

ADJUSTMENT TO DIVORCE

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INTRODUCTION

Of particular interest is the process whereby a woman moves from the status of *wife* to that of *single person*. The process is accompanied by trauma and disorganization. It is widely assumed that the adjustment just takes time. But I have found that some women, less than a year after their divorce were functioning well and enjoying their new freedom, while others, after several years, were still having great difficulty with both personal and social conditions. This research investigates the effect of such factors as length of time, duration of marriage, finances, children, social support, previous employment, sexual and dating behavior, and the possession of a sex-equality ideology on a divorcee's adjustment. With the high divorce rate in the United States, knowledge of how divorcees adjust and live could be of interest to newly divorced women who find themselves in a new and alien world as regards life style, norms, and behavior expectations.

This study concentrates on divorcees who are not considering an immediate remarriage as a means of adjustment, but rather, plan their own life style as single persons.

Familial institutions and relations are part of a larger social structure in which divorce is one facet of social disorder (Kirkpatrick 1959). Divorce rates vary by geographic region and various social categories, and are thought to relate to the urbanization process (Glick 1963). Divorce rates are higher among those of lower socioeconomic status (Goode, Winch, Hillman 1964). Yet the divorce rate is higher among college trained women than among less educated women (Kirkpatrick 1963). And the diffusion of feminism may temporarily increase family dissolution, as women demand equality in the privilege of divorce, and as they become economically independent of husbands and relatives (Sysiharju 1960). Applying psychoanalytic concepts to analysis of alienation and post-divorce adjustments, Waller (1960) suggested that the divorcee should in most cases arrange her life with ultimate remarriage in view. Kirkpatrick noted the problem of self identity following divorce. If one's identity is chiefly in relation to another,

the loss of the other drastically alters one's subjective identity, and the divorcee lacks a clearly defined role to play.

Goode (1965) emphasized the post-divorce adjustment of a woman as she proceeds from the status of *Mrs X* to the *ex-wife of Mr X*, assuming the role of simple friend, neighbor, coworker or date. Goode's 1940's study investigated the influence of many variables on divorce adjustment, and emphasized that society exerts a strong pressure on the divorcee to remarry. The relevant variables included income, number of children, duration of marriage, grounds of divorce, friends, counseling, family attitudes, and the divorcee's emotional attachment to her ex-husband.

THEORY

This study touches on the major variables of Goode's research, with the contention that in the mid-1970's, 30 years later, there is now a rationale which encourages a divorced woman *not* to remarry, or at least to wait a considerable time before considering remarriage. Such a rationale supports the restructuring of the divorcee's life style, planning for an independent future, and seeking a self-identity apart from marriage.

Hypothesis 1: The divorcee's adjustment to single status is positively correlated with her adoption of a female-sex-equality ideology.

Hypothesis 2: Divorcees with children will exhibit lower adjustment scores than those without children.

Hypothesis 3: A divorcee's adjustment is positively correlated with a satisfactory financial adjustment.

Hypothesis 4: A divorcee's adjustment is positively correlated with a high degree of social support.

Hypothesis 5: Divorcees engaged in active sexual and dating behavior have higher adjustment scores than those less active.

Hypothesis 6: The divorcees' adjustment improves with the passage of time.

Hypothesis 7: The longer the duration of the marriage, the lower the adjustment level.

Hypothesis 8: Previous work experience outside the home is positively correlated with

post-divorce adjustment.

Hypothesis 9: Women who have a major change in life style after divorce will have a higher adjustment score than those who maintain the pre-divorce pattern.

Associated problems are many. The divorced mother faces a double problem of adjustment in restructuring her life style in simultaneously meeting role expectations of a single woman and a mother. Financial problems are usually pressing, due to the costs of resettling and reordering the home, and the earning and career disadvantages of women generally, and divorced mothers particularly. It is also an adjustment problem to reorder social relations among friends and family. The new social relations foster meeting eligible men. Previous work experience fosters gaining and maintaining an independent identity in terms of career and workplace associations. Finally, a major change in life style means that the woman's self-identity, pattern of living, and status become primarily her own, not something deriving from the former marital relation.

DATA COLLECTION AND METHODS

I used a convenience sample of participants in a regional interdenominational divorce seminar, of whom 25 were contacted by telephone. I explained the purposes of the research and then hand-delivered questionnaires with stamped return envelopes. Fifteen other questionnaires were distributed to divorced acquaintances. Of the 40 questionnaires, 31 were returned within about 10 days. The ages ranged from 23 to 45 except for one woman aged 60, with a mean of 34 and a median of 35. The time since divorce ranged from 2 months to 10 years, with a mean of 2.9 years.

These women were unrepresentative in the area of education, in that 65 percent had attended college and 32 percent had entered graduate school. Only one respondent had not gone past high school. To the statement, "The best thing to do would be to remarry right away," 90 percent answered negatively. One advantage of this sample was that these well-educated women would have no difficulty understanding and responding to the questions. And since 80 percent had participated in divorce seminars, there was a relatively high

level of insight into their circumstances. At the same time, this could bias the sample, because the individual could use this as a rationale to elevate the adjustment score higher than it actually should have been.

In doing research on *adjustment to divorce* it is difficult to define the term. In general use, the term *adjustment* combines being contented, and having made a change to solve problems. My questionnaire lists the problems a woman may face in reordering her life after divorce, and measures both her solution and her degree of satisfaction with that solution. In this case, these solutions and attitudes make up *adjustment*. Included are time-restructuring, decisions, children, friends and social life, sex, finances, future plans, and attitudes about divorce and remarriage generally, and the ex-husband particularly.

A Likert scale was used, pretested on 5 subjects. Items which failed to discriminate between high and low scores were discarded. The pretest subjects also suggested changes in wording to clear up ambiguities.

To measure female-sex-equality ideology 10 items were taken from the Governor of Arkansas Commission on the Status of Women, 1972. The scale had been repeatedly tested, and the items were selected for face validity. The cover sheet was titled: "How does a woman reorganize her life after divorce?" The idea was to avoid suggesting that a score would be awarded for adjustment. The respondents' scores were not clumped noticeably in high and low categories but were dispersed from a high of 70 to a low of 39, so the median score of 56 was used as a cutting point for high and low adjustment.

To score the item, *sex and dating behavior* two questions were combined:

- 1) How often do you date? 1 Weekly; 2 Bimonthly; 3 Monthly; 4 Less often
- 2) Please check responses which best describe your current sex behavior:
 - 1 frequent sex with the same man
 - 2 infrequent sex with the same man
 - 3 frequent sex with different men
 - 4 infrequent sex with different men
 - 5 no man — masturbation
 - 6 no man — lesbianism
 - 7 other (specify)

These scores were trichotomized as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1: EFFECT OF SEX & DATING BEHAVIOR ON ADJUSTMENT SCORES

Activity	Description	Percent
Low	Dating infrequent, no sex	26
Moderate	Dating, infrequent sex	35
High	Dating, sex, both frequent	39
		100

Adjustment Score	Inactive or Moderate	Active
High	7	8
Low	12	4

Chi square = 2.62; df = 1; p = .10; n = 31

TABLE 2: EMPLOYMENT PRIOR TO DIVORCE

Years	Percent
0 - 2	29
3 - 7	55
9 - 15	16

TABLE 3: EFFECT OF CHILDREN ON ADJUSTMENT

Adjustment Scores	Children	No Children
High	8	7
Low	14	2

Chi square = 4.39; df = 1; p = .05; n = 31

TABLE 4: CORRELATION OF INDEPENDENT VARIABLES WITH ADJUSTMENT SCORES

Independent Variable	Spearman r	Confidence p
Time alone	.32	ns
Years married	.12	ns
Finances	.43	.05
Social support	.76	.001
Fem-Sex equality	.52	.001
Prior employment	.06	ns
Change	.31	ns

Social support was scored on new friends since divorce, continuing old friendships, and

positive family approval. Change was scored on changes of residence, taking a job, going to school, and definite plans for the future.

CONCLUSION

The divorcee today is building her own life style, playing her own role outside marriage. A divorced mother has a more difficult adjustment. Financial adjustment, social support, and active sexual and dating behavior do contribute positively to adjustment.

TABLE 5: HYPOTHESIS EVALUATION

Hypothesis	Statistic	p
Hyp No 1	Spearman r = .52	.01
Hyp No 2	Chi Square = 2.74	.10
Hyp No 3	Spearman r = .43	.05
Hyp No 4	Spearman r = .76	.001
Hyp No 5	Chi Square = 4.39	.05
Hyp No 6	Spearman r = .32	ns
Hyp No 7	Spearman r = .12	ns
Hyp No 8	Spearman r = .06	ns
Hyp No 9	Spearman r = .21	ns

The amount of time since the divorce, duration of marriage, and previous work experience seems to have had no effect on the divorcee's adjustment.

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