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REFRAMING THE DEATH OF THE MARITAL RELATIONSHIP AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR GROWTH: A PROGRAMME FOR FACILITATING POST-DIVORCE ADJUSTMENT

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Divorce, symbolically speaking, may be viewed as the "death" of a marital relationship. During post-divorce guidance the counsellor should, amongst other things, allow the divorcee to mourn this relationship loss, facilitate a process where the dissolution of marriage is reframed to unearth opportunities for constructive and personal growth, and to support the divorcee in terms of healthy post-divorce adjustment. This paper proposes a programme for facilitating post-divorce adjustment. Schlossberg's Transition Process Model (1981) is adopted, amongst others, as foundational framework informing the subject matter of the post-divorce guidance programme with the foci of this programme being informed by and based on the post-divorce recovery groups facilitated by the author.

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INTRODUCTION

Divorce, metaphorically speaking, may be viewed as the "death" of a marital relationship, with the marriage partners and children (if any) as the mourners, the lawyers the undertakers, the judge the pastor, and the courtroom the graveyard where this relationship is put to rest.

Prior to, during, but especially after the divorce the loss of the marital relationship with its many associated benefits of emotional support, companionship, intimacy and economic safety (Amato in Kołodziej-Zaleska & Przybyła-Basista, 2016:207) needs to be mourned. Mourning helps to close the door to the past and allows one to move on (Määttä, 2011:421). Baum (2004:178) states that mourning is "considered essential to the completion of the psychological separation [or detachment] that is so important to the divorced individual's functioning, emotional adjustment", as well as for reconstructing and re-establishing a new post-divorce identity (Gregson & Ceyner in Frisby, Booth-Butterfield, Dillow, Martin, & Weber, 2012:717).

During the process of post-divorce guidance (Sakraida, 2008:873) the divorcee, amongst others, needs to be assisted to gain perspective and facilitate processes for post-divorce adjustment, allowing mourning and reframing of the dissolution of marriage to unearth opportunities for constructive personal growth (Baum, 2004:181; Schneller & Arditti, 2004:4; Bevvino & Sharkin, 2003:83; Pietsch, 2002:77).

In their classic work on systems therapy, Watzlawick, Weakland and Fisch (1974:95) refer to "reframing" as "a gentle art", explaining it as follows: "To reframe … means to change the conceptual and/or emotional setting or viewpoint in relation to which a situation is experienced and to place it in another frame which fits the 'facts' of the same concrete situation equally well or even better, and thereby changing its entire meaning". For Mattila (in Haug, DeMarinis, Danbolt & Kvignec, 2016:152) "reframing" is a meaning-making and a meaning-changing exercise aimed at facilitating positive attitudes, adaptive coping responses and relationships. By adopting a different view on a particular situation, it is transformed. In guiding the divorcee to look at the divorce experience through a different lens and by adopting a coping strategy of "positive reframing", the divorce experience may bring in a harvest of personal growth and change.

Concerning post-divorce adjustment, Bokker, Farley and Denny (in Bottom, 2013:221) note that there is no singular operational definition for post-divorce adjustment. Even so, and deduced from the literature consulted – and by implication, as an outcome – post-divorce adjustment relates to the following:

- constructively managing the psychological distress and disturbances ensuing from the divorce, and being unchained from it;
- reconstructing and establishing a sense of self-esteem and identity or an autonomous self not tied to the former spouse and to the former marriage;
- developing an alternative perspective on the marriage, the former partner and the divorce;
- establishing a life-style with a supportive social network independent from the former spouse (Kitson, in Yárnoz, Plazaola & Etxeberria, 2008:293; Sakraida, 2008:871; Pietsch, 2002:71; Kitson & Raschke, 1981:1).

Exploring the mentioned tenets of post-divorce adjustment, post-divorce guidance should take the form of a series of facilitated therapeutic conversations between the counsellor and the divorcee. In the process the focus should be on narratives and themes inherent to "the events" *that led to the death of the marital relationship*, the self, the other (ex-spouse in this case), and the relationships that redefine perceptions, better acceptance and a more constructive post-divorce adjustment (Yárnoz, *et al*., 2008:297).

The suggested foci to be covered in post-divorce guidance tie in with Schlossberg's (1981, 2011) framework or model for analysing human adaptation to transition, commonly referred to as "the transition process model" (Schlossberg *et al*., in Sakraida, 2008:872). This model informs and underpins the subject matter for the proposed post-divorce guidance programme presented (to be introduced next) and applied to the topic of post-divorce adjustment.

Schlossberg's transition process model as foundational framework informing the subject matter of the post-divorce guidance programme

The concept of "transition", central to the transition process model, has its roots in crisis theory (Schlossberg, 1981:6). For Moos and Tsu (in Schlossberg, 1981:6), a crisis can be seen as an "upset in a steady state" of events. In divorce an upset occurs in the state of being married. The divorce crisis, for many not anticipated and predicted as part of the life course of the marriage, in essence introduces a transition, a turning point or an event resulting in changes in relationships, routines, assumptions and roles (Schlossberg *et al*., in Peila-Shuster, 2016:55; Schlossberg, 2011:159; Schlossberg *et al*., in Sakraida, 2008:872; Schlossberg, 1981:5). The divorce crisis may result in differing degrees of disruption in established personal and social identity patterns for the divorced (La Gro, n.d.). Vukalovich and Caltabiano (2008:146) underscore the stated viewpoint by asserting that the "post-divorce period is a time of change, confusion and transition".

All transitional experiences, even if planned and appraised or reframed as positive, carry with them a sense of loss and grief for the simple reason that with transitions something familiar is usually left behind. Whilst facing a fear of the unknown, the person is confronted with a loss of the "familiar structures of the past" (Skar in Bussolari & Goodell, 2009:102-103). In attempting to cope with the transitional realities of the old and familiar that no longer exists and the new that has not yet emerged, the divorcee may respond with wide ranging cognitive, behavioural and physiological reactions (Mnyango & Alpaslan, 2018:77; Mnyango, 2015:17; Bussolari & Goodell, 2009:103: Sakraida, 2008:873).

