like never seen their dad. I'm forty-one years old and I talk to my dad every day.
>
> Researcher: Mm-hmm
>
> Von: From 1988 when they got divorce to the day I'm talking to you now, I still talk to him every day so I didn't have that that typical, I guess, my parents got divorced and my dad moved away.

As the only male in the study, the researcher later wondered if his father's presence was especially important since he was also male.

To Seek Therapy or Not

A mental health professional working with the family has also been identified as an aspect present during a collaborative divorce. Only one participant had the experience of seeing a therapist for individual sessions during his parents' divorce. Von described the experience as influencing his career goals and did not share his personal progress, if any, with adjusting to his parents' divorce because of therapy.

> Researcher: Did you parents connect you with, um, a therapist? Like were you connected with a therapist during the divorce?
>
> Von: Yes, I went to, that's why I wanted to go to school for psychology.
>
> Researcher: Oh.
>
> Von: Fifth grade, it's so funny, fifth grade I went to go see, it was a black dude

named Dr. Gibbs, and he had something called a psych team, and he was out west and I went to sit with him and go to the psychologist.

Therapy Not A Factor

Cassidy expressed her parents' dismissal of therapy, especially her father's apprehension to therapy, which appeared to be conveyed by a laugh while she responded.

Cassidy: Um, there wasn't any therapy that I can remember.

Researcher: Okay.

Cassidy: Um, yeah I know for sure my dad didn't. [laugh]

Researcher: Okay.

Cassidy: Um, yeah, yeah. I wanna say I'm fairly positive that neither of my parents sought therapy as a result of the divorce.

Four out of the five participants shared therapy was not sought as they experienced their parents' divorce. Von was the only participant who was linked to individual therapy by his mother.

Presence of a Support System

The researcher found Salena's response about therapy interesting. Even though her parents did not get her connected to a therapist, they connected her to another resource- "the larger support system."

Researcher: Hmm, and so the, did, did your parents get you connected with like a therapist during their divorce, and if they did, um, how was that experience for you?

Salena: They did not. I literally, I left the country. [laugh]

Researcher: Yeah. [laugh]

Salena: Um, I think they connected me with the larger support system-

Researcher: Hmm

Salena: but definitely not a therapist.

Researcher: Hmm, and can you describe what that support system looked like?

Salena: Yeah, I went to live with my grandmother and my great aunt-

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Salena: in Haiti. Um, so that was great. I enjoyed that.

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Salena: Um, my uncle was like my father figure.

Researcher: Hmm

Salena: Um, so it was pretty stable.

She identified this support system as an alternative to therapy during her experience. This larger support system appears to have assisted Salena in adjusting to her parents' divorce.

Effects of Parental Divorce on Relationships

Each participant was very vocal and detailed on how their parental divorce affected their intimate relationships and views on marriage. This theme resonated intensely with all participants. Four sub-themes emerged from participants' experiences. Theses sub-themes were trust issues, relationship and marriage not being a priority, use of protective barriers, and concerns with marriage.

Trust Issues

The researcher was not astonished once participants started sharing their experience with trust issues within their relationships. The stories shared by the participants in this study corroborates with Cartwright's (2006) finding that children of

parental divorce have a lack of trust in partners. Cassidy was very specific on how her issue with trusting people is a result of her parents' divorce.

> Cassidy: I think really their divorce, the thing that I kind of come back to, is how it affected me, is I kind of struggle in relationships.
>
> Researcher: Mm-hmm
>
> Cassidy: I have a really hard time trusting people.

Von spoke with assertion when sharing how his mother's infidelity, which led to his parents' divorce, produced his trust issues with women.

> Von: Um, more of my mom, the effect, with being that I had a somewhat of a trust issues with women, because once I got the story of why they divorced, it wasn't the main, it was the main thing of why they divorced, it was infidelity on my mom's part.
>
> Researcher: Mm-hmm
>
> Von: So, once I got the story it made me have trust issues with women, because I'm like if my own mother would lie to me about an incident then why would I trust the next person off the street?

Relationship/Marriage: Not A Priority

The second sub-theme that surfaced in relation to the effects of parental divorce on the participants' relationships were relationships/marriage not being a priority. Most of the participants shared this sentiment. Micah described how her experience of parental divorce has led her to view marriage as not a requirement in life.

> Researcher: And what if any effect did your parents' divorce have on your own relationships and ideas of marriage?

Micah: Um, it added to the belief, it added to my unbelief in marriage and relationships.

Researcher: Your unbelief-

Micah: Like-

Researcher: you said?

Micah: Yeah

Researcher: Explain that.

Micah: Yeah, like I don't really feel like I believe in marriage

Salena described how her view on marriage has changed as well. She expressed how because of her parents' divorce, marriage is no longer something she aspires to have, but is now optional.

Salena: Um, uh, I think I see marriage differently.

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Salena: Um, I think I see marriage as something that's aspirational, but definitely optional.

Divorce being viewed as an option by children of parental divorce has been discussed in previous research. Amato and DeBoer (2001) shared how children of parental divorce begin to learn that marriages do not last a lifetime and that divorce can provide opportunities to obtain greater happiness. Salena expressed how the experience of her parents' divorce gave her the realization that divorce can be okay and occur for a beneficial reason.

Salena: Um, and so I can see the drawbacks-

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Salena: but I could also see, like thank God they got divorced.

Researcher: Hmm, at what age would you say you started, um, having this acknowledgement of how life would have been like and where you came to this idea of thank God that they got the divorce?

Salena: Um, I think maybe like preteens. Um, maybe like eleven. I just really started kind of looking around like oh they really don't like each other.

Researcher: Hmm

Salena: Like I can't deal with them now, I don't know how I would have dealt with them being together in the same household.

Salena was able to identify the benefits of a divorce not only for her parents, but how the divorce benefited her development.

Salena: I don't know how life would have turned out differently. I mean, I think it also was beneficial on the other side because knowing who my father is I'm pretty sure it's not someone I wanted to grow up with-

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Salena: in the same home.

As Salena expressed her realizations, she appeared to be in a position of not feeling burdened to get married or feel pressured to avoid a divorce if needed.

Researcher: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, hmm and then so what, if any, effect did your parents' divorce have on your own relationships and ideas of marriage? I know you briefly touched on that too.

Salena: Oh, um, I like the idea of that if this doesn't work out then like the world will be okay.

Cassidy did not identify how her parents' divorce affected her views on marriage, but rather how the experience has hindered her from having any type of intimate relationship. Cartwright's (2006) study showed this occurrence of children of parental divorce having hesitancy about entering intimate relationships. Cassidy identified fear as the main factor keeping her from pursuing any serious relationship.

Cassidy: I have never been in like a serious long-term relationship.

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Cassidy: Mainly because I have never pursued anything like that-

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Cassidy: and I think a lot of it stems from I have a lot of fear of not knowing how to be in a relationship.

Protective Barriers

The next sub-theme that appeared was the concept of protective barriers. Four of the five participants expressed how they have all focused on how they protect themselves from a divorce or just avoided intimate relationships in totality. It appears the participants put their attention on ways to protect themselves from experiencing their own divorce. Charmaine shared how she attempted to work very hard to not get a divorce herself.

Researcher: Hmm, okay, and how do you think your own life has been impacted by your parents' divorce?

Charmaine: Um. [laugh] I would say that I think, I think I worked very hard to not end up in the same situation

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Charmaine: But somehow, I did.

Charmaine began her statement with a laugh which appeared to be in relation to reflecting on her attempts on saving her marriage. She concluded her statement with “but somehow, I did” with a sense of sorrow in her voice.

Salena spoke assertively of being aware of what she does not want in a relationship. It seems that she set up a protective barrier as well. She shared how looking at her mother’s experience, she decided that she will not have that same experience in her own life.

Salena: I'm very clear on what I don't want.

Researcher: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm

Salena: Um, and so I think my mother leaving that situation-

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Salena: or ensuring that the situation didn't continue, um, kind of set a precedent for me that, that’s not something that I can recreate in my life.

Cassidy described how the experience made her into a “closed off person.” When she mentioned being “closed off”, the researcher first assumed it was a negative aspect she was describing. However, after she shared more of her experience and the researcher did some more review, it was apparent she saw this characteristics as a hindrance to her romantic relationships, but at the same time a positive because it was protecting her.

Cassidy: So, I think its really kind of affected me in the relationship department-

Researcher: Yeah.

Cassidy: just because it kind of made me into this closed off person that I tend to just do everything by myself because I have control of that.

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Cassidy: Um, so I would say that's like the primary thing that's affected me.

Researcher: Okay.

Cassidy: More so as an adult

While being closed off, she can control aspects of her life which may give her some feelings of security.

After further reflection on the sub-theme identified as protective barriers, the question arose as to whether these protective barriers relate to not only protecting themselves from experiencing their own divorce, but do they also relate to protecting their own children from experiencing a parental divorce as well. A parent going through a divorce is one experience, but the children experience is different. This unique experience as a child of parental divorce may be of more concern for these participants.

Concerns with Marriage

The final sub-theme that emerged from three participants' experiences were their concerns with marriage. Each of the participants shared how experiencing a parental divorce led to them developing concerns with the idea of marriage. Charmaine shared how she once was optimistic about marriage. She now expressed her concern with marriage, and specifically the risk of repeating the cycle of divorce in her own life. Wallerstein et al.'s (2000) study supports this experience of children of parental divorce modeling their parents' relationship in their adult relationships. Charmaine expressed this concern as part of her experience.

Researcher: Mm-hmm, and what, if any affect, did your parents' divorce have on your own relationships and ideas of marriage?

Charmaine: Um, I would say I was optimistic at first about everything, um, people say that we are reflection of our parents, or you know what we experience is what we'll be but, um, at first I didn't think that was true, but-

Researcher: Hmm

Charmaine: I think that sometimes we, uh, unknowingly-

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Charmaine: I, um, picked up a lot of habits from that, from their relationship-

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Charmaine: that I didn't [inaudible 06:00] and I brought some of that into my own marriage I would say.

The hesitancy in her voice when she spoke about her concerns, was evidence of an underlying emotional difficulty with the experience. It is important to clarify that Charmaine not only experienced a parental divorce, but her own marriage ended in divorce as well. It appears she went into her marriage optimistic even after going through her parents' divorce. The experience of her own divorce suggest that it added to her understanding and her views of marriage changed.

Cassidy shared her concerns with marriage related to having no example of marriage, and the fear that brought her. Cassidy expressed her concerns with worry in her voice.

Cassidy: Um, I never had like you know my parents living together. You know, husband and wife, that was never modeled for me as a child.

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Cassidy: So, I have a lot of fears and concerns of like I just I have no-

Researcher: Hmm

Cassidy: I have no template; I have no example of what that looks like I don't know what a normal family-

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Cassidy: quote, unquote, looks like for people.

She continued to discuss how she is troubled by the idea of marriage and experiencing the unknown.

Cassidy: now trying to navigate, you know, entering relationships then thinking down the line of do I want to get married, and maybe have my own children, like I don't know how to do,-

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Cassidy: be in a relationship, be a parent, but just like the what if, fears, that kind of play over and over.

To reiterate, Cassidy was only two when her parents separated before their divorce when she was seven. Her only memory and experience was seeing her parents as not together.

Micah also experienced her parents' divorce at a young age. Micah was two at the time of the divorce and only witnessed her parents as a divorced couple. She acknowledged her concerns with the idea marriage came from the example her parents gave her.

Micah: So, it just makes me hesitant about wanting to be in a relationship and wanting to ever get married. It's not just my parents, but they, you know, they're one of the, you know, one of the, the examples that I have of, yep, forget this

person and this person and this person. Like my parents are, my parents are one of them.

Her repetition of stating her parents are one of the examples, expressed the intensity of her feelings. It appears she wanted to make it clear that she was not looking at an abstract distant relationship that ended in divorce. Clarifying her own parents are an example of a divorce may suggest how much closer in proximity and more likely for her to possibly experience a divorce as well. She also shared her concerns with marriage being unsuccessful and having “shady parts”.

Micah: I don't think that marriage as a whole is really what it seems like on paper. Like I feel like, most relationships and marriages are either unsuccessful or if they are successful, people, people accept things that they shouldn't have to accept from somebody that loves them-

Researcher: Mm-hmm

Micah: and like people, I actually think, people [inaudible 03:42] people make mistakes, but I just feel like the vast majority of relationships have shady parts to them that shouldn't exist in what I think of what marriage should be.

It could be assumed that Micah drew her conclusion about marriage being unsuccessful with “shady parts” after experiencing her own parents’ divorce, witnessing other relationships around her, and her own experiences in romantic relationships. All these experiences may have brought her to this current view on marriage. Reflecting on Micah’s shared experience, the researcher could have explored more with Micah on her thoughts on what marriage should be.

Summary

The results of this study support many of the findings in the existing literature about children of parental divorce experiences. However, the identification of any collaborative divorce aspects, present or not, as these children experience this phenomenon, expand upon what has already been said about how children adjust to a parental divorce. The excerpts featured in this chapter illustrate a range of issues that were particularly relevant to the participants in the study. They emphasized the significance of parental roles in caregiving, the relationship between divorcing parents, effects on adult children's relationships, and countless other individual and relational variables. Considered together, they illuminate the experience of adjusting to a parental divorce. Table 3 displays the universally shared, partially shared, and unique sub-themes across cases.

Table 3

Shared and Unique Sub-Themes Across Cases

	Participants Who Expressed Theme	Sub-Themes
Universal Shared Themes	Von Salena Micah Cassidy Charmaine	• Mom Primary Caregiver • Dad Was Around • Concerns with Marriage

Partially Shared Themes	Von Cassidy	• Parents Lived Experience: Sharing with Children • Trust Issues
	Von Salena	• Child Support
	Von Charmaine	• Stuck In The Middle: Remaining Loyal as a Child
	Von Micah	• Dad Being Present
	Salena Micah Cassidy Charmaine	• Therapy Not A Factor • Protective Barriers
	Salena Micah Cassidy	• Relationship/Marriage: Not A Priority

Unique Themes	Von	• Self-sufficiency • Changed View of Parents to Individuals
	Salena	• Shifted View of Fathers • Presence of a Support System
	Micah	• Too Young To Be Impacted
	Charmaine	• Improved Communication with Age • Not Taking Care of Responsibilities • Able to Speak Up

In Chapter V, I make connections between the findings from this study and the existing research literature on adjustment of children of parental divorce. I identify the strengths and limitations of the study and offer suggestions for future studies to expand upon what has been found in this exploration of children experiences of parental divorce adjustment with collaborative divorce aspects present or not. Finally, I discuss the implications of the study and its relevance for the field of family therapy.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Making Meaning of the Study and Its Results

The purpose of this study was to investigate the presence or absence of collaborative divorce aspects during a parental divorce and examine the child's adjustment into adulthood, using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach. By interviewing five adult children of parental divorce, I was able to offer valuable relational perspectives on the adjustment process that will serve to enhance the existing literature on this phenomenon. The participants in the study shed light on several important issues that impact how children of divorce adjusted into adulthood. From this process the researcher was able to determine the participants' lived experiences as described by them. The transcripts from the five interviews I conducted contain an abundance of rich information that I attempted to capture in a way that would preserve the integrity of the participants' original words while offering new interpretations of the phenomenon that can enhance family therapists' work with children of parental divorce at any age during their adjustment.

The hope of the researcher was to elucidate experience of the adult child of divorce and identify the presence and/or absence of collaborative divorce aspects during their adjustment. The aspects of a collaborative divorce that were explored during this study include a mental health professional working with the family, less conflict between the divorcing couple, and the presence of effective co-parenting. These aspects of collaborative divorce have aided couples and their children with adjusting during and after a divorce (Alba-Fisch, 2016; Gamache, 2015; Pruett et al., 2007; Schatz, 1999;

Webb & Ousky, 2011). This study explored the adjustment of children into adulthood whose parents have experienced any type of divorce with these collaborative divorce aspects present or not. The results of this study corroborate what other researchers have asserted about the adjustment of adult children of any type of parental divorce, still there are new findings that capture what it means to adjust with the presence or absence of collaborative divorce aspects.

In my review of the existing literature in Chapter II, I overviewed the primary findings of the previous studies that have been conducted to explore how children of parental divorce adjust into adulthood. In some ways, the participants in the present study echoed what has been found in previous studies. The findings that most closely correspond with those of previous studies have to do with parental divorce being associated with romantic relationship dissolution and lower relationship commitment (Cartwright, 2006; Cui & Fincham, 2010; Whitton et al., 2008). Each participant was very vocal and detailed on how their parental divorce has affected their intimate relationships and views on marriage. This theme resonated intensely with all participants. The participants of this study shared how an intimate relationship or marriage is not a priority and divorce is seen as an option. This study also highlights the previous assertion that children of parental divorce model their parents' relationship in their adult intimate relationships (Wallerstein et al., 2000). One participant also mentioned her father's remarriage and second divorce, which resonated with Ahrons' (2007a) findings about the impact of fathers' remarriage being associated with adult children's father-child relationship quality.

One aspect of collaborative divorce, a mental health professional working with the family, only appeared in the experience of one participant. Interestingly, another participant spoke about getting connected to a support system as she adjusted to her parents' divorce. The researcher believes this resource may be present in the experiences of other children of parental divorce and should be explored in more depth regarding their adjustment. In addition, with the collaborative divorce process, an emphasis is on less conflict between the divorcing couple. Moments of conflict and moments of peace between parents where identified by all participants. Each participant had certain indicators for what made their parents' divorce peaceful. Moments of peace included not seeing parents fight, parents communicating about children with no unpleasant interactions, and father being present.

The researcher noticed that the findings from this study departed from the previous literature in the importance of co-parenting and the relationship with parents for adjustment (Ahrons, 2004; Eldar-Avidan et al., 2009; Pruett et al., 2007; Schatz, 1999). Ahrons (2004) found that effective co-parenting with interaction and communication present, related to a child's adjustment. Each participant in this study shared the common experience of their mom being the primary caregiver while the father made an appearance occasionally. For some of the participants, a peaceful parental divorce was the father being present in their lives. It did not have to be an equal presence as the mother's role. Their father being around in some way was a theme that was reiterated within all participants' experience of their parental divorce. Co-parenting was not how the participants experienced their father's role, however they adjusted to adulthood with their mother as the primary caregiver. So co-parenting, which is another aspect present

during a collaborative divorce, was not expressed as part of the participants' experiences in this study after their parents divorced.

The findings also convey that the type of divorce the participants' parents utilized (do-it-yourself divorce, litigated, mediation, or collaborative) was not a factor. It appeared that none of the participants were aware of the specifics of their parents' divorce process. They were all more entwined with the conflict between their parents, their parents' presence in their lives, and the impact their parents' divorce had on their own intimate relationships. The focus was on the fact that their parents got a divorce. They were not concerned with their parents' type of divorce. The emergent themes of this study suggest that the experiences of the participants had more to do with their experiences of a parental divorce in general and less to do with the type of divorce.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

To better understand its contribution to the existing literature, it is crucial to examine this study's various strengths and limitations. Childhood experience of divorce is extremely prevalent, yet there are few first-person accounts in the research exploring this common phenomenon. Utilizing IPA provided thick, rich descriptions and valuable themes held in common. The methodology used for the study is its primary strength. This approach emphasizes the meanings people derive out of their experiences. The IPA approach enabled me to shift back and forth between the original essence of the participants' responses and my own understandings of them. Other qualitative methodologies, while allowing me to explore this research phenomenon in context, might not have given me as much leeway to interpret the participants' descriptions of their lived experiences. A quantitative study of the adjustment of children of parental divorce would

have offered a reductive overview that would fail to capture the valuable nuances that were essential to this study. Utilizing this methodology allowed me to see the participants' experiences through their unique perspectives as well as through my own, "experientially-informed lens" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 36).

Naturally, this study has limitations that must be considered. This study did not include much diversity with respect to participants' age at the time of their parents' divorce. Therefore, the experiences of older children of divorce who might have distinct, age-related perspectives are absent from this inquiry. Since older children are at a different developmental stage in their life at the time of their parents' divorce, their responses and shared experience might have offered valuable information about their adjustment. In addition, majority of the participants in this study were female. A lack of the male experience is another limitation. Gaining more male experiences could have provided more information on the experience of male children of parental divorce. Additionally, the participants mainly identified as Black. Only one participant identified as White. The race and culture of participants and their parents could have influenced their views on seeking therapy and views on parental roles. Future studies would do well to incorporate a more diverse sample, to offer a broader view of the adjustment of children of parental divorce.

While this study examined a topic that deserves to be explored, due to the size of the sample, generalization from these findings should be approached cautiously. Although the recruitment process was homogeneous, continued conversations with a larger number of participants over a longer period would be beneficial. The current study was designed to include a maximum of five participants for whom the lived experience of

parental divorce as a child was significant. It was not the intention of the researcher to develop such ideas as treatment modalities or to provide generalizability of this study. The intent was to elucidate the phenomenon, and to provide insight into the lives of children of parental divorce as adults while identifying if any collaborative divorce aspects were present during their adjustment.

Suggestions for Further Research

There continues to be a need for more studies to broaden and enhance the understanding of what it means to adjust to divorce. Factors to assist in the adjustment after a divorce can constantly shift as our society and the perspectives of the people within it change as well. The participants in this study experienced their parental divorce between the ages of two and ten. For future research, the experiences of adult children who experienced their parents' divorce while they were over ten years old could be explored. The time of their parents' divorce may elicit a different experience of adjustment due to what is known about child developmental stages. To expand upon the findings from this study, future studies should examine the lived experiences of parents who have experienced any type of divorce and identify if any collaborative divorce aspects were present or not present during the divorce. Exploring the parents' lived experiences would likely elucidate more information on collaborative aspects of the divorce, of which the children may not have been aware. Future studies can also focus on gaining rich descriptions of experiences of adult children of collaborative divorce. This population has not been explored extensively. Some of the children whose parents have utilized this approach are now adults and their experience of adulthood after going through a parental collaborative divorce have not yet been studied.

Implications of the Study

This study has wide-reaching implications that can serve children of parental divorce, their families, and professionals in the field of family therapy. As I mentioned in previous chapters, my intention was to expand upon what exists in the present literature, and to shed light on aspects, present or not present, of the collaborative divorce process that affect the adjustment of an adult child of parental divorce who have lived that experience. This study represents a reflection of a constant occurring family phenomenon that is worthy of consideration and understanding.

For Adult Children of Parental Divorce

Previous research has shown that children of parental divorce continue to be affected by the experience well into adulthood. These adult children of divorce face new adjustments as they age and have new life experiences. Once they enter adulthood, the way they experience their parents' divorce and its effect on their life continues. This study shed light on, and gave voice to, these adult children and allowed them to recognize and share their experience in a safe environment. The researcher hopes that more adult children of parental divorce will reflect on their experience and their current adjustment and continue dialogue to identify aspects that affect their continued adjustment. The researcher also hopes that parents going through a divorce with children of any age who read this study may recognize aspects of the collaborative divorce process that affect the adjustment of their children and address these concerns.

For Therapists

This study provides implications for marriage and family therapists and other mental health professionals (MHPs) who work with children who have experienced a

parental divorce of any kind as they adjust to life experiences. Gaining information on the experiences of the adult children of a parental divorce provides MHPs with knowledge of what collaborative factors present or not present, within any type of divorce, contributes to their adjustment as adults. MHPs can now be aware of collaborative divorce aspects that may be present or not, which might affect their future adjustment as children of parental divorce. MHPs on collaborative divorce teams work with a family well after the divorce is completed to make sure effective co-parenting is being implemented, so MHPs in general practice may need to focus more on the years of co-parenting after divorce.

As divorces continue to occur, more families may seek general therapy. Marriage and family therapists and other mental health professionals should have general knowledge about the experience of children of divorce. Therapists need to take into consideration the race, culture, and age of children of parental divorce when working with this population. These factors influence their experience and adjustment to parental divorce over time. By MHPs being aware of the family's culture, they can assist more effectively with getting the parents to experience a more civil divorce that fits the family's beliefs and needs. The findings from this study might shift the way MHPs provide services to their families who are experiencing divorce and seeking therapy as they adjust to this life change. Marriage and family therapists may gain knowledge from the findings in this study which may change how they work with this population.

It is the researcher's hope that family therapists reading this document become educated about the fact that children of divorce are not only impacted at a young age, but that the impact can carry over into adulthood. However, certain aspects such as key collaborative divorce aspects (mental health professional working with the family, less

conflict between the divorcing couple, and the presence of effective co-parenting) affect their adjustment after the divorce and well into adulthood. The participants in this study all talked about the divorce over time. Their experiences convey that the actual divorce process is not as important to them as what happens during the following years. Therapists can try to put less focus on the actual divorce and give more attention on the following years as it relates to co-parenting skills and conflict resolution techniques. From this study, family therapists can garner information shared by adult children of parental divorce and utilize the data to develop therapeutic tools for working with this population.

For Family Therapy Educators and Supervisors

Reviewing the literature in various mental health fields has revealed the need for educators and supervisors to include a broader concept of the child of divorce in educating MFTs. Future clinicians need to be educated on the increasing diversity of the demographic of children of divorce. Divorce and how it impacts children have been heavily studied. However, the term children, has been vastly limited to under the age of eighteen. A parents' divorce, as shown in this study, no matter what age it occurs, influences a child's adjustment for many years following that divorce. This should be reflected in how MFTs are educated and trained. Supervisors themselves also need to be aware of this population and their needs as they age.

This study has profound implications for current and future MFTs who will inevitably encounter children of parental divorce at any age. The children of divorce may not seek services until they are well into adulthood and observe the effect of the divorce manifesting in their life at that time. This study elucidates the need for educating MFT

professionals on this significant topic. I am hopeful that the participants' shared experiences will resonate with other individuals and families, and that the results of the study can help guide the work of researchers, educators, and practitioners.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Recruitment Flyer

DID YOUR PARENTS EXPERIENCE A DIVORCE?

IF YES, YOU ARE NEEDED AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

STUDY TITLE

Exploring the Lived Experiences of Adults Who Have Experienced a Parental Divorce: Identifying Collaborative Divorce Aspects as They Adjusted to Adulthood

PURPOSE: To examine the lived experiences of adult children whose parents have experienced a divorce while the children were 17 years old or younger.

ELIGIBILITY: English speaker over the age of 20. Your parents had to have divorced when you were under the age of 18 years old. You must have the willingness to share your experience.

BENEFITS: There is no promise of any direct benefit to you as a participant in this research study.

COMPENSATION: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and the Participants will not be compensated.

CONTACT: Arlene Brown, LMFT
Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Family Therapy
Nova Southeastern University
3301 College Avenue
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33314
954-634-2978

Appendix B

Invitation Letter

Dear Potential Participant,

My name is Arlene Brown. I am conducting a dissertation study as a Doctoral Student of Family Therapy at Nova Southeastern University to contribute to the body of literature in the Marriage and Family Therapy field. I am interested in examining the lived experiences of adult children (21 years old or older) whose parents have utilized a divorce while the children were 17 years old or younger. My goal is to discover their overall experience, how he/she has been affected by this occurrence, as well as how, if at all, he/she has dealt with/is dealing with their parents' divorce.

The criteria for inclusion in this study, is for you, the participant, to be English speaker over the age of 20. Your parents had to have divorced when you were under the age of 18 years old. You must have the willingness to share your experience.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you will NOT be compensated for your time. You will also be asked to sign and return a consent form to the researcher, and the researcher will answer all your questions before you participate in the study. If you decide to participate in this research study, one interview will be conducted in person at Nova Southeastern University, over telephone, or by video call through the app Zoom, with the potentiality of one additional interview if found to be necessary. Each interview will last between one to two hours. The interview will consist of questions formulated by the researcher, as well as any additional questions, which may arise because of a response, which needs clarification, or provokes interest in acquiring further information. Please keep in mind that participation is based on first come, first serve basis due to the small sample size.

Confidentiality is of optimum importance for academic research. Every effort will be made by the researcher to ensure the confidentiality of your information throughout the entire process. Your data will be de-identified with the use of pseudonyms in place of your actual name. You will also be assigned a number used to differentiate between the participants and to protect your information. Your data will however be available to my dissertation chair Dr. Anne Rambo.

If you are interested or know someone who may be interested, have any questions regarding the requirements for participation, or any other questions regarding the research study in general, please contact the researcher, Arlene Brown, via telephone at 954-634-2978, or email at arlebrow@mynsu.nova.edu. Thank you for your consideration in participating in this study and/or nominating someone who you believe would also be suitable for this study.

Sincerely,

Arlene Brown, LMFT

This research is conducted under the direction of Dr. Anne Rambo, Department of Family Therapy

(IRB number: #2020-243)

Appendix C

General Informed Consent Form
NSU Consent to be in a Research Study Entitled
Exploring the Lived Experiences of Adults Who Have Experienced a Parental Divorce: Identifying Collaborative Divorce Aspects as They Adjusted to Adulthood

Who is doing this research study?

College: College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

Principal Investigator: Arlene Brown, LMFT

Faculty Advisor/Dissertation Chair: Anne Rambo, Ph.D.

Co-Investigator(s): N/A

Site Information: Nova Southeastern University
Maltz Psychology Building
3301 College Avenue
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33314

Funding: Unfunded

What is this study about?

This is a research study, designed to test and create new ideas that other people can use. The purpose of this research study is to examine the lived experiences of adult children whose parents have divorced while the children were 17 years old or younger. The goal is to discover their overall experience, how they have been affected by this occurrence, identify if any collaborative aspects were present or not present, as well as how if at all, they have dealt with/are dealing with their parents' divorce. This study may provide implications for marriage and family therapists and other mental health professionals (MHPs) who work with children going through parental divorce. Gaining information on the experiences of the adult children of any type of parental divorce might provide MHPs with knowledge of what collaborative factors contribute to a positive adjustment.

Why are you asking me to be in this research study?

You are being asked to be in this research study because I believe your experience as a child of parental divorce qualifies you as a participant. Your lived experience will add significant value to this research study.

This study will include about 5 people over the age of 20.

What will I be doing if I agree to be in this research study?

While you are taking part in this research study, you will be asked to participate in an interview, with the prospect of one additional interview if the first interview is interrupted or incomplete. The interviews will be one to two hours in length. You will also be asked to read and review the findings of this research study in an effort to ensure that your lived experience was recorded and presented accurately.

Research Study Procedures - as a participant, this is what you will be doing:

The investigator will conduct an in-depth interview with you, with the likelihood of one additional interview if the first interview is interrupted or incomplete. The interview will be recorded with a digital audio recorder. Each interview session will last about one to two hours. The format of the interviews will vary between in-person, video call, and telephone. Every effort will be made to ensure privacy and security by conducting the face-to-face interviews in a private room with doors locked at Nova Southeastern University, and phone and video call interviews will be conducted in the researcher's secured home office. You will have the opportunity to review and edit the transcripts of your interview, if necessary.

Are there possible risks and discomforts to me?

This research study involves minimal risk to you. To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would have in everyday life.

You may find some questions we ask you (or some things we ask you to do) to be upsetting or stressful.
If so, we can refer you to someone who may be able to help you with these feelings.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research study?
You have the right to leave this research study at any time or refuse to be in it. If you decide to leave or you do not want to be in the study anymore, you will not get any penalty or lose any services you have a right to get. If you choose to stop being in the study before it is over, any information about you that was collected **before** the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the end of the study and may be used as a part of the research.

What if there is new information learned during the study that may affect my decision to remain in the study?
If significant new information relating to the study becomes available, which may relate to whether you want to remain in this study, this information will be given to you by the investigators. You may be asked to sign a new Informed Consent Form, if the information is given to you after you have joined the study.

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

There are no direct benefits from being in this research study. We hope the information learned from this study will help Mental Health Professionals gain knowledge of what collaborative factors contribute to positive adjustment of children of a parental divorce.

Will I be paid or be given compensation for being in the study?

You will not be given any payments or compensation for being in this research study.

Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you for being in this research study.

Ask the researchers if you have any questions about what it will cost you to take part in this research study (for example bills, fees, or other costs related to the research).

How will you keep my information private?

Information we learn about you in this research study will be handled in a confidential manner, within the limits of the law and will be limited to people who have a need to review this information. De-identification will be used in an effort to maintain your confidentiality and privacy. You will be assigned a number in place of your actual name. No identifying information will be used in the study or any future publications of the study. This data will be available to the researcher, the Institutional Review Board and other representatives of this institution, and any regulatory and granting agencies (if applicable). If we publish the results of the study in a scientific journal or book, we will not identify you. All confidential data will be kept securely on the researcher's encrypted computer. All emails of consents and demographic questionnaires will be deleted as soon as the researcher receives the documents from you and prints hard copies. All pertinent study documents will be stored in a locked box in the researcher's secured private home office where there is no access by others. All data will be kept for 36 months from the end of the study and destroyed after that time by deleting electronic copies and shredding hard copies.

Will there be any Audio or Video Recording?
This research study involves audio recording. This recording will be available to the researcher, the Institutional Review Board and other representatives of this institution, and any of the people who gave the researcher money to do the study (if applicable). The recording will be kept, stored, and destroyed as stated in the section above. Because what is in the recording could be used to find out that it is you, it is not possible to be sure that the recording will always be kept confidential. The researcher will try to keep anyone not working on the research from listening to the recording.

Whom can I contact if I have questions, concerns, comments, or complaints?

If you have questions now, feel free to ask us. If you have more questions about the research, your research rights, or have a research-related injury, please contact:

Primary contact:
Arlene Brown, LMFT can be reached at 954-634-2978

If primary is not available, contact:
Anne Rambo, Ph.D. can be reached at 954-262- 3002

Research Participants Rights
For questions/concerns regarding your research rights, please contact:

Institutional Review Board

Nova Southeastern University
(954) 262-5369 / Toll Free: 1-866-499-0790
IRB@nova.edu

You may also visit the NSU IRB website at www.nova.edu/irb/information-for-research-participants for further information regarding your rights as a research participant.

All space below was intentionally left blank.

Research Consent & Authorization Signature Section

Voluntary Participation - You are not required to participate in this study. In the event you do participate, you may leave this research study at any time. If you leave this research study before it is completed, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

If you agree to participate in this research study, sign this section. You will be given a signed copy of this form to keep. You do not waive any of your legal rights by signing this form.

SIGN THIS FORM ONLY IF THE STATEMENTS LISTED BELOW ARE TRUE:

- You have read the above information.
- Your questions have been answered to your satisfaction about the research.

Adult Signature Section

I have voluntarily decided to take part in this research study.

Printed Name of Participant	Signature of Participant	Date
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent and Authorization	Signature of Person Obtaining Consent & Authorization	Date

Appendix D

Snowballing Recruitment Letter

Dear Research Participant:

Thank you for your interest in the research on Exploring the Lived Experiences of Adults Who Have Experienced a Parental Divorce: Identifying Collaborative Divorce Aspects as They Adjusted to Adulthood. I am writing to ask whether you would be willing to pass along the enclosed information to friends and/or family members who may also be interested in participating in this research study. I have enclosed an invitation letter with the study information for your convenience to share with others. You are under no obligation to share this information and whether or not you share this information will not affect your relationship with the researcher.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Arlene Brown, LMFT

Appendix E

Demographic Questionnaire

Title of study: Exploring the lived experiences of adults who have experienced a parental divorce: Identifying collaborative divorce aspects as they adjusted to adulthood

1. What city and state do you live in? _____

2. Race:

___ Caucasian ___ Black or African American ___ Hispanic or Latino
___ Asian or Pacific Islander ___ Native American or American Indian
___Other: _____

3. Gender: ___ Female ___ Male

4. What is your age? _____

5. How old were you at the time of your parents' divorce? _____

6. What is your marital status? ____ Single ____ Domestic Partner ____Married
_____ Separated _____ Divorced ____ Widowed

7. What is your highest level of education?

____ Some high school, no diploma
____ High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED)
____ Some college credit, no degree
____ Trade/technical/vocational training
____ Associate degree
____ Bachelor's degree
____ Master's degree
____ Professional degree
____ Doctorate degree

Appendix F

Sample Interview Questions

Title of study: Exploring the lived experiences of adults who have experienced a parental divorce: Identifying collaborative divorce aspects as they adjusted to adulthood

1. Tell me about your relationship with your parents before the divorce?

2. What do you remember about your parents' divorce?

3. In your view, would you describe your parents' divorce as highly conflictual or peaceful, and how did that affect you, if it did?

4. What was highly conflictual or peaceful about it?

5. Did your parents get you connected with a therapist during their divorce, and if they did, how was that experience for you?

6. How would you describe your parents co-parenting skills?

7. How do you think your own life has been impacted by your parents' divorce?

8. What, if any, effect did your parents' divorce have on your own relationships and ideas of marriage?

Appendix G

Member Check Letter

Dear Research Participant:

I am completing my dissertation research on Exploring the Lived Experiences of Adults Who Have Experienced a Parental Divorce: Identifying Collaborative Divorce Aspects as They Adjusted to Adulthood and as I spoke with you about, I want to review my interpretation of the data that I have collected from our interview. The words were taken directly from the digital recording and transcribed.

I realize that you are quite busy. If you have the opportunity, I would appreciate you reviewing it and making any comments or asking any questions about it that you would like. If there is anything that you do not want me to publish, please make that clear.

This has been a wonderful experience and I am grateful to you for your participation in this very important project.

The deadline to reply with your feedback is two weeks from the date of this email being sent to you. Feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Thank you so much!

Warm regards,

Arlene Brown, LMFT

Biographical Sketch

Arlene Brown was born in Brooklyn, New York and raised in Lauderdale Lakes, Florida by her mother and father who migrated to the United States from Jamaica. She attended the University of South Florida (USF) where she received her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Minor in Sociology. During her time at the University of South Florida she volunteered as a research assistant for various studies. She received the USF Outstanding Senior Award for outstanding service and leadership achievements. Arlene then pursued her graduate career at Nova Southeastern University and received a Master of Science Degree in Marriage and Family Therapy. To enhance her therapeutic understanding and skills she pursued a Ph.D. in Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) at Nova Southeastern University's (NSU).

Arlene has years of experience working clinically from a systemic, collaborative approach. During her Masters program, she worked with individuals and couples in the Brief Therapy clinic at NSU, and with at risk children in the PROMISE program in Broward County School District, which both experiences have been instrumental in refining her therapeutic skills. Arlene's years of work experience also included working as a Family Strengthening Counselor at Children's Harbor, and as a Clinical Counselor at Children's Home Society of Florida. She became a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist in February 2015. While pursuing her Ph.D., she has been working as a full time EAP Counselor.

Her future work endeavors include continuously enhancing her knowledge base and therapeutic skills. She is also interested in becoming a Certified Supreme Court Family Mediator, an approved provider for the Parent Education and Family

Stabilization course, teaching as a professor, and becoming a qualified supervisor. She plans to concentrate her practice on work with children, with a focus on addressing parenting concerns, as well as assist with other areas of concern to individuals, couples, and families.