ONCE BITTEN, TWICE SHY?

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF RE-PARTNERING FOR

SEPARATED OR DIVORCED MALTESE COUPLES.

Aldo Farrugia

August 2017

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MASTER'S DEGREE IN
SYSTEMIC FAMILY PSYCHOTHERAPY.

INSTITUTE OF FAMILY THERAPY MALTA
IFT-MALTA

DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

I hereby confirm that this research, 'Once Bitten, Twice Shy? The lived experience of re-partnering for separated or divorced Maltese couples', which is being submitted to the Institute of Family Therapy, IFT – Malta, is solely the work of Aldo Farrugia under the supervision of Ms. C. Delicata.

_____   _____

Aldo Farrugia   Ms. C. Delicata

Masters Student   Dissertation Supervisor

Dedicated to the three most important people in my life - my wife Jennifer and

my children, Warren and Emily Anne.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my wife, Jennifer, who gave and gave and asked for nothing in return. This research, indeed all my studies during the past five years, would not have been possible were it not for her incredible patience, moral strength and unconditional love. A big thank you also goes to my parents, my siblings and my extended family for their continuous prayers and moral support.

Secondly, sincere gratitude and thanks go to all my lecturers and tutors who accompanied me on this journey, but especially to my tutor, Ms. C. Delicata, for her supervision, her invaluable insight, theoretical expertise and clinical experience and for lighting the way. Thank you for believing in me and for standing by my personal and professional growth.

Another word of thanks definitely goes to my fellow travellers, my colleagues, especially those within my clinical team – the Monday group. We always believed that we'll make it through together, and we did. I will always cherish the memorable moments, and the desperate ones, that we have shared. We grew up together! Let us keep the flame alive.

A big, heartfelt thank you also goes to the four couples who participated in this study. Without your commitment, trust and time, this study would not have been accomplished. I was humbled and honoured to listen to and learn from your experiences.

Sincere gratitude also goes to the Senior Management Team and staff, my colleagues at St. Augustine College, who were always understanding and accommodating towards me, especially during the past couple of years. I appreciate it immensely.

Abstract

This study examines the lived experience of re-partnering separated or divorced couples in the Maltese context. An interpretative phenomenological approach was used to this end. One-time, semi-structured interviews were held with four couples who had re-partnered post separation and/or divorce. The emergent themes were: re-defining the self within the relationship, coping strategies, conceptualising relationships and the local context mirroring foreign trends. The findings of this study were in line with similar re-partnering experiences in studies conducted abroad. The impacts of the face-to-face local context as well as the religious context were particularly felt amongst the participants and featured strongly in the findings of this study. Implications for clinical practice and recommendations for further research in the subject are also outlined.

Keywords: Marital Dissolution, Separation, Divorce, Re-partnering, Transitions, Relationships, Remarriage.

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix I – Interview Guide

Appendix II – Linji Gwida ghall-intervista

Appendix II - Information Sheet

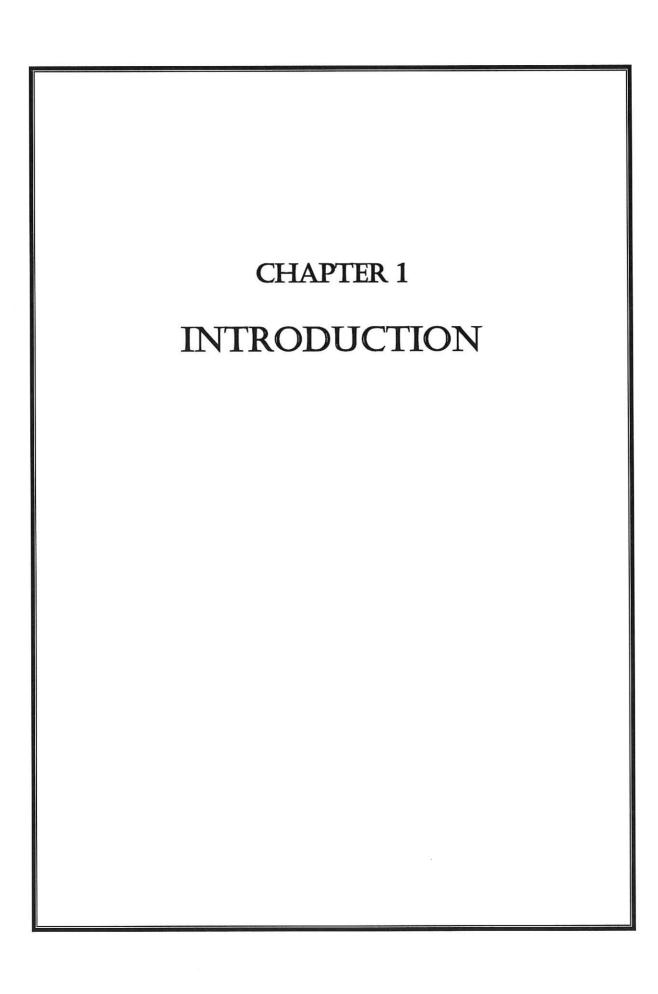Appendix IV – Consent Form

Appendix V – Excerpt of Analysed Transcript

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 4 – Findings

Chapter 5 – Discussion

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aims and objectives of this study

This study aims to shed light onto the complex, transitional period in the lives of Maltese couples who re-partner after marital separation or divorce – the stage between marital break-up and re-partnering, the stage where individuals are trying to re-define their identity after marital separation and the time when they might meet a new partner who they can trust enough to embark on a relationship with.

I want to explore the individual and relational experiences of such couples and try to elicit the meaning that they give to such a re-partnering process. I am curious to see what helps them, how they learn to trust again, when the time is right to move on and how careful they are not to repeat the same mistakes. I intend to compare the eventual data from amongst the couples themselves and also with other studies conducted in other countries, as I am curious to see whether re-partnering experiences across national borders converge, diverge or otherwise.

This study will be one of the few to shed light upon the particular experiences of re-partnering after marital dissolution in the pertinent context of Maltese culture and society. Portelli (2015) examined the single-parent's experience of re-partnering. Abela et al. (2015) explored the attitudes about remarriage in Malta, whilst Galea (2013) studied the experience of young adults who pass through parental separation and their parent's formation of new relationships. Delicata (2007) studied the relationship of separated fathers with their non-custodial sons in the Maltese context. Scicluna (2009) also looked into the phenomenon

of re-marriage in Malta after legal separation. Farrugia (2014) based her research on the lived experiences of Maltese couples who remarry after divorce. Finally, Scicluna's (2015) study explores the Orthodox tradition on divorced and remarried faithful in the Maltese context by focusing on what the Catholic Church can learn. This study will be focusing on an experience not touched upon by the abovementioned research. It is hoped that this research will help professionals be more knowledgeable about this transition in the lives of adults after separation or divorce.

The period after marital dissolution is a period in such peoples' lives which is often not talked about. My hypothesis is that it is because of the shame; of the stigma that cohabiting still carries with it in Malta, especially with elderly members of the extended family. Since cohabitation is an ever-increasing phenomenon in Malta, this study will be useful to workers in the field of family therapy, including, systemic psychotherapists, family therapists, counsellors and social workers as it will examine and bring to light the often untold stories of re-partnered Maltese, the meaning they give to their experiences and behaviour as well as their interaction with meaningful other people in their lives.

In light of this, the main question that I would like to answer in this study is: 'What is the lived experience of re-partnering for separated and/or divorced couples in the Maltese context?' The dominant model of lifelong marriage has been replaced over the past 50 years by a series of (often) less stable relationships (Foldhazi, 2010). Other subsidiary questions which I will try to answer include: what factors affect the formation of new partnerships in Malta?

How, and when, do separated and divorced people in Malta go about finding new partners? Why would they re-partner, or not, in the first place?

After marital breakdown, many individuals will be once more involved in new relationships. While many of these see this opportunity as something to look forward to since they would wish to form satisfying relationships, the process can be quite daunting and inevitably calls for a number of family adjustments (Anderson & Greene, 2010).

On the one hand, the literature on re-partnering and remarriage indicates that such attitudes are inextricably linked to the benefits gained. Committed companionship that helps to overcome loneliness is one of the many psychological benefits conferred by remarriage (Kavas, 2010, as cited in Abela, 2015). Kavas, (ibid), posits that marriage was preferred over single life and that for some, marriage was related to 'disciplined life' whereas for others it related to being 'a real family.' Love and choosing to remarry so as to have a complete family with a father figure were also reasons for re-partnering and remarriage which came out in the study by Kavas (2010, cited in Abela et al. 2015). Moreover, women's emotional needs superseded economic and social imperatives (ibid).

On the other hand, there are also reasons why one may choose not to re-partner or remarry. Losing an intimate relationship is like losing part of oneself, and after marital dissolution, one's yearning for love and concurrently avoiding new relationships due to fear of getting hurt, is a predominant concern. 'Having enough of men' as well as, to a lesser extent, mistrust of marriage as an institution were both emergent themes in Kavas's (2010, as cited in Abela et al.

2015) study. Another main reason for not remarrying was the fear of putting children through an emotional turmoil again (ibid).

What are the factors, if any, that influence the decisions of separated people to re-partner? What are their fears and their dreams? How does the previous marital relationship influence the choice of partner, if at all? These are the kind of questions that have intrigued me enough, ever since my own experience of re-partnering after marital dissolution, to delve into this very particular area of human interaction and experience. When one is living the experience, one does not stop to think, to sit around and ponder. One tries to live day by day, to cope the best one can; one turns to family and friends, if one is lucky to have such support.

Previous studies have shown that there are indeed factors which may influence people in their re-partnering choices. These include: age, time since separation, separation decision, health and wellbeing, presence of children, health, occupation and income, employment, housing as well as previous relationships (Koo et al., 1980; Koo et al., 1989).

Furthermore, other questions which I have also considered include: are there any gender differences and/or similarities of this experience, as has been the case in studies conducted in other countries (Khoo et al., 1989; Weston and Khoo, 1993)? Men are more likely to remarry, and remarry sooner, than women (Carter & McGoldrick, 1988). What about financial considerations? The likelihood of remarriage is also linked to economic stability: the employed are more likely to remarry than those looking for a job (de Jong Gierveld, 2004) and changing jobs lowers the likelihood of remarriage (Ahituv & Lerman, 2004).

Even here, one finds gender differences. Women with higher resources, more income and education, are less likely to remarry, whereas the reverse is true for their male counterparts, who are more likely to remarry and sooner (Carter & McGoldrick, 1988). We also know, for instance, that the presence of children from previous unions is often a negative determining factor in re-partnering (Foldhazi, 2010).

Moreover, does the particular, Maltese, cultural context make a difference? Is re-partnering in Malta any different as a human experience from the same process in other countries, other cultures? The influence of the Catholic Church in Malta is waning (Abela et al., 2015) but marrying in church remains popular (Galea, 2013). However, the psychological cost of marital separation and divorce may be higher for Roman Catholics because the Catholic Church preaches against divorce and sanctions only Church marriages (Kim, 2011).

The attitudes towards re-partnering, cohabitation and remarriage in Malta are rapidly changing, however. NSO statistics show that, in 2015, civil marriages, which included marriages of foreign nationals who come to get married in Malta, equalled the number of Church marriages. A decade earlier the number of civil marriages equated to half the number of religious marriages. In 2015, there were 656 marital separations, 91 annulments, 96 divorces obtained from abroad and 372 divorces obtained from Malta (NSO, 2016)

People who divorce and remarry can now receive Holy Communion, something which up to a few months ago they could not. The Maltese government has just introduced legislation to regulate cohabitation, gay marriage and the possibility of gay couples to foster and adopt children. This evidently shows

both the Catholic Church and Maltese society caught in the throes of a massive, far-reaching tidal wave of change. I am very much curious whether the uniqueness of Malta, both geographically and culturally, makes any difference at all during this transitional, re-partnering period for such couples.

1.2 Self-Reflexivity – My Story

My area of interest in this research is the experience of re-partnering after separation or divorce in the Maltese context. I must admit this is very much borne by my own personal experience; first, through marriage separation, eventual re-partnering and, much later, through divorce from my first spouse and eventual re-marriage to my present wife. Consequently, I am very much interested in exploring and eliciting other Maltese couples' meanings and interpretations of such experiences. How are they similar or different to mine, if at all?

When my marriage ended up on the rocks, the last thing on my mind was re-partnering, let alone re-marriage. Marital separation came to me like a bolt from the blue – there was no distant, early warning at all. The effects on me seemed devastating. There was a long – or, at least, that was how it seemed to me – period of shock, disbelief, anger, pain, self-pity, feeling worthless coupled with a deep mistrust of all that is female; all this in stages and, at times, rolled in one. I still remember distinctly, even now, sixteen years later, the booming, echoing sound of the closing front door on any empty home.

I was shattered on most levels. My self-confidence was ground zero. Yet, I feel I was also fortunate. I had my family as sustenance; I had the support of newly-made friends, colleagues of mine at my new place of work; I also had my three year old son, too, to take care of, and enjoy the company of, during most weekends – what more could I ask for, or want? There was no place for a new partner, consciously or unconsciously, in my life. This stage of my life lasted around two years.

With hindsight, I do not think that not re-partnering immediately was a matter of conscious choice per se; it was not something I thought about at the time. It could also have been the fact that I did not really know where to begin. Most of the men, and women too for that matter, my age – I was thirty-one years old at the time - were either married and raising families or in some religious order. It took me two years to find enough strength to stand on my own two feet and not totter perilously around in the dark, like a drunkard. It took me two years of living on my own to realise one fine day that I felt safe enough, that I believed in myself enough to start picking up the pieces, turn over a new leaf and start afresh.

So I took the proverbial bull by the horns, powered up my computer and ventured tentatively out into the, then, brave new world of online chat rooms. That was where I eventually encountered J, who piqued my interest and curiosity enough to tentatively ask her out for a coffee. I had surprised myself then, in a way, as I did not think I had it in me still. I was even more surprised and pleased that she had accepted, after some initial hesitation. I felt safe enough to venture out into the sunlight again and tentatively to give love, and

myself, a second chance. I had lived in the twilight for too long, I thought. The rest, as they say, is history. J is now my wife of four years; we've been together for fourteen years and, two years ago, we were fortunate to be blessed by a beautiful baby girl.

The ways I have viewed and lived my experiences of marital separation and re-partnering, as well as the meaning I give them are the products of the contexts, cultural and personal, including all the dominant discourses that make me who I am today. They are my constructs; it is how I managed to make sense of my experiences.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

I will be taking a postmodern epistemological stance to explore the subject of re-partnering in Malta after marital dissolution. Such a stance acknowledges the uniqueness and complexities of each couple's experiences. This necessitates acknowledging that there is no one truth. Postmodernists argue that there are no 'final' stories, but each story reflects the language we use to explain our way of organising and understanding the social world.

Wu (2014) posits that spouses in a committed relationship are continuously constructing their reality by negotiating and re-authoring their past and present experiences, so as to co-construct new and different meanings which are significant to them. The language used and the factors affecting re-partnering after marital dissolution change over time in society, and also through the life course of an individual (Foldhazi, 2010).

Social constructionism emphasises that meanings and identities in interactions are dynamic and prone to escalations (Dallos and Draper, 2010). People are seen as fundamentally social: without others to interact with we cannot have a self. Social constructionism shares with systemic theory an emphasis on the centrality of relationships. We only become people through being involved in a social world of meanings through our interactions with others (ibid).

Social constructionist researchers are less focused on phenomena in themselves and are more interested in how the phenomena are seen, how knowledge is generated – hence the focus is on construction (Gergen, 1985). Such researchers question every-day, taken-for-granted assumptions, arguing that these need to be seen in their social, historical and cultural context.

There is ample evidence that family stresses, which are likely to occur around life-cycle transition points, frequently create disruptions of the life cycle and produce symptoms and dysfunction (Carter and McGoldrick eds., 1988). The greater the anxiety generated in the family at any transition point, the more difficult or dysfunctional the transition will be. Divorce certainly adds complexity to the developmental tasks the family would be experiencing in its present phase. Each ensuing life cycle phase becomes affected by the divorce and must from then on be viewed within the dual context of the stage itself as well as the residual effects of the marital dissolution (Peck & Manocherian, 1988, in Carter & McGoldrick, eds, 1988).

Very often, in re-partnering, individuals continuously seek something and someone different from what they had. Weiss (1975) states that adults often create relationships that are different and better than their previous difficult

marriages. There may be extra pressure to succeed, a sense of trying to prove a point.

Individuals may engage in corrective or reparative scripts, depending on their past experiences (Byng-Hall, 1998). In this light, the re-partnered couple may be seen as attempting to correct negative aspects of their previous relationships, as attempts to re-author their scripts (Byng-Hall, 1998). However, going through certain life cycle phases again automatically reactivates some of the intensity over issues that were problematic the first time round (McGoldrick & Carter, 1988). Attempts to 'make up for' past mistakes may overload the new relationship. The focus needs to be on having the experiences again, not on undoing, redoing or denying the past, through open discussion, mutual support, understanding and a lot of thoughtful planning (ibid).