The outcomes (ranging from positive to negative) subsequent to transitioning towards post-divorce adjustment or in terms of adaptation to transition are dependent on, and influenced by, the individual and the cultural and societal context with its prevailing norms and expectations in which the divorcee is functioning (Sakraida, 2008:872). The notion of positive and/or negative outcomes embedded in transitions is emphasised by Moos and Tsu (in Schlossberg, 1981:6), who state that "a transition may provide both an opportunity for growth and a danger of psychological deterioration".

Adjustment, as "an attempt to cope with and manage transitions", can be viewed as a "component of adaptation" (Bussolari & Goodell, 2009:103). Adaptation can be considered as the goal of post-divorce guidance or the consequence following a successful transition (Bussolari & Goodell, 2009:103) whereby divorcees move from being totally preoccupied with the divorce to integrating this transition into their lives (Schlossberg, 1981:7). The outcomes of post-divorce adjustment mentioned in the introduction of this article testify to the integration of the transition into the divorcee's life.

The transition process ignited by the divorce requires the counsellor to accompany the divorcee on the journey of reflection and appraisal. The focus needs to be on the four common features, known as the 4-S's system in Schlossberg's transition process model (Bowen & Jensen, 2017:1366; Schlossberg, 2011:160-161; Anderson, Goodman & Schlossberg., 2012:10), namely: the *situation*, the *self*, *support* and *strategies*, influencing individuals' ability to cope with the divorce transition. In providing post-

divorce guidance, the divorcee's *perceived or actual appraisal* of assets and/or liabilities or deficits need to be assessed with reference to:

- the *situation* or the transition itself;
- the individual's characteristics in terms of the *self*, sense of competence, wellbeing and coping;
- the convoy of *support* in terms of social support available; and
- the coping *strategies* employed in the journey towards post-divorce adjustment.

The perceptions of these features could determine the level of ease or difficulty in adapting to the post-divorce transition (Mnyango & Alpaslan, 2018:71; Sakraida, 2008:872-873; Schlossberg, 1981:6-7).

The *situation* in the process of transition refers to the total context of the person at the time of transition. What is the divorcee's perception or appraisal of the divorce? The answer to this question and the questions to follow elucidate the features of the transition, determining whether the divorce situation is perceived as a resource or a deficit. Is the divorce perceived as a gain or a loss? Was it expected or unexpected? Was it imposed internally or externally in terms of who initiated the divorce? Was the divorce gradual or sudden in terms of onset? Is it permanent, temporary or uncertain in terms of duration? What emotions and degrees of stress are evoked by the divorce situation? (Anderson *et al*., 2012:11, Schlossberg, 2011:160; Kotewa, 1995:48; Schlossberg, 1981:8-10; La Gro, n.d.).

The *self* refers to the person's inner strength to cope with the situation (Schlossberg, 2011:160). It relates to the divorcee's ability to manage and adapt to the divorce. Apart from variables such as gender and gender role identification, age and life stage, state of health, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, value orientation and previous experience with a transition of a similar nature (Schlossberg, 1981:11-15) having an influence on the success or failure of adaptation to transition, Tyler (in Schlossberg, 1981:12-13) adds the variable of psychosocial competence. Psychosocial competence finds expression in attitudes to self, the world and behaviour. A self-attitude typified by a sense of self-worth, a favourable self-evaluation or positive self-esteem, together with an internal locus of control and a sense of responsibility, will contribute towards easing the process of adapting to the divorce transition. Displaying traits of optimism, hope and trust, as attitudes to the world, coupled with behavioural attitudes such as demonstrating an active coping disposition, a high level of initiative, and the ability to set goals, plan and work resiliently towards goal attainment (Tyler in Schlossberg, 1981:13) are significant qualities for the divorcee to be "able to recover from or adjust to misfortune or change" (Windle, Markland & Woods, 2008:285).

With reference to the aspect of *support* the appraisal focuses on the kind of resources/assistance available in the transition and in the process of adaptation to transition. Individuals' ability to adapt to and integrate transitions in their daily lives is closely linked to their environments and the interpersonal and institutional support to their avail (Mnyango & Alpaslan, 2018:84; Mnyango, 2015:19; Kulik & Kasa, 2014:193-194; Kotewa, 1995:48-49; Schlossberg, 1981:10-11). Support systems, supportive friendships, support groups, and personal counselling have been cited as helpful and empowering as people make the transition from marriage to divorce (Canham, Mahood, Stott, Sixsmith, O'Rouke, 2014:606). Of critical importance is identifying who is likely to help or hinder the person in the transition and adapting to this by offering or withholding support, or knowing the other options for support available (Peila-Shuster, 2016:56; Kotewa, 1995:48).

In addition, the individual's neighbourhood, living arrangements and occupation can contribute to a hindering or facilitating the adaptation to the transition or post-divorce adjustment (Mnyango, 2015:19; Schlossberg, 1991:11-12; Kotewa, 1995:51).

The aspects of situation, self and support introduced above can be associated with "taking stock" (Kotewa, 1995:48; La Gro, n.d.) of the coping resources. The *strategy* can be labelled as "taking charge" (Kotewa, 1995:48; La Gro, n.d.), pointing to how the individual copes (Anderson *et al*., 2012:11) in terms of resources drawn from and strategies used to do so. Concerning the aspect of

strategies, Anderson *et al*. (2012:16) propose the implementation of multiple coping strategies, applied in a flexible manner, to manage and adapt to transitions. In addition, it is commonly accepted that the more resources and strategies one employs, the better the adjustment to the transition (Kulik & Kasa, 2014:193).

Coping needs to be viewed as a person's answer or response to environmental stressors, emerging from a dynamic interplay between person and environment (Frydenberg, 2014:83). In sufficiently responding to events and to the taxing nature of divorce and post-divorce adjustment, coping is appraised as a multi-dimensional process involving cognitive, behavioural and emotional efforts or coping techniques (Krumrei, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2009:374: Greenglass, Fiksenbaum & Eaton, 2006:16; Laux & Weber, 1991:234; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984:141).

With reference to the ways of coping, Papalia, Sterns, Feldman and Camp (2007:425) distinguish between adaptive or maladaptive coping, which finds expression in striking out, indulging oneself and constructive coping. In the literature consulted (Padden, Connors & Agazio, 2011:251; Lazarus, 1995:33; Laux & Weber, 1991:235) the researcher also came across problem-focused and emotion-focused coping. The coping strategy to be employed will be dependent on the appraisal and reappraisal of the stressor, for example, the divorce as transition and adaptation to the transition, including tallying the resources that the individual has available.

With problem-focused coping, the individual takes action and utilise resources with the aim of modifying the relationship with the source of stress by both adjusting the stressor or their own behaviour in an attempt to balance the reality of divorce and its variables, and adjusting to them. Within the framework of emotion-focused coping, the stressor does not inform the way of coping or reacting, but rather the view and attitude adopted towards the stressor after it has been appraised (Padden *et al*., 2011:251; Lazarus, 1995:33; Laux & Weber, 1991:235). To summarise so far: adaptation to the transition or the post-divorce adjustment will be determined by and dependent on the views and attitude taken towards the transition and the adaptation to the transition. This could unfold as an opportunity for psychological growth or as a trigger for psychological deterioration (Moos & Tsu, in Schlossberg, 1981:6).

The problem-focused and emotion-focused processes of coping explained above to a large degree correspond with the coping strategies mentioned by Pearlin and Schooler (in Schlossberg, 2011:161). These are coping strategies aiming at changing the situation, reframing the situation and reducing/alleviating stress.

Before describing the programme, topics to be covered, and the activities and pointers for facilitating these topics, it is necessary to highlight the prerequisites for providing post-divorce guidance using a transition process framework as point of departure.

Prerequisites for providing post-divorce guidance within a transition process framework

In providing post-divorce guidance the counsellor enters into a collaborative partnership with the divorcee and co-creates interventions to facilitate the process of adaptation to transition (Bussolari & Goodell, 2009:99).

Irrespective of where the divorcee is in the transition process – either "*moving in, through or out of the transition*" in terms of planning to divorce, getting divorced, or being divorced (Anderson *et al*., 2012:38) – the counsellor needs to create a safe environment by utilising listening, attending and focusing skills. This is paramount, as individuals going through divorce transitions often experience anxiety and emotional upheaval – as if they are riding an emotional roller-coaster (La Gro, n.d.; Schlossberg, 1981:7).

Individuals in transitions can be so preoccupied with the transition, even stuck in it, that the counsellor needs to assist them to get unstuck, refocus and reframe their situations (La Gro, n.d.). Different types of questions and skills can be used for this purpose. Proceeding from a narrative approach, White (in

Pietsch, 2002:70) proposes "relative influence questioning ... landscape of action questions … [and] landscape of consciousness or meaning questions". Relative influence questioning helps to appraise how the divorce affected the divorcee. After externalisation of the situation, and by recording how the divorce impacted on the different spheres of the divorcee's life, landscape of action questions are employed to explore previous relational losses, and how such losses were managed to act as testimonials in pointing to the divorcee's resilience and problem-solving abilities.

This calls for putting meaning questions to divorcees in an attempt to help them to make sense of their experience, reframing it, and to reconstruct a new narrative during the transition and in view of the need for adaptation and adjustment to the divorce (Bussolari & Goodell, 2009:99).

As divorcees in transition need to move out of the transition and toward moving on, their problem-solving, decision-making and coping skills and strategies need to be appraised. In addition, they should be assisted in extending their repertoire of constructive coping strategies (La Gro, n.d.:5).

A description of the guidance programme for facilitating post-divorce adjustment

The post-divorce guidance programme proposed in this article originated from the post-divorce recovery groups facilitated by the author, with the first groups being presented as a social worker in private practice as far back as 1989-1991, when he was approached by the faith- and community-based organisation, The Divorce Crisis helpline, with the request to present post-divorce group work sessions. The Divorce Crisis helpline operated as a telephone counselling serve and the clients who called in expressed the need for support groups. Upon accepting this invitation, the author engaged in a focus group discussion with the steering committee of the Divorce Crisis helpline at the time, who were all divorced, and conducted a needs assessment on what topics they would like to address if they had the opportunity to be part of a post-divorce guidance support group. The initial suggestions were translated into the topics presented in this paper. He then commenced with presenting the post-divorce group session and at the end of each series engaged the group members to reflect on the topics covered during the group work sessions. The feedback provided by the group members confirmed that the menu of topics should remain. When returning to full-time private practice from 2005-2008, he once again offered the post-divorce guidance group work sessions, and the topics covered were evaluated by the group members who attended as addressing their needs. In returning to academia full-time in 2008, this programme informed by the divorcee's needs was once again updated and packaged (Alpaslan, 2008) as a CPD-accredited activity to social workers, psychologists, counsellors and ministers or people in religious and corporate contexts.

The topics covered in this programme (presented below) were informed and underpinned by –

- the suggestions and feedback from divorcees who attended the post-divorce group work sessions;
- the outcomes of post-divorce adjustment highlighted in the introduction to this article;
- Schlossberg's transition process model (Schlossberg, 2011:160-161; Anderson *et al*., 2012:10; Schlossberg, 1981), specifically the 4 S's system with reference to the situation, the self, support and strategies;
- the foci in the attachment-based group intervention with long-term divorced parents (see Yárnos *et al*., 2008:297) in which the group members and the therapist focused on the divorce events, the self, the other (the ex-spouse in this case) and other relationships promoting adjustment to divorce;
- The aims of the community group intervention programme of adjustment to separation and divorce as set out by Vukalovich and Caltabiano (2008). The aim of their intervention was four-fold: assisting participants to integrate their divorce experience of separation or divorce; supporting them on their journey of personal growth; fostering awareness and personal responsibility; and assisting them in exploring avenues to adjust to the divorce in a supportive environment (Vukalovich & Caltabiano, 2008:151). This four-fold aim was covered in a series of six sessions comprising the following:

- In session one the focus was on the past relationship: exploring the aspects that contributed to the failure of the relationship; the pathways of separation and the feelings and emotional reactions triggered and experienced as a result of the separation or the divorce;
- Session two focused on separation grief. The information provided focused on the nature of the losses suffered in the separation/divorce; the emotional reactions to such losses and ways to manage them, as well as effective ways of communicating during the grief process;
- The topics of guilt and rejection were covered in the third session. The emotional reactions to separation from the perspectives of the partner who left and the one who stayed behind were discussed with the aim of providing a safe space for sharing their emotional experiences;
- Session four focused on the topic of "separation anger". Participants were given information on how to acknowledge and appropriately express anger in order to reframe anger as emotion rather than behaviour;
- The topic "family of origin" took centre stage at session five. The aim was to assist participants in gaining an understanding on how impressions, adopted beliefs and values, patterns of interacting and experiences emanating from their family of origin and the previous marriage all contributed to the separation and the divorce;
- Session six focused on the topic of self-esteem and social support. Information on how to improve self-esteem following the divorce and establish appropriate support networks was shared (Vukalovich & Caltabiano, 2008:154-155).

The next part of this article deals with the post-divorce programme packaged under six topics.

Each of these topics will be introduced briefly and followed by a description of the exercises and activities that can be utilised to facilitate the post-divorce adjustment.

Topic 1: Post-divorce guidance in respect of revisiting the events that led up to the divorce or the death of the marital relationships

Revisiting the events that led up to the divorce relates to "appraising the situation" or the "transition" as per Schlossberg's transition process model (Bowen & Jensen, 2017:1366; Schlossberg, 2011:160-161). Inviting divorcees to share their stories about what led to the divorce and reflecting on the features of this transition could assist them to acquire perspective into what contributed to end of the marital relationship. They come to distinguish the wood from the trees and "recognise that the 'failed' relationship was not [only] due to … [their] own supposed 'weaknesses'" (Van Schalkwyk, 2005:94). A process is sparked whereby the divorcees develop a different view on the state of affairs; reappraise their part in it; reconceptualise themselves and the previous marriage, as well as the ex-partner by "looking differently at the person with whom [they] … constructed certain realities and without whom they now have to face the future" (Van Schalkwyk, 2005:94).

To facilitate such retelling and reflection, a structured experience in the form of a written exercise is proposed. The divorcee can be requested (as part of a homework assignment) to compile a newspaper article on the events that lead to the death of the marital relationship for the column: "My marital relationship has passed away."

In the follow-up session the divorcee is requested to read the newspaper article, with the counsellor listening attentively and probing for further clarification, by asking for example: "Tell me more … Can you expand on what you read… or on that aspect?" in order to facilitate an "aha experience - the marriage relationship has passed on".

On completion of this reflection, the counsellor invites the divorcee to roll the article into a small ball, and then to open it and remove all the creases. This will obviously prove to be impossible. The counsellor brings the message home that just as it is impossible to smooth out the creases from the

paper, it is also impossible to undo the divorce, and invites the divorcee on the journey to post-divorce adjustment.

Topic 2: Feelings and emotional reactions experienced following the divorce and the constructive management of feelings and emotional reactions

The divorce experience stirs up a lot of feelings and emotional reactions (Willén, 2015:357). The way these are managed relates to the feature of "strategies" in Schlossberg's transition process model (Bowen & Jensen, 2017:1366; Schlossberg, 2011:160-161). During post-divorce guidance, provision must be made for divorcees to get in touch with the feelings and emotional reactions resulting from the divorce experience by requesting them to identify and verbalise the ever-lingering feelings and/or emotional reactions present after the divorce. The focus should also be on how the feelings are expressed: the triggers igniting specific feelings and how the expression of feelings and emotional reactions impact on the relationship with the self and others. Where such expressions seem to be harmful and destructive to the self and others, options should be explored on how to constructively express feelings and emotions by way of exercising emotion regulation. Emotion regulation entails learning the art of firstly appraising the trigger situation and then reacting in an adaptive fashion so as to increase or decrease the magnitude and/or duration of the emotional response (Gross *et al*., in Willén, 2015:359).

The counsellor needs to note that lingering feelings of anger and jealousy towards the ex-spouse, as well as a longing for the ex-spouse and the previous marriage may be indicative of an unresolved emotional attachment: while the sweet music is over, some strings are still attached.

As part of a homework assignment request the divorcee to take a sheet of paper and list all the feelings and emotional reactions they are experiencing as result of the divorce by using a black non-erasable marker.

At the next session the counsellor invites the client to present what was written down. Alpaslan (2008:8) suggests the following question to facilitate this process:

- Share with me the feelings and emotional reactions still lingering after your divorce that you have written down…
- What stirs up these feelings? …When do you normally experience this/these feelings of ….?
- When you experience these feelings … what do you do? How do you react? /When those feelings become evident, what do or don't you do?
- How does your reaction to the feelings make you feel about yourself? How do the people close to you react to the way in which you give vent to your feelings?

As counsellor you need to mention that experiencing feelings of confusion, disorientation, loss, failure, fear of the unknown, rejection, guilt, loneliness, anger, humiliation, sadness, hurt, disbelief, shock, self-pity and depression, as well as feeling free and relieved, are not uncommon following a divorce (Willén, 2015:357; Canham *et al*., 2014:609; Symoens, Bastaits, Mortelmans and Bracke, 2013:179; Alpaslan, 2008:5-7; Van Schalkwyk, 2005:92). After completing the exploration of the lingering feelings and emotional reactions, furnish the client with an eraser and instruct him to erase what was written. Erasing what was written with a permanent marker will prove to be impossible. Provide insight and perspective by explaining that the feelings and reactions resulting from the divorce cannot be "erased" or denied. They need to be shared and verbalised, and the way that the feelings are expressed and how the divorcee reacts to situations need to be appraised in terms of their effects on the self and others. If necessary, guidelines and tips on emotion regulation in terms of how to deal constructively with the feelings resulting from the divorce and reacting to situations need to be provided.

Topic 3: Self-esteem – appraising and enhancing self-esteem

The aspect of self-esteem relates to the facet of the "self" in Schlossberg's transition process model (Bowen & Jensen, 2017:1366; Schlossberg, 2011:160-161). Individuals in relationships tend to define or identify themselves in relation to another. As a consequence, their self-esteem may suffer and get damaged when the relationship dissolves (Kulik & Kasa, 2014:192; Sappington in Vukalovich, & Caltabiano, 2008:147-148). Van Schalkwyk (2005:92) postulates that the previous construction of the self, especially as a relational being, is largely lost and/or distorted as a result of divorce. Symoens, Colman and Bracke (2014:221) elaborate on this by asserting that low-quality relationships characterised by long-term conflict, such as the post-divorce relationships, for example, can leave lasting marks on a person's identity, self-esteem and the ability to cope. Individuals may as a result of the divorce suffer from a loss of trust, lowered self-esteem, a decrease in self-confidence and a preoccupation with what others think (Frisby *et al*., 2012:719). However, when divorced persons redefine their identity in separating the self from the previous marriage as well as the partner, positive growth and improvement of self-esteem are possible in various aspects of the self-concept (Baum, Rahav & Sharon, 2005:48, 49, 58). Baum *et al*. (2005:58) found this to be true of the women participants in their study who, following their divorce, reported higher self-esteem, becoming more responsible for themselves, more independent and in control of their lives (Canham *et al*., 2014:605).

Post-divorce guidance needs to assess to what extent the divorcee's post-divorce identity is still tied to the identity of being married and to the former spouse, and to their self-esteem. In addition, support to build/enhance better self-esteem must be enlisted, by amongst other ways, challenging and changing negative self-talk and thinking patterns as barriers to positive self-esteem (Vukalovich, & Caltabiano, 2008:155).

In assessing whether the divorcee's post-divorce identity is still coupled to being married to the former spouse, the following questions, adopted from Pietsch, (2002:72-73) could be used to put them on the journey towards regaining custody of themselves – becoming a capable single person:

- How does talking with your ex-spouse keep you in a close relationship with him/her?
- How does this image of you as still married, for example, as "Mrs ...," prevent you from moving on with your life?
- How does not knowing how you may want to act in new situations stop you from doing those things that would make you happy?
- How does not knowing how you may want to handle relationships stop you from interacting with people?

In assessing their current level of self-esteem and how the various parts comprising their self-concept add up or detract from how they value themselves, The Adapted Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSE) (Rosenberg, 1965) and the Synoptic Self-esteem Assessment Framework (Alpaslan, 1997:165) are some of the functional aids that can be used for this purpose. The RSE consists of 10 statements related to assessing a person's general feeling about themselves; a lower score points to positive self-esteem.

The Synoptic Self-esteem Assessment Framework (see the text box below) comprises of statements pertaining to the following aspects of the self-concept: the physical, intellectual, psychological, social, moral, gender and the ideal self, where an "agree" in terms on the rest of the statements points to a positive appraisal of the facets of the self-concept. Where aspects were negatively appraised in terms of "disagreeing" with a statement, this aspect must be explored. The counsellor needs to determine what informed the "disagreement" with a statement and if the divorcee's appraisal was realistically founded on the truth.

Guide divorcees to come to an acceptance of the facets of the self-concept that cannot be changed (especially the physical features and build) and the need to be encouraged to change those that they can.

SYNOPTIC SELF-ESTEEM ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

Indicate the extent to which you "agree" or "disagree" with each of the statements below

1. I am satisfied with my appearance.
2. I am satisfied with my intellectual abilities.
3. I have positive personality traits that form part of my temperament.
4. People like me.
5. I find it easy to forgive myself when I have transgressed/made a mistake.
6. I am satisfied with being male/female.
7. It is within my reach to achieve in most facets of my life what I would like to become.
8. I am a charming person.
9. I think I am talented.
10. I have negative personality traits that form part of my temperament.
11. I enjoy being with other people.
12. It is important for me to be morally correct, because I do not like it when people disapprove of my behaviour.
13. I do *not* have a need to be like someone else.
14. I have dreams and ideals.

Because it is "an absolute human certainty that no one will know his own beauty or perceive a sense of his own worth until it is reflected back to him in the mirror of another loving caring human being" (Powell in Alpaslan, 2008:17), referee reports could be employed for building divorcee's self-esteem. Request the divorcee, as part of a homework assignment, to identify significant others, or as Kahn (in Schlossberg, 1981:10) labels them "a convoy of support", and ask them to write a reference report on the divorcee. Relationships and connections with significant others, in the post-divorce period, serve as protection against or mitigate the negative consequences caused by a stressful event. Such relationships simultaneously aid recovery and promote positive adaptation (Szlachta, in Kołodziej-Zaleska & Przybyła-Basista, 2016:208; Krumrei *et al*., 2007:161).

The format provided in the text box below could be used for this request.

Date _____

Referral regarding _____

Dear _____

Since you have known me personally for the past _____ years and because I regard you as an important person in my life and value your opinion and judgment, I ask you kindly to act as a referee for me. I will be most grateful if you would compile a report for me in this regard by answering the following questions and by being comprehensive in your commentary:

- What would you single out as my strongest and weakest characteristics?
- What would you regard as my talents?
- How would you describe my intellectual abilities?
- How would you describe me when I am among people? In your opinion, what interpersonal impressions do I create? How would you describe the contribution I make to relationships?
- If you had to tell someone who does not know me about me, what would you say?

Thank you that you are willing to compile this report. I will appreciate it if you would place the report in the enclosed addressed envelope and post it back to the counsellor

by _____ (date).

Kind regards

Divorcee's Signature:

The completed reference reports must be posted back to the counsellor, who will share this with the divorcee in-session as a strategy to build self-esteem, which was tarnished to a lesser or greater extent by separation from the former partner, the divorce and how these eventualities were interpreted by the client.

In addition, and to further assist the divorcee in transforming his or her self-esteem, the idea of the testimonial could also be used as a strategic intervention by asking:

- If God had to compile a testimonial for you, what do you think would He write?
- If your child/children had to compile a testimonial for you, what would they write?
- If you had to compile a testimonial for yourself, what would you write about yourself?

The negative thoughts and negative self-talk emerging from the ongoing spousal conflict, and the minimal positive physical and emotional nourishment (or its complete absence) in the previous marriage and the subsequent divorce need to be traced, examined and monitored. Suggestions for replacing negative, unrealistic thoughts and self-talk with their opposite need to be explored.

Topic 4: Depression as an expression of grief – identifying the presence of depression and managing it

The multiple losses brought about by the passing of the marital relationship may result in feelings of sadness and depression (Symoens *et al*., 2013:186; Rosenstock, Rosenstock & Weiner, 1988:43). Taylor and Andrews (2009:476) confirm this, stating that "often the stress of divorce drives people beyond the normal grief felt in a divorce and into a clinical depression". This, however, should not be regarded as the norm. In cases where the divorce is not experienced as a loss or a negative event, but rather appraised as a positive life-change, a "fresh start", a relief or an escape, the person who was previously depressed may even recover from depression after the divorce (Symoens *et al*., 2013:179; Cohen, Klein & O'Leary, 2007:868).

In focusing on the topic of depression, the counsellor needs to determine whether the divorcee has a history of depression, or if the onset of the depression was situation-related – a response to the stress caused by the divorce and the subsequent perceived losses experienced (Miller & Jackson, 1995:201). Where there is a history of depression, explore how it manifests and is managed. Ascertain if the divorcee is currently depressed and how he or she is coping. The coping in this context ties in with the facets of "support" and "strategies" in Schlossberg's transition process model (Bowen & Jensen, 2017:1366; Schlossberg, 2011:160-161). In addition, options and strategies on how to constructively manage the post-divorce depression can be explored in a complementary manner in this session.

In order to establish whether there has been a history of depression, the following questions (Alpaslan, 2008:22-23) may be put to the divorcee:

- Was there a time in your life that you have been depressed before?
- What would you say was the cause then?
- How did you feel at that time?
- How did you cope with it?
- What did you then do to deal with the depression?
- What difference is there between the depression you experience now and the depression you experienced then?
- Do you think there is any connection between the depression that you experience now and the depression you experienced then? If there is, how would you describe it?
- What would you do differently from before to deal with the depression you experience now?

In exploring whether the client is currently depressed, the following questions (Alpaslan, 2008:22) are suggested:

- Would you describe yourself as currently feeling depressed?
- How is it for you when you feel depressed?
- What do you think caused the depression that you experience now?
- When you are depressed, how does it make you feel?
- In experiences of depression, what does it cause you to do/not to do?
- What do you do to cope with your depression?
- What do you do to deal with your depression?
- How successful are you in dealing with your depression?
- What do you think can be done now to deal with your depression?
- What will have to change before you would feel ready to work on the depression?

Topic 5: Post-divorce relationships: managing the relationships with the ex-spouse and post-divorce parenting

The quality and nature of the relationship with the ex-spouse may impact on the post-divorce adjustment either negatively or positively (Symoens *et al*., 2014:222). A relationship with the ex-spouse marked by low levels of hostility and anxiety, and by friendship, especially for men, is a major source of support and facilitates post-divorce adjustment (Kulik & Kasa, 2014:193).

Especially where children were born from the marriage, the topic of the relationship with the ex-spouse and post-divorce parenting must be addressed. This relates to the facets of "support" and "strategies" in Schlossberg's transition process model (Bowen & Jensen, 2017:1366; Schlossberg, 2011:160-161). For Ahrons and Wallisch (in Frisby *et al*., 2012:720-721) the relationship between the ex-spouses could fit into one of the following categories: they can

- remain or become perfect pals;
- become cooperative colleagues, focusing solely on their co-parenting responsibilities, without sharing any information of their personal lives with each other;
- be "angry associates" – hostile towards each other, have limited contact and interaction to avoid conflict;
- be fiery foes; mutually extremely hostile and engaged in conflict on parental and personal matters; or
- become a dissolved duo who have ceased to maintain all contact with one another (Ahrons & Wallisch, in Frisby *et al*., 2012:720-721).

For the core business of childcare and raising the children born from the previous marital union, a "business-like relationship" (Frieman, 2002:168) needs to be established. In this regard, Leek (in Taylor, 2005:159) suggests that divorced parents "need to be educated regarding a 'business-type' approach to communication and parenting".

The following questions – adopted from Karpf and Shatz (2005:10) – need to be asked in compiling a mutually agreed post-divorce parenting plan:

- How much time does each of the former spouses want to spend with the children?
- How will the child care responsibilities be divided … who will be responsible for what?

- Whose or what rule set will be applied in the respective households? What will the rules be with regard to aspects of discipline, household duties, allowances/pocket money, bed-time, watching TV, curfews?
- How will important decisions regarding the children and their future be taken?
- How will you exchange information regarding the children's emotional and physical well-being?
- How will the children's daily routines, weekly schedules and school activities be managed?
- What role will the extended family network play in the lives of the children?

In supporting the idea of the business-like partnership, characterised by mutual respect and the protection of privacy, Kahn (1990:93-120) proposes following rule set for managing the post-divorce relationship:

- No sexual relationship;
- No pressure on the former spouse for information on whom they associate with socially or sexually;
- No spying on the former spouse and/or using the children as spies to gather information;
- No visits to the former spouse's home without an appointment. When it happens, however, do not just walk in, but ring the doorbell first;
- No "borrowing" of things without prior consent;
- No meals on the spur of the moment; meals should rather be by invitation;
- The children are not used as messengers when information is passed on to the other party;
- No begging when there must be negotiations about money or crying either in order to elicit sympathy. Draw up a business plan together based on facts when money matters are concerned.
- As far as the custody arrangements of this business-like partnership are concerned, especially for the non-custodial parent, guide this parent to explore how to create a space specially for the children in the new home; give the children age-appropriate responsibilities, keep familiar routines, be involved in the child's school life, and counting one's words carefully when talking about the former spouse in front of the children (Frieman, 2003:173).

Strategies and skills on how to resolve the problems/difficulties arising from the spheres of the relationship with the ex-spouse and post-divorce parting must be furnished. Proceeding from the notion of a business-type partnership, Taylor (2005:159) proposes a C.A.R.E model. This model suggests **C**onnecting with the ex-spouse by treating each other with the necessary respect a business partner deserves; **A**ppreciating the ex-spouse's situation and efforts (putting yourself in the other's shoes); **R**esponding to the ex-spouse's needs by listening attentively and clarifying what is being requested; and **E**mpowering each other to solve problems together, working as a team.

In introducing the topic of the relationship with the ex-spouse and post-divorce parenting, the divorcee can be requested to compile a relationship diagram.

The instructions are: Take a clean sheet of paper and position yourself in the middle (for "male" use a square and for "female" use a circle), and write your name in the circle/square. Identify your ex-spouse and children accordingly by arranging them around you. If you perceive yourself to be close to them, place them close to you, but if distant, position them further from you. Continue by making use of straight lines to indicate a positive relationship between you and your former spouse and the children, or a zigzag line to indicate if a particular relationship is poor or conflictual in nature.

Upon completion of the relationship diagram, explore and assess the nature of the relationships indicated. The following questions may provide structure:

- What reasons can you give for the close/distant relationship that you experience with your ex at the present time? Were there times when you were closer to each other? Tell me more about it … Were there times when the distance between you was greater? Tell me more about it…
- I see that the relationship between you and your ex is poor or conflictual in nature. What would you say are the reasons for this? Since when has the relationship been like this? How has the relationship changed since the divorce? To what degree does the relationship help/hinder you in processing the divorce? How does the present relationship between you and your ex influence the children? What do you think should happen (for the sake of the children) to improve the relationship? What are you prepared to do about this? How are you going to attempt to improve the relationship between you and your ex?
- I notice that the present relationship between you and your ex is positive. Was this always the case? If not, what has contributed to the improved relationship? What do you think (both of) you could do to keep the relationship positive for the sake of the children?
- What reasons could you give for the close/distant relationship that you have with your child at the present time? Tell me more about it… Were there times when the distance between you was greater? Tell me more about it…
- I see the relationship between you and your child is poor or conflictual in nature… what would you say are the reasons for this? Since when is this the case? How has the relationship changed since you have been divorced? To what extent does the relationship help/hinder you in processing the divorce? To what extent does this relationship help/hinder him/her in processing your divorce? What do you think must happen to improve the relationship between you and your child? What are you prepared to do in this regard? How will you go about improving the relationship between you and him/her?
- I notice that the relationship between you and your child is a positive one. Has it always been the case? If not, what contributed to the improved relationship? What do you think (both of) you could do to keep the relationship positive?

During the assessment and discussion of the relationships as indicated on the relationship diagram, the counsellor can share information about different aspects of the post-divorce relationship with the former spouse and post-divorce parenting as presented under this topic.

Topic 6: Reflecting on establishing future relationships

Whilst the lost marital relationship may continue to have meaning and influence future relationships (Schneller & Arditti, 2014:30), entering into a new relationship after divorce is a source of support. It provides protection against stressful situations and allows for regaining one's balance after the experienced of the divorce crisis (Amato in Kołodziej-Zaleska & Przybyła-Basista, 2016:209). Dating after divorce is a significant correlate for better post-divorce adjustment (Kulik & Kasa, 2014:205; Clarke-Stewart & Brenato, in Kołodziej-Zaleska & Przybyła-Basista, 2016:209) and divorcees who live together with, or marry, a new partner after the divorce "are significantly more satisfied with life, report higher levels of self-esteem and mastery and feel less depressed" (Symoens *et al*., 2014:229). The new relationship assists in facilitating the perception that divorce is a completed chapter in the divorcee's life and promotes the process of detachment from the former spouse (Clarke-Stewart & Brenato in Kołodziej-Zaleska & Przybyła-Basista, 2016:209). Seeking a new romantic relationship may also be regarded as both a coping strategy and source of support for acquiring a new post-divorce identity (Bevvino & Sharkin, 2003:93). Based on a finding in Schneller and Arditti's (2014:30) research, younger adults may be more positive about the prospects of building satisfying intimate new relationships, while older adults may proceed with greater caution as a result of disappointments experienced in post-divorce relationships. This finding, however, cannot be generalised.

Given the positive impact of a new relationship on post-divorce adjustment, reflecting on the establishment of future relationships as topic is included in the post-divorce guidance programme. The aspect of relationships ties in with both the facets of "support" and "strategies" for coping in Schlossberg's transition process model (Bowen & Jensen, 2017:1366; Schlossberg, 2011:160-161). Some of the aspects to be covered in this session are indicated below.

- Pointers/directives indicating the divorcee's readiness for a next relationship.

Before the divorcee can venture into a new relationship, the mourning process has to be completed; psychological separation from the former spouse needs to have taken place (Baum, 2004:178), and post-divorce adjustment and adaptation should have been established. The following pointers may indicate that post-divorce adjustment and adaptation have been realised: if the divorcee

- is able to constructively manage the psychological distress and disturbances caused by the divorce, becoming unchained from it;
- has developed an autonomous self or self-esteem and identity not tied to the ex and/or the former marriage;
- has put into perspective the marriage; the ex and the divorce;
- has established a lifestyle and a supportive social network independent from the ex (Kitson, in Yárnoz, Plazaola & Etxeberria, 2008:293; Sakraida, 2008:871; Pietsch, 2002:71; Kitson & Raschke, 1981:1).

Adding to this list, the following pointers may also be indicative of a divorcee's readiness for a next relationship (adopted and adapted from Buitendach, 1990:296-297). If -

- the divorcee is not so invested in the divorce by thinking about it constantly;
- being alone does no longer mean the end of the world;
- feeling guilty about the divorce is no longer present;
- the relationship with the ex has stabilised to such an extent and a business-like partnership relationship has been established in which they can communicate without fighting;
- every possible partner is not compared to the ex, and not all air-time is devoted to speaking about the ex when with the new partner;
- the divorcee's relationships with the ex and the children have stabilised;
- the divorcees have carved out a position as single parents able to exercise the necessary authority and maintain discipline among the children.

- Pointers/directives indicating that the client might not yet be ready for a next relationship.

The following pointers, according Yárnos *et al*. (2008:295) and Kahn (1990:46) are indicative of the fact that psychological separation has not materialised:

- Having obsessive thoughts about the marriage;
- Reacting with anger upon hearing that the former spouse is not missing the former partner, nor experiencing any adjustment upheavals following the divorce;
- Where the former spouse still prescribes to the former partner how personal affairs should be managed, just like it was in the marriage;
- When attempting to still keep the relationship alive by threatening to keep the children away from the former spouse if that spouse is unwilling to visit the children at home;
- Fixating on the past by fantasising about and over-romanticising the marriage;

- If the ex-spouses are still entangled in conflicts about custody-related matters and assets from the former marriage;
- When one partner goes all out to punish the former partner;
- When the former partner is blamed for the failed measure in an attempt to camouflage intense guilt feelings;
- Feeling jealous about the ex-spouse's apparent happiness;
- When the former partner's behaviour still has an influence on the other partner;
- Resuming or continuing a sexual relationship with the ex-spouse in an attempt to bring about a possible reunion.

In appraising the client's level of psychological separation from the ex-spouse, the questionnaire developed by Kahn (1990:35-36) provided below (in an adapted format) can be employed by the counsellor. The more the "yes" answers to the questions, the greater the possibility that the divorcee has not yet psychologically separated from the former spouse.

1. At times, do you feel that in some areas of your life you are still being controlled, or checked on, by your ex-husband/wife?
2. Do you find that you are inclined to discuss your ex with your friends, family, even the new partner in your life?
3. Although you have decided many times not to talk about your ex, do you still find it difficult to stick to it?
4. Does your ex still have the power to hurt you?
5. Are you still in love with, or do you still love, your ex?
6. Do you cherish any fantasies about your ex?
7. Is your ex still in a position to make you doubt yourself?
8. Would it have been better for you to remain married rather than to get divorced?
9. Do you wake up with feelings of anxiety at the thought that you are going to have contact with your ex?
10. Do you experience strong emotions after speaking to your ex?
11. Is your day thrown into disarray when your ex gets cross with you?
12. Is your ex in your thoughts often?
13. Do you feel saddled with your ex for the rest of your life?
14. Is it important for you that your ex must think that you are a good person?
15. Is it important for you to give your ex tit for tat?
16. Is it important for you to look good just in case you might meet your ex unexpectedly?
17. Are you sorry about the divorce?
18. Do you feel like a loser for having been divorced from your ex?
19. Do you feel that after your divorce life has no meaning or lost its meaning?
20. Do you feel that your ex's life has meaning and that makes you jealous?

- The motives for wanting to get involved in a relationship (or getting married) as well as the dynamics at play in the process of choosing a new partner also need to be explored. Asking the question "What are the reasons for you wanting to venture into a new relationship … or wanting to enter into marriage?" may assist in such an exploration. In addition, the reasons or motives for why the divorcee entered into the previous marriage, and what attracted him or her initially to the ex-spouse also need to be reflected on retrospectively and discussed. This is essential given the fact that motives for entering into the previous relationship may influence the motives for seeking the new relationship and in some instances even be a duplication of the previous motives and a search to fulfil the unfulfilled needs of the previous marriage and the family of origin.

- An exercise where divorcees are given an opportunity to "sell" themselves in the relationship market can also be introduced. They can be requested to compile two advertisements for a dating column in a popular magazine. In the one advertisement they have to introduce themselves and provide information on what they can offer relationship-wise. The other must be drafted to indicate the kind of person and relationship they are looking for. This exercise may allow for the appraisal of how realistic their expectations and views about future relationships are. The counsellor may also pass on information about myths about relationships and marriage, and the realities of marriage. Relationship skills and relationship etiquette should also be points on the agenda when focusing on future relationships (Scott, Rhoades, Stanley, & Allen, 2013:138; Alpaslan, 2008).

A final note

In our post-divorce guidance programme offerings we as counsellors enter into a collaborative partnership with the client and co-create interventions to facilitate the process of adaptation to transition (Bussolari & Goodell, 2009:99) and post-divorce adjustment by reframing the death of the marital relationship as a growth opportunity. I the light of this, we need to keep in mind the advice offered by Erikson (in Bradshaw, 1992:01): *"Each person's map of the world is as unique as their thumbprint. There are no two people alike. No two people will understand the same sentence the same way. So in dealing with people, try not to fit them to your concept of what they should be".*

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