1.4 Conclusion

In this first chapter, I have presented an introduction to the chosen research topic. I have sought to give the reader a clear picture of the pertinent aims of this study, the research questions and how these were primarily borne out of my own life experiences of marital dissolution, re-partnering, divorce and eventual remarriage. I have also outlined the theoretical frameworks adopted in an effort to give this research a solid theoretical position. The following chapter will detail the main ideas found in the literature pertaining to marital dissolution and the lived experiences of re-partnering, and eventual remarriage at times, on both the physical and emotional levels.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will try to give a systemic perspective of the process of re-partnering after marital dissolution, highlighting the complexity of emotional and social contexts. I will be viewing the literature on re-partnering both from a positivist stance and from a social constructionist lens which is both interpretative and phenomenological.

People co-construct new or different meanings to their lived experiences, including marriage and its dissolution (Anderson, 1997). Both systemic theory and social constructionism emphasise the importance of contexts and how these are internalised into the dynamics of family interactions (Dallos and Draper, 2010). Cultures are, effectively, frameworks for meaning-making. This is done 'over time and in multiple contexts – mostly through the vehicle of human communication' (Pare', 1999). The understanding of re-partnering after separation or divorce, in the Maltese context, will be obtained through the couples' interpretation of it.

The stress-buffering effects of social relationships have been one of the major findings in psychobiology in the last century (Hostinar, Sullivan & Gunnar, 2014, cited in Greenberg, 2014). Adults often seek relationships for the comfort they may provide. Moreover, people often feel pressured by positivist ideas of our expected self, of the person we expect, or are expected, to be. What is crucial in relationships is identity preservation, through validation, being seen, confirmed, recognised and validated is crucial to maintain a sense of who is in one's own, and one's partner's, eyes (Greenberg, 2014). Mutual recognition

between persons – what Buber (2013) would refer to as I-Thou relationships – is the cornerstone of the relational ideal.

Marital dissolution and divorce is an interruption of the traditional life cycle which produces the kind of profound disequilibrium that is associated throughout the entire family life cycle with shifts, gains, and losses in family membership (Carter and McGoldrick eds., 1988; Ahrons and Rodgers, 1987).

2.1.1 Divorce and re-partnering as a major variation in the family life cycle

Divorce brings with it crucial shifts in relationship status and important emotional tasks that must be completed by the members of divorcing families in order for them to proceed developmentally (Carter and McGoldrick eds., 1988). In fact, they posit that families in which divorce occurs need to go through one or two additional phases of the family life cycle in order to re-stabilise and go forward developmentally again at a more complex level.

Furthermore, the emotions released during this transitional period of marital dissolution relate primarily to an emotional level – the retrieval of self from the marriage (ibid). People going through this transitional phase must retrieve their hopes, dreams, plans and expectations. This requires mourning what is lost and dealing with pain, guilt, blame, shame and loss in oneself, in the spouse, in the children, and in the extended family (Carter and McGoldrick eds., 1988).

It takes a minimum of two years and a great deal of effort after divorce for family members to readjust to a new structure and proceed to the next life cycle stage, which may or may not include remarriage (Carter and McGoldrick eds., 1988; Ahrons, 1980; Hetherington, 1989). This has also been my personal experience of re-partnering which included many of the emotional peaks and lows that Carter and McGoldrick (1988) mention in their work.

During this transitional period, emotional tension peaks at the time of serious commitment to a new relationship; at the time a plan to remarry is announced to family and friends and at the time of the actual remarriage. The emotional process at this transitional period to re-partnership and/or remarriage consists of struggling with fears about investment in a new marriage and a new family: one's own fears, the new spouse's fears, and the children's fears; dealing with hostile or upset reactions of the children or of the extended families and the ex-spouse; struggling with the ambiguity of new roles, structures and relationships and re-arousal of parental guilt and concerns about children and their welfare (Carter and McGoldrick eds., 1988). All this can be overwhelming for the newly re-partnered couples and presents complex challenges which they might find difficult to manage.

From a systemic stance, therapists can offer clients the challenge of inventing a new form of family structure. Therapy can help them give up the old model of family life and adapt to the complexity of a new form. This may require maintaining permeable boundaries to permit shifting of household memberships and working for open lines of communication between all sets of subsystems:

step-parents, natural parents, grandparents and children (Carter and McGoldrick eds., 1988).

Friedman, in (Carter and McGoldrick eds., 1988), talks about systems and ceremonies, of taking a family view to rites of passage, including marital separation, divorce, re-partnering and remarriage. Rites of passage are usually associated with emotionally critical moments of life. Friedman (ibid) posits that the family is the primary force operating at such moments.

Moreover, it is the family, more than culture that ultimately determines which rites are to be used, and not the other way round. Families are selective, according to their characteristics of their culture's ceremonial repertoire. Friedman (ibid) believes the role of the family process in rites of passage is so central that it is more a case of the family making the transition to a new stage of life at such a time, rather than any 'identified member' focused upon during the occasion. Interestingly, Friedman (ibid) posits that,

> *"All family relationship systems seem to unlock during the months before or after such events, and it often possible to open doors (or close them) between various family members with less effort during these intensive periods than could ordinarily be achieved with years of agonising effort."* (p.120)

This is because life cycle events are not as random as they seem. Rather they are usually the culmination of family processes that have been moving forward toward those ends for some time. Consequently, life cycle events are always part of "other things going on" (Friedman, in Carter and McGoldrick eds., 1988). Although a large body of literature exists on the study of re-partnering following

the marital breakdown, relatively little attention has been paid to re-partnering after the breakdown of a cohabiting relationship (Wu and Schimmele, 2005). For the purposes of this research project, I was mainly interested in looking at the experience of, and the meaning people give to, re-partnering after marital separation and/or divorce.

2.2 What entices adults to give love a second chance?

Re-partnering – the formation of close emotional ties to a single other in an intimate relationship – has been shown to confer a range of benefits for women and men (Hughes, 2000). It can be a key pathway to improved financial circumstances, particularly for women, and to increased levels of health and emotional wellbeing (Funder, Harrison and Weston, 1993). Moreover, whatever issues a divorced/separated person may have when contemplating re-partnering the desire to be in a relationship often remains compelling (Parker, 1999). As Weston (1991) and Spanier & Thompson (1989) point out, divorced people clearly favour re-partnering over remaining single.

Anderson et al. (2004) found that "among a sample of parents with a divorce filing initiated in the prior 60 days, half had already experienced dating in some form and about one quarter were currently in a serious relationship with a new romantic partner" (as cited in Anderson & Greene, 2010 p.49). For the newly unattached, becoming involved in another relationship can provide a distraction

from dwelling on the separation, something to look forward to, relief from loneliness and isolation and a boost to one's self-worth (Weiss, 1975).

On the other hand, a reluctance to become involved in a new relationship may stem from several concerns: fear of hurt and rejection, lack of confidence in ability to attract a partner and the expectations of others who have recently become single (ibid). It is noteworthy that the psychological benefits of remarriage far outnumber the material gains, yet financial recovery is often cited as the primary reason a person – particularly a woman – might remarry (Parker, 1999).

2.3 Contexts that influence the process of re-partnering

While much of the relevant research focuses on the characteristics of those who have actually taken the step into remarriage after the breakdown of their marriage or de facto relationship, understanding the factors surrounding an individual's preparedness to re-partner can also contribute to our understanding of remarriage and re-partnering trends and behaviour (Parker, 1999).

Several factors have been found to influence the timing and likelihood of re-partnering, namely, gender, age, economic resources and children (Weston and Khoo 1993; Khoo 1989). Gender appears to be a major mitigating factor. Khoo (1989) found that, in Australia, men were more than three times as likely as women to re-partner. This was usually explained by the hypothesis that women's increasing financial independence reduces their motivation to enter

and maintain relationships (Sweeney, 1995). So it seems that men are forming new unions earlier and with higher frequency than women.

A few months before the introduction in Malta of divorce legislation in 2011, a quantitative local study carried out by the Centre for Family Studies (2011), in collaboration with the National Statistics Office, explored the attitudes of married or previously married Maltese persons including annulled marriages, separated or divorced, towards marriage. This study indicated that the majority of respondents (64.7%) stated that they would not consider re-marriage even if divorce legislation were introduced in Malta. According to the study, the factors that would increase the likelihood of re-marriage after divorce were young age, high educational attainment, having a paid job and being a non-parent. On the other hand, the three main reasons militating against remarriage were religious/social beliefs/values, avoiding previous negative union experience and old age/health (Portelli, 2015)

2.3.1 Age and gender

'*The age at which something occurs has a lot to do with how it is experienced*' (Settersten, 2009). Age reflects timing. In terms of re-partnering, people at younger ages have a larger pool of potential partners than at older ages where many people are already in partnerships. This applies to both men and women (Skew et al., 2009; Hughes, 2000). However, the effect of age may be particularly strong for women. Men tend to partner with women younger than

themselves, so as they grow older, women's pool of potential available partners diminishes faster than men's (Dean and Gurak, 1978, as cited in Skew et al, 2009).

Gender is also crucial in determining re-partnering behaviour. Khoo (1989), Poortman (2007) and Wu & Schimmele (2005) all found that men were more than three times as likely as women to re-partner. Various interpretations of this have been proposed and these include: women receiving fewer benefits from being in a partnership compared with men (Bernard, 1972); women taking longer to recover from negative mental health consequences of separation (Willits *et al.*, 2004); other individual characteristics such as age, fertility and previous relationship history, as well as the maternal responsibility of raising their children from previous relationships.

Khoo (1989) also compared remarriage and de facto re-partnering and found that the type of relationships women entered following divorce varied by socio-economic status. Women in professional or managerial occupations were less likely to remarry than other women, but were more likely to be in de facto or non-cohabiting relationships. This suggests that women's financial independence did not operate as an alternative to relationships, but as an alternative to remarriage (Hughes, 2000).

2.3.2 Previous relationships

Prior relationship duration has been the most commonly used measure of relationship history. Whilst studies conducted in the eighties found no significant effects of duration (Koo *et al*. 1984; Mott and Moore, 1983), more recent studies point to a positive effect of longer durations on re-partnering (Poortman, 2007, Wu and Shimmele, 2005). Yet, this may also be debatable since, on one hand, people who are separating from a long relationship may take longer to re-partner because of being out of the marriage 'market' while, on the other hand, those who are used to living with someone may be reluctant to stay single for long (Poortman, 2007).

Prior relationship experiences are likely to affect people's subsequent chances and choices with regards re-partnering and remarriage (Poortman, 2007). Such experiences may make people more cautious about new relationships (e.g. Frazier et al., 1996) and one's chances of finding a new partner may have become more restricted the second time around (e.g. Jacobs and Furstenberg, 1986). After a marital break-up, however, people may realize that relationships can go wrong, resulting in less desire for new relationships. People may want to avoid getting hurt again. Furthermore, divorced people may have less desire for marriage than the never married (Frazier et al., 1996).

Separated or divorced people often gain knowledge about whether the impact of their prior marriage or relationships diminishes when they go on to re-partner. It seems likely that 'the first cut is the deepest' and that people learn to deal with

relationship break-ups (Poortman, 2007). Given that marital dissolution has many adverse consequences and re-partnering is a way to overcome these consequences (e.g. Kitson and Morgan, 1990; Holden and Smock, 1991), knowledge on whether the first cut is indeed the deepest shows whether disadvantages associated with previous relationships cumulate over the life course (Poortman, 2007).

2.3.3 Socio-economic situations

Based on a traditional view of relationships as well as on economic theory, where the man is the breadwinner and the woman the homemaker, it is argued that the more economically independent the woman is, the less need she has to re-partner (Becker *et al.,* 1997). Employed men with steady or high incomes are more attractive as potential partners and so have higher re-partnering rates.

Yet, the times are changing and in current times the changing gender roles and labour markets mean that two incomes are often necessary to maintain a good standard of living, and that women with a higher earning potential might be more attractive in the partner market (Mott and Moore, 1983; Oppenheimer, 1988; Sweeney and Cancian, 2004, cited in Hughes, 2000). Being employed also provides the potential to meet partners through the work environment (Hughes, 2000). The more people one meets, the more likely one meets an adequate partner.

Hughes (2000) suggests that re-partnering was most common among men and women with an 'average' economic profile, which suggests that the mating market is more open or flexible in the middle of the socio-economic spectrum than in the extremes. There is evidence to suggest the existence of a threshold of resources below which men and women are unlikely to re-partner by marriage or de facto relationship (ibid). This concurs with Birrell and Rapson's (1998) claim that unemployment, work insecurity and income inequality are influencing patterns of relationship formation and dissolution.

Education is linked to employment. Although highly-educated women have higher earnings, the more highly educated a woman the more restricted will be her potential pool of men with similar education levels (Goldman *et al.,* 1984). This tallies with other research findings by Khoo (1989) in which women with high levels of resources, including educational, were less likely to remarry but more likely to be in de facto or non-cohabiting relationships. Men with high levels of education and higher income levels did not differ from men with average levels of education and income in terms of their relationship status (Hughes, 2000).

2.3.4 Religious context

Some studies suggest that religion influences individual behaviour in terms of second-union formation, although its cultural importance changes according to country (Angeli and De Rose, 2003, as cited in Meggiolaro & Ongaro, 2008).

Most religions tend to have specific prescriptions regarding what is acceptable or not with regards partnering, such as being specifically against pre-marital sex and cohabitation (Thornton *et al.,* 1992).

This is certainly the case with the Roman Catholic religion in Malta, for instance, a country where religious beliefs are still relatively strong. Marrying in church in Malta still remains popular (Galea, 2013), yet according to Abela (2015), the influence of the Catholic Church in Malta is steadily waning. The strong, though progressively weakening influence of the Catholic Church makes changes happen at a slower pace (Mizzi 1981; 1997) compared to other countries where the Catholic faith is, or used to be, predominant.

Gender also seems to play a hand here; men from Catholic backgrounds were significantly less likely than other men to remarry, perhaps because they tend to hold more traditional views about marriage (Sweeney, 1995). It would be interesting to explore why Maltese separated or divorced couples seem to go for re-partnering, rather than remarriage.

On the other hand, religious people who re-partner may be more likely to marry than cohabit (Skew *et al.*, 2009). Attitudes towards partnership and marriage also play a major role. Divorced people may try to avoid re-marriage and the more emancipated, individualistic and less religious, the less likely to re-marry (Foldhazi, 2010).

2.3.5 Cultural context

It is worthwhile pointing out at this point that culture and value orientations may also influence people's decisions on re-partnering. Cultural similarity is a prerequisite and facilitates understanding of behaviour. As such, common activities will be more likely. Partners with similar cultural backgrounds will probably also share similar values and have more or less similar opinions on important issues (Foldhazi, 2010). Meggiolaro and Ongaro (2008) hypothesise that the level of social acceptance of separations influences the entry into second relationships by changing the (individual) social costs of re-partnering, in particular those borne by male partners. Men's relationships with separated women may indeed involve potential conflicts with their family of origin – parents tend to discourage their offspring from adopting new family behaviours (Schroder, 2008).

However, as the cultural context becomes more modern and marital instability more common, such cultural factors may become less influential on the re-partnering process. In Malta, family is an important identity factor and as Abela et al. (2005) found, the Maltese have high moral standards. The strong, though progressively weakening, influence of the Catholic Church makes changes happen at a slower pace (Mizzi 1981; 1997) compared to other countries. The phenomenon of re-partnering has therefore been looked down upon until quite recently.

A few months before the introduction of divorce legislation in Malta in 2011, a quantitative local study carried out by the Centre for Family Studies in collaboration with the National Statistics Office, explored the attitudes of married or previously married Maltese persons including annulled marriages, separated or divorced, towards marriage. This study indicated that the majority of respondents (64.7%) stated that they would not consider re-marriage even if divorce legislation were introduced in Malta.

According to the study, on one hand the factors that would increase the likelihood of re-marriage after divorce were young age, high educational attainment, having a paid job and being a non-parent. Moreover, the top three reasons listed for re-marriage were love, living in someone's company and claiming a right. On the other hand, the three main reasons militating against remarriage were religious/social beliefs/values, avoiding previous negative union experience and old age/health.

Despite the smallness of the Maltese islands, and despite all the socio-cultural and legal, seismic, brand-new changes in marital laws which have taken place this year and recently, I would tentatively hypothesise that one may still find differences in attitudes towards re-partnering and remarriage between people coming from the urbanised, modern parts of Malta to the, more traditional village dwellers in Malta and Gozo. This concurs with Meggiolaro and Ongaro's (2008) study which found significant differences in attitudes and behaviours towards re-partnering and remarriage between the North and the South of Italy. The South of Italy is characterised by more traditional family models and

behaviours (ibid). Also, women's personal resources have more importance in the North of Italy than in the South (ibid).

2.3.6 Children from previous relationships

The role of children in re-partnering is also significant in various ways. Overall findings from various studies indicate that the presence of children from a prior relationship has a negative effect on the chance of re-partnering. Moreover, the chance of re-forming a union decreases as the number of children increases (Khoo et al., 1984; Foldhazi, 2010).

Having children from prior relationships decreases one's attractiveness as a partner due to financial and indirect costs associated with the complexities of step-families (Bumpass et al., 1990). Hughes (2000) hypothesises that children may lessen the need to re-partner as they can provide company and be a source of emotional support for the parent. Also, the presence of children may be a barrier to the possibility of finding a new partner by decreasing the chance for social interaction (Ermish et al., 1990).

Other studies found, however, that contrary to what parents often fear, several children view dating by either one of their parents as an encouraging experience, although a few perceived this event as highly stressful (Amato, 1987). Stress may stem from different factors, such as competition for parental attention and affection or even the child's hope for parental reconciliation (ibid). Kalter (1990) also claims, children may feel different types of emotions such as

anger, anxiety, sadness or sometimes even curiosity about their parent's sexual activity.

While women who were childless or had only one child at home were interested in having a new relationship, those with two or more children were clearly not interested in re-partnering (Parker, 1999). It may be that a woman with two or more children is perceived by men to be a less attractive potential partner and such women may be more reluctant to enter the relationship 'market' given that she may not be seen as 'relationship material' (Parker, 1999). Moreover, women with older children were more likely than women with younger children to re-partner (Hughes, 2000).

However, women with younger children who did re-partner tended to formalise new relationships through remarriage (ibid). Furthermore, younger children (less than six years old) tend to reduce the remarriage prospects of sole mothers, whereas having children older than 18 years increases the likelihood of their remarriage, perhaps because adult children are not perceived as obstacles to re-partnering. No such concerns appear to impact on men's re-partnering decisions (Parker, 1999). Men whose children lived independently were more likely to re-partner than other men.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the most pertinent literature relevant to the aims of this research – the lived experience of separated or divorced people in the

Maltese setting. It is not just the emotional psychological needs of separated couples that is affective, but there are also socio-economic situations which weigh heavily on one's mind when making decisions and taking up new opportunities. What entices such couples to re-partner was reviewed first, followed by the factors, according to the literature, which influence people to re-partner. Relevant studies from the local, Maltese context were also reviewed so as to give a fuller picture of the complexities of this particular lived experience. The following chapter describes in detail the research design and the methodological framework adopted for this study. The research participants are presented and the data collection procedure outlined.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide a detailed picture of the methodological approach and framework chosen for the purposes of capturing the lived experience of re-partnering for separated/divorces couples in the Maltese context. The rationale for adopting a qualitative approach will also be detailed as well as the data analysis tool used in this research. The criteria, data collection methods and instrumentation used in selecting participants to take part in this research will be discussed and presented. Ethical considerations to preserve trustworthiness and ensure research credibility will also be detailed.

3.2 Research Design

Research is usually undertaken from one of two conventional approaches (although sometimes, if necessary, it is undertaken from both): Qualitative and Quantitative. On one hand, Qualitative research focuses on meaning, sense-making and communicative action (Smith et al., 2009). On the other hand, Quantitative research focuses on what happens by trying to explain the associations between events. Qualitative research allows researchers to keep their interpretations as true as possible to the participants' views and narratives (Porter, 2002). Delving deep into lived human experience, whatever form or content, cannot be engaged from a Quantitative Framework. Numbers, figures and graphs are inherently devoid of the subtleties of human emotion or the complexities of human cognition.

Systemic researchers are seen as the most adequate in conducting such qualitative researches as they are appreciative of and able to process the complexities of human relationships (Burck, 2005). I must admit that I was attracted to my area of research - the experience of re-partnering for separated and divorced couples in the Maltese context - because I was very curious of the meaning and significance these people attributed to their experiences. This research was also fuelled by my own experience of re-partnering after marital dissolution. As the participants become more aware of these experiences, it was hoped that their thoughts would eventually evolve into deeper reflexivity.

Context, and its importance thereof, is one of the pillars of systemic work. Contextualising clients and their experiences is fundamental when doing systemic work with clients (Dallos and Draper, 2010). I could not possibly refrain from exploring the Maltese context in my research since I believed it would give my research a distinct and particular flavour, both culturally and thematically.

3.3 Rationale behind the Research Framework

To this end, since my area of research was all about the lived re-partnering experiences of couples and their reflexive processes resulting in meaning, I could not avoid the fact that IPA is the Framework most apt to conduct such research from. I was not interested in coming up with new theories about this

particular research, as I would have needed to do, had I opted for Grounded Theory, for instance.

Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) generally sets out to generate a theoretical-level account of a particular phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). I neither had a structured protocol to follow nor had the time and space available to deal with a lot of data, which is why Grounded Theory was not personally appealing. This often requires sampling on a large scale, especially in comparison with IPA. Furthermore, there have been various international studies along the years on the lived experience of re-partnering and the meaning people give to it. This precludes pushing towards a conceptual explanatory level where individual accounts are drawn on to illustrate the resultant theoretical claim (Smith et al., 2009).

Neither did I want to limit myself to discourse or to an analysis of how discourses influence and develop identities and relationships, as is required from a researcher opting for Discourse Analysis, which is rooted in social constructionism. From a Foucauldian perspective, discourse is a body of knowledge which shapes and constrains our ways of understanding. Moreover, discourse can also be analysed from a discursive psychological perspective, where discourse is understood to refer to communicative interaction – how people make use of available cultural resources and how language functions in specific contexts (Potter & Weatherall, 1987, as cited in Smith et al., 2009).

To conclude, I believe that my research question - What is the experience of re-partnering for separated and divorced couples in the Maltese context? - was best served by adopting IPA as a research tool. I was more interested in capturing the experiences, views and exploring the perceptions of the participants. IPA allowed me to also include my interpretations of the local cultural context which inevitably also colours the participants' world-view and the meanings they give to their experiences.

3.4 Epistemological Reflexivity and Underlying Philosophy

Understanding human experience is the very bread and butter of psychotherapy, and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is an excellent research method which offers researchers the opportunity of learning from the invaluable insight of the experts themselves – the research participants. IPA explores, and tries to understand, lived experience. Researchers using IPA are, therefore, interested mainly in capturing and exploring the meaning/s that participants give to their life experiences, especially major ones, as opposed to attempting to produce an objective statement of the object or event itself (Reid et al, 2005).

A postmodern, social-constructionist perspective entails acknowledging that people give different meanings to lived experiences as they are exposed to different cultures and beliefs (Gergen, 1985). For the purposes of this research, I was mainly interested in looking at, from a systemic perspective, the

experience of, and the meaning people give to, re-partnering after marital separation, since divorce is a new phenomenon in our country.

The approach to IPA is phenomenological in that it involves a detailed examination of the participants' life-world – hence, the importance of context, one of the pillars of systemic practice. When people are engaged with 'an experience' – they are aware of what's happening – 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 (Smith et al., 2009).

However, experience is, as we all know, complex. Some are experienced as positive, while others are most certainly negative. Yet, what they all have in common is the fact that they are all very significant to this person. This will, in turn, make the person reflect considerably, trying to come to terms with it whilst working towards making meaning of it all. As a researcher, I was constantly aware that I could not afford to be rigid and biased; whilst a certain degree of bias is inevitable as we are all human, as a researcher I had to be genuinely curious and flexible whilst conducting the interviews.

IPA actually emphasises that the research exercise is a dynamic process with an active role for the researcher in that process. One is trying to get close to the participant's personal world, to take, in Conrad's (1987) words, an 'insider's perspective', but one cannot do this directly or completely. Access depends on, and is complicated by, the researcher's own conceptions; indeed, these are required in order to make sense of that other personal world through a process

of interpretative activity. Thus, a two-stage interpretation process, or a double hermeneutic, is involved (Smith and Osborn, 2008). The participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world.

Smith et al. (2009) posit that IPA is an approach which has been informed by concepts from three main areas of philosophy: phenomenology, hermeneutics and Idiography. Whilst this is not the place to delve deeply into the sometimes complex world of philosophical thinking and endeavour, I believe it will be fruitful, at this point, to briefly highlight the main concepts behind the above terms and their implications for psychological research and for IPA in particular.

3.4.1 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is the philosophical approach to the careful study of experience, in all its various aspects, especially in terms of the things that matter most to us. Experience, according to Husserl (1927) as cited in Smith et al (2009), should be examined in the way it occurs, and in its own terms. For Husserl, phenomenology involves and requires reflexivity, stepping outside of our everyday experience in order to be able to examine that everyday experience. We take things for granted all the time. In order to be phenomenological, we need to disengage from the activity to attend to the taken-for-granted experience of it.

As humans, we see ourselves as different from everything else in the world. Our perception of others always develops from our own perspective.

Therefore, while we can observe, and empathise with others, ultimately we can never share the others' experiences. For researchers and IPA researchers in particular, this view is of utmost importance. The world is not mine, alone, and my perception of the world is largely shaped by the presence, or absence, of others. People do things, they reflect on what they do and their actions have meaningful consequences. IPA research is therefore concerned with human lived experience and is necessarily interpretative. It focuses on people's attempts to make meanings of what is happening to them (Smith et al., 2009).

3.4.2 Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation. Hermeneutic theorists were mainly interested in trying to provide answers to questions such as: What are the purposes of interpretation itself? Is it possible to uncover the intentions or original meanings of an author?

The researcher may be able to offer a perspective on the text which the author is not. In *Being and Time* (1962), Heidegger, as cited in Smith et al. (2009), also discusses interpretation explicitly: *'Whenever something is interpreted as something, the interpretation will be founded essentially upon the fore-conception'* (p. 191-192). IPA concurs with Heidegger that phenomenological inquiry is from the outset an interpretative process.

Gadamer (1960), as cited in Smith et al (2009), goes one step further by arguing that one may only really get to know what these fore-conceptions are once the interpretation is underway. Interpretation is a multi-faceted and

dynamic process. Sometimes we can identify our preconceptions in advance, other times they will emerge during the process of engaging with the text/new experience presented. Either way, this requires a spirit of openness: "…one does not try to argue the other person down but that one really considers the weight of the other's opinion…" (Gadamer, 1960, p.367).

It is pertinent to also mention, at this point, the hermeneutic circle – the relationship between the part and the whole, at a series of inter-related levels. To understand any given part, you look to the whole; to understand the whole, you look to the parts. This is very much in line with systemic thinking as it describes the process of interpretation as circular, non-linear and dynamic. The meaning of a word becomes clear in the context of a sentence; the sentence becomes clear in the context of a text; the text within an interview which is in turn understood within the context of a research project and so on and so forth. IPA is systemic in this sense; in the process of analysis, the researcher may move back and forth through a range of different ways of thinking, rather than moving in a linear, step-by-step manner.

IPA involves also a 'double-hermeneutic' (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The researcher is making sense of the participant, who is making sense of X. On one hand, the researcher is like the participant, drawing on everyday human resources to make sense of the world whilst, on the other hand, the researcher is not the participant. The researcher only has access to the participant's experience through what the participant reports. According to Smith et al. (2009), successful IPA research is both empathic and questioning. The researcher is trying to understand, both in the sense of 'trying to see what it is

like for someone' and in the sense of 'analysing, illuminating and making sense of something' (ibid).

3.4.3 Idiography

Idiography deals with the particular, in contrast with a nomothetic approach, which the philosopher Kant (cited in Smith et al., 2009) described as the tendency to generalise. Idiography is the study of the individual, who is seen as a unique agent with a unique life history and properties, setting him apart from others (ibid). IPA is concerned with detail and depth of analysis. According to Smith et al. (2009), IPA is indebted to Idiography in the sense that there is a commitment to the single case in its own right, or to a process which moves from the examination of the single case to more general claims. Yet, they recognise also that the particular and the general are not so distinct.

According to Warnock (1987), as cited in Smith et al., (2009), delving deeper into the particular takes us closer to the universal. Through connecting the findings of the particular case to the psychological literature, the IPA researcher is helping the reader to see how the case can shed light on the existing nomothetic research. Again, echoes of part and whole relationships. The specifics of each case are unique, yet they are hung on what is shared and communal.

3.5 Research Participants

The research participants were recruited through homogenous, purposive sampling. I opted for this method because it is congruent with the methodological framework adopted, IPA. This sampling method 'is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand and gain insight' (Merriam, 2009, p.77). Furthermore, purposive sampling is most apt when researchers are interested in exploring in-depth experiences as it makes it possible to pinpoint differences and similarities across the participants (Smith and Osborne, 2008) will be separated and/or divorced individuals who have re-partnered again and are in a steady relationship or re-married.

Interviews were conducted with four heterosexual couples where both partners are Maltese. They have all lived in Malta for at least the past three years and so were familiar and relatively accustomed with the rapidly changing Maltese cultural milieu. The partners in each couple needed to have been in this committed relationship for at least three years.

The age of the participants was not deemed to be significant for the purposes of my research, though I envisaged that since they would be in a second committed relationship after marital dissolution, they would probably be in their thirties or over. The participants were not my clients, neither at IFT-Malta nor elsewhere.

Although I interviewed four couples after consulting with my tutor, I had identified five couples who could take part. This was so as to have a fall-back option in case some couples had second thoughts, or, they decided to stop the

interview for whatever reason. My thoughts initially were to ask, tentatively of course, friends, colleagues or members of my family whether they know, or might know, of couples who might be interested in participating. I started from my contacts first.

I did not encounter major obstacles in finding four couples willing to take part in my research project, given the Maltese cultural context in the present day after the introduction of divorce legislation four years ago. The smallness of the island and the fact that everyone knows everybody else also helped in the recruitment of the sample.

3.6 Sample size

The primary concern of IPA is with a detailed account of individual experience. The issue is quality and not quantity, given the complexity of most human phenomena (Smith et al., 2009). They suggest that three is the default size for an IPA study at Masters' level. This is because it allows the researcher to conduct a detailed analysis of each case and also for the development of a subsequent micro-analysis of similarities and differences across cases (ibid).

The sample size for my research into the re-partnering experiences of separated and divorced couples in the Maltese context, was four. This provided me with sufficient examples of meaningful points of similarity and difference between participants, but not so many as to be overwhelmed by the amount of data generated.

3.7 Data Collection

For the purposes of this research, I opted for the semi-structured interview for practical and epistemological reasons. The available literature on doing research indicated that semi-structured interviews are the best medium through which to collect rich data. They are more suited to bring out the uniqueness of each participant's experience.

Semi-structured interviews comprise a set of questions that would have been prepared prior to interviewing. The questions needed to be sufficiently open so as to enable me to be structured, yet also flexible (Wengraf, 2001). I made sure that the questions posed were clear and unambiguous. They allowed me to remain curious throughout and refrain from making any assumptions, especially since my research was about an experience which I had gone through myself – the experience of re-partnering for separated and divorced people in the Maltese context. One pitfall which as a researcher I had to acknowledge and be aware of was that of losing focus during the interview and ending up having formal conversations with the research participants (Dallos and Vetere, 2005).

Having a semi-structured interview guide helped me both in staying curious and in remaining on track whilst gaining confidence and creating a good rapport with the participants. I managed to do this also by adopting an empathic stance through my questions and interventions throughout the interview. The interviews were audio recorded and were of approximately 1 hour duration.

3.8 Joint Interviews

In the beginning I thought of interviewing each partner in each relationship separately. My thinking was that, if there were issues which one party would not feel safe enough to open up on during the interview in the presence of the other partner, he/she would have no difficulty in doing so since they would be alone. Perhaps when conducting joint interviews, this safety and comfort would no longer be felt. However, my tutor advised otherwise. Her thinking was that interviewing them together would be more beneficial since they would build upon each other's arguments and interventions.

In fact, Dallos and Vetere (2005) point out that an advantage of interviewing couples jointly is that the researcher would be able to take note of any observations made throughout the interview in relation to couple dynamics that could later on be referred to in the data analysis. Joint interviews allow partners in a relationship to corroborate or negate, perhaps, each other's stories (Valentine, 1999). Such joint interviews may also shed important light upon a couple's communication patterns and gender difference, if any, which would not be obtained from one-to-one interviews (Bjornholt and Farstad, 2014).

3.9 Recruitment

All participants were found through word of mouth; they were all friends or acquaintances of friends, relatives or colleagues of mine. I made sure the participants understood what such an interview involved so as they would know what to expect. First, I contacted them by phone, introduced myself and

explained my research. Then I proceeded to ask them if they would be interested in participating as a couple. All the participants I called accepted to participate unambiguously. I then sent them a soft copy of the Information Sheet (Appendix III) so that they could have on black and white what I had told them over the phone. This allowed them to discuss it again together as a couple before signing on.

Then I invited the participants for an interview at a time and a place convenient to them. I ensured that the meeting place would be free from noise and intrusion so as to respect their privacy and to ensure not having problems with recording and eventual transcription. The participants' ages ranged from the late twenties to the late forties.

3.10 Data gathering

I conducted two interviews at my house; another was conducted at the participants' own house while the last one was conducted at a neutral, public place. I spent a few minutes before the actual interview to engage the couples in informal conversation, so as to break the ice, until they were ready to start the interview. I also explained that since the interviews were going to be audio-recorded, I would need them to sign a consent form giving me permission to do so. I did this prior to the interview. After the interview, I again spent a few minutes in informal conversation with the participants by way of closure.

The interviews were carried out in Maltese. Even though I knew that all of my participants could speak English, I felt that not having perhaps a sound-enough

command over the English language might hinder the flow of conversation and hence, also, the richness of their narratives. They could possibly become self-conscious and the experience would be ruined.

Having joint interviews was conceivably more fruitful, and possibly richer, than interviewing one party in a relationship at a time, for it opened up differing and contrasting, besides similar, stances or attitudes towards the issue of re-partnering. An obstacle which immediately became apparent in first interview was that I had to juggle the role of therapist with that of researcher. I decided that at that point, I was primarily a researcher and not a therapist. So, I kept this mind as from the second interview. I was there as a researcher, to learn, and not to conduct therapy.

However, since it is very difficult, if not impossible, to really compartmentalise oneself completely, I found that my basic skills in systemic psychotherapy, like empathising and being genuinely curious and relational, helped to elicit an in-depth meaningful experience and narrative from the participants. All interviews went smoothly and I thought this augured well for the rest of my research.

3.11 Data Analysis

The data collected from the interviews was processed in different stages. Smith et al., (2009) provide a detailed presentation of the stages involved in doing an IPA study. However, they also state that IPA allows for a certain degree of flexibility and experimentation when it comes to analyse data.

I started off by immersing myself into the worlds of the respective participants. I did this by listening to, twice or thrice, the audio-recordings. Then I proceeded to transcribe the recordings, a very laborious task indeed. Listening closely to the recordings again whilst transcribing enabled me to really become part of the system and, moreover, to reflect upon my interaction with the participants. This already gave me an idea of the rich tapestry of co-constructed narratives that could be gleaned from these interviews. Consequently, I made sure I took note of these reflections during transcription. In fact, the transcript document is split into three columns; the transcript of the interview in the middle column, my thoughts and reflections in the left-hand column and the emerging themes in the right-hand one.

I must admit I found the process of clustering the key phrases into significant emergent themes not so straightforward at first. But after consulting with my tutor and following the guidelines set out by Smith et al. (2009), this became less troubling so as to allow me to immerse myself completely in the data. I repeated this process with all transcripts. Finally, after going carefully through all the data, I highlighted the emerging patterns and connections and proceeded to group them, 'both within and across cases' (Willig, 2008) into five super-ordinate themes.

3.12 Reflexivity

Dallos and Vetere (2005) posit that throughout the entire process of the research, researchers are to reflect thoroughly on their biases and experiences

as these are moulded and borne by one's cultural values. My interest in researching the re-partnering experiences of separated or divorced couples in the Maltese context was primarily fuelled by my own experiences and narratives, 'constructed within the wider reality' (Dallos and Vetere, 2005, p.19), drenched as they are in my own biases, beliefs and values. This, in turn, made me very curious in exploring, and learning from, these lived experiences of my participants. Inevitably, I had to be constantly aware of analysing this data by looking through my own coloured lenses. Flick (2002) acknowledges that "the subjectivities of the researcher and those being studied are part of the researcher process."

Bias is an aspect of subjectivity and needs to be recognised (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). One of the three explanations provided by Schwandt (1997) with respect to the term subjective is that it refers to "(1) the personal view of an individual; (2) unwarranted or unsupported (or unwarrantable, insupportable); and (3) biased or prejudiced". Peshkin (1988) argued that problems with subjectivity arise with failures to recognize and account for these, and thoughtfully shape a project in ways that manage subjectivity.

However, researchers have called into question dichotomized notions of subjectivity/objectivity and their relevance to research (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). Bruno Latour (2000), cited in Roulston & Shelton, 2015, questions the idea that objectivity and subjectivity are opposites, and asserts that "objectivity does not refer to a special quality of the mind, and inner state of justice and fairness, but to the presence of objects which have been rendered "able" . . . to object to what is told about them."

Roulston & Shelton (2015) argue that definitions of bias borrowed from foundationalist approaches to inquiry, along with checklists of strategies for how to "manage," "minimize," or "avoid" bias in qualitative inquiry, are not helpful. Bias might be understood as a characteristic quality unique to a particular researcher. Thus, subjectivity or "bias" may not only "unbalance, and limit endeavour" in particular ways but "also motivate and illuminate inquiry" (Preissle, 2008, p. 844, as cited in Roulston & Shelton, 2015).

With this in mind, I endeavoured to take note of my reflections throughout the whole research process and discuss them with my tutor. I needed to look at my values and dominant stories from within, rather than reflecting on them from outside. Making sense of such stories and, at times, generating new meanings has enabled me to be in a better position to interpret my narratives as well as the research participants'. I found myself more and more thoughtful about how I interact with, listen to and respond to my participants. I believe it was important they felt listened to and acknowledged. I managed to develop a coherent picture and interpretation of my interactions and to obtain a meta-position of myself conducting the interview, of how I may have been influencing the participants and how they might have been influencing me in turn.

Throughout my research on the lived experience of re-partnering for separated or divorced Maltese couples, I realised how my personal positions constantly bore upon my thought processes, especially during and after data collection. Yet, I also could see how these realisations could also be considered as strengths. This allowed me to "sustain sameness and elide examinations of difference (Barad, 2007, as cited in Roulston & Shelton, 2015). I was inevitably

positioned by my positions as a novice researcher, as an experienced teacher and also as a final-year Masters student, an engulfing reflexive process, whilst also trying to maintain a here-and-now stance.

Re-visiting the data helped me to see how data is co-constructed by the researcher and the participants. In more than one interview, I could see and appreciate how the number of pauses, the length of such pauses, the hesitation, the speed of speech and the emphases and inflections all pointed to how challenging the participants might have been finding it to verbalise their thoughts and their emotions in front of a complete stranger.

Etherington (2004) also points out that such reflexivity is ongoing and dynamic. I simply could not avoid the intensification of such reflections upon further reading, both around the topic of re-partnering but also on all the stages of the research process and I cannot help but feel that this has only enriched the analysis of the data collected.

A good part of my work regarding data analysis has been taken up with classifying different 'types' of behaviour and distinguishing the 'typical' from the 'atypical'. In qualitative research, this concern with similarity or difference leads to maximising external validity or generalisability (Mays & Pope, 1995). I ensured reliability and rigour when analysing data by setting up meetings with my tutor and going over the data so as to have an independent assessment by a skilled qualitative researcher and comparing ideas and interpretations. The fact that my tutor is female also helped, I believe, to give me an invaluable, female angle on the data.

Whenever the data obtained diverged from that of other interviews, or from the findings predicted by a previously stated theory, I have tried to revisit the existing theory and literature so as to ensure thoroughness, reliability and validity. In three out of four interviews, I managed to conduct my research in the participants' own setting – in their homes. The other interview was conducted at my home. The contexts were very similar; all interviews were held sitting around the kitchen table. All this is testament to the facts that the participants were gracious enough to not only let my inside the privacy of their homes, but also felt safe enough to hold the interview in the kitchen, an act normally reserved for close friends or relatives, at least in the Maltese context. Keeping the context in perspective guarantees trustworthiness, as long as the researchers demonstrate the ability to immerse themselves in the world of the participants.

3.13 Ethical Considerations

Working ethically in safeguarding the participants was of paramount importance in conducting this research. This study was approved by the Malta Research Ethics Committee and IFT-Malta. I was well aware of the confidentiality issues involved. I had explained the aims of this research to the participants over the phone first, then via a soft copy of the information sheet and participating letter. I also pointed out that the interviews would be audio-recorded and then transcribed and all the data and recordings would be destroyed when the research would be concluded.

Informed consent (Appendix IV) was obtained, prior to the interview, through a pre-prepared consent form, both for participating in data collection but also for the likely outcomes of the data analysis, particularly, the inclusion of verbatim extracts in the published thesis. At this time, I also gave the participants a hard copy of the information sheet containing all the relevant information about the research and their participation in it. I read out and also signed the consent form myself, thus binding myself to be ethical and professional all the way, especially in handling the data.

Since I was primarily interested in having a male and female perspective to bear on my research question, I did not consider same-sex marriages or relationships. Other than that, anyone could have been a participant, whatever nationality, colour, age, culture and religion. Gender sensitivity was also sought so that equal value was given to both male and female participants. They all had to be over legal age, obviously. Through the semi-structured interview, I ensured to adopt a non-biased, non-judgemental and genuinely curious stance with the interviewees, thus ensuring enough safety for the participants to open their hearts and talk candidly about their experiences.

All provisions for the protection of sensitive data were taken. I used a digital voice recorder to record the interviews on SD card. There was no need for the sessions to be videoed. The interviews were then transcribed and stored on an external hard drive which was password protected. All digital recordings were kept until after the completion of the Master's Degree. They were then destroyed - burnt.

Fictitious names were used throughout. References to time and place were also changed. During the actual recordings of the interviews, I too extra care not to mention any names or identifying factors. If such factors did come up during the interview from the participants' part, I made sure that they were removed immediately. The clients would ultimately have the ownership of all the recorded and transcribed data.

One must keep in mind the need to evaluate the extent to which simply talking about sensitive issues might constitute 'harm' for the participants. I informed them again that their participation was entirely voluntary. To this end, I emphasised with the participants that they could always opt not to proceed with the interview at any time they wished so, and I would stop the interview at once. In such a case, the data would obviously be destroyed immediately and I would start the process again with a different couple.

A small, symbolic gift, as a token of appreciation for their willingness and participation, was given to each participating couple after the interview was concluded. Although the questions were open-ended and were not expected to cause particular distress for the participants, I offered them the possibility of therapy sessions at IFT-Malta as follow-up support. Thus they could avail themselves of professional help, should they feel the need to do so, should they feel the need to talk more about their experiences.

3.14 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to give a detailed presentation and explanation of the research methodology used in my research of the lived experience of re-partnering for separated or divorced couples in the Maltese context. I have set out to provide a comprehensive rationale behind this methodology, including the adopted methodological framework, information about the participants themselves and the recruitment and interviewing process. I concluded by highlighting the necessary, pertinent, ethical considerations I had to follow, and adhere to, in conducting my research.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will present the findings from the four interviews conducted with separated or divorced Maltese couples in a committed relationship. The sample consisted of four heterosexual couples who have been in a relationship for the past three years. The table below presents the research participants' demographic data. All names used are fictitious

Table 1: Demographic data of participants

	Alan & Yvonne	**John & Ingrid**	**Norbert & Ramona**	**Peter & Mariella**
Age	44 & 38	40 & 25	49 & 42	38 & 25
Nationality	Maltese	Maltese	Maltese	Maltese
Years in relationship	9 years	4 years	10 years	4 years
Type of relationship/ Status	Cohabiting Alan – separated Yvonne - annulled	Cohabiting John- separated Ingrid - single	Married Norbert – divorced Ramona - divorced	Cohabiting Peter – separated Mariella - single
Children	1 boy, aged 4	2 girls from John's previous marriage	1 girl, aged 8 adopted	1 girl, new-born; 1 boy, aged 10 from Peter's previous marriage

4.2 Emerging themes

These themes were carefully selected on the basis of their importance and occurrence. Following a comprehensive analysis of the interview transcripts, four Super-ordinate themes were identified:

1. Redefining the self within the relationship

2. Coping Strategies

3. Conceptualising relationships

4. The local context mirroring foreign trends

The following table portrays emergent themes and their abstraction into Super-ordinate Themes.

Table 2: Super-Ordinate and Subordinate themes

4.2.1 Re-defining the Self within the relationship	4.2.1.1 Grieving the losses 4.2.1.2 Picking up the pieces 4.2.1.3 Looking inwards 4.2.1.4 Searching for the expected self
4.2.2 Coping Strategies	4.2.2.1 Seeking connections with family and friends 4.2.2.2 Re-learning the dating game 4.2.2.3 Biding one's time & learning to trust again 4.2.2.4 Shelving the past
4.2.3 Conceptualising relationships	4.2.3.1 Knowing what works 4.2.3.2 Appreciating gender differences 4.2.3.3 Sharing common values 4.2.3.4 Older and wiser
4.2.4 The local context mirroring foreign trends	4.2.4.1 Waning religious beliefs 4.2.4.2 Maltese culture

The findings detailed in this chapter are all substantiated by direct, relevant excerpts from the interviews conducted with the participants. For a more thorough understanding of the procedure followed, an excerpt from an actual interview together with the emerging themes and the researcher's notations is included in the Appendices (Appendix V).

4.2.1 Re-defining the self within the relationship

4.2.1.1 Grieving the losses

For all participants, the period immediately following marital dissolution was marked by a sense of grieving and mourning. This was brought about by the death of their marriage and by the accompanying loss of self – a period of time, which can last even years, which is usually characterised by self-doubt, no sense of direction in life, pessimism, mistrust – especially of the other sex, and also regrets. These feelings come in stages or even all rolled in one big, pervading sense of dissatisfaction with one's life. Yvonne pointedly states that:

> *"So, in a short period of time, I ended up from almost being a mother (she had a miscarriage a couple of months earlier) to having literally nothing…nothing…no marriage…no baby…no relationship…this is why I lost heart…" (Int.1, p.18)*

Ramona feels let down and disappointed with her first marriage because she feels she had invested a lot in it. She says that:

> *"I should have left (the marriage) when we received the first garnishee order. Instead I remained there waiting, thinking if I should forgive*

him...I lost a lot of money...besides losing myself as well in the process, when I should have invested them in my life and in myself instead of continuing to help him..." (Int. 3, p.19)

John describes well these feelings of loss when he says:

"...I just wanted to be left alone at that time. It was a tough time and I just wanted to be alone. But then again, how long was I going to be in that state? How long was I going to go out alone, going here and there, all alone? Always going back home, alone. It was not nice..."

Alan talks about how hard it is when you lose your way after marital dissolution and feel as if you have nothing worth living for:

"...I really took it badly...you have no idea...I had nothing...I ended up living with my parents again....not that I had anything to complain about...but, first I was independent, with a life of my own...and now, I'm again....(pause)...it's hard, very hard...I really took it badly, very badly..." (Int. 1, p.9)

Such an engulfing sense of loss and helplessness is not only associated with the previous relationship and one's sense of self and direction, but also with the workplace and career. Alan, a retired army official, for instance, recounts:

"...when my ex-wife left me, I had just been assigned a new division...a promotion...so, when I got this promotion, I turned to my commanding officer and told him that I was not even able to control and keep one woman...how was he expecting me to take control of 90 men?...Are you really going to give me this role?....so, I took it really badly."

Alan and Yvonne also describe the pain of the losses as almost physical, psychosomatic. Alan recounts how:

"In those days the pain was hard...my shoulder used to dislodge frequently...now I am a person who is very physically fit and I never suffered from anything in particular...I used to look at myself and say, look at me, how I ended up...finished...I took it (separation) very badly...incredibly so..." (Int. 1, p.11)

Yvonne also says that:

"I had a lot of tension and stress...and I had a persistent dry cough...coughing all the time...and I was not even aware of it. It took me a year to realise and I went to more than one doctor...all with varying diagnosis...but it was all a consequence of all that stress...and it took me years to heal..." (Int. 1, p. 11)

Peter talks about this period of grieving as very stressful, both for him and for his immediate family:

"Stressful, very stressful...and it was not just me...my parents too...I remember my mum took it badly as well...she never expected it...you feel the weight of everyone on your shoulders...plus all those thoughts about my son...was I going to lose him too?" (Int. 4, p.8)

And finally, Alan also recounts how the mourning one's losses can also very well be about loss of material things:

"I used to give my ex-wife all my wages...and I had a large house, for example, and I had to sell it and give her half of the monies...and I had done all the work there...she did not even contribute to one quarter of it...it was hard for me...even when I'm sitting down at the kitchen table...I used to have a very large kitchen...and now I have this...nothing...it was very, very hard for me..." (Int.1, p.9)

4.2.1.2 Picking up the pieces

The period of grieving the losses may even last up to two years or more. In the case of John, this period of healing and recovery took 9 years. Eventually, however, one starts to look around, and ahead, again. One learns that it is time to let go of the past finally. One realises that maybe it is time to step outside in the sun and start to pick up the pieces, as it were, and move on. One even feels reborn. This is what the participants experienced and tried to recount during the interviews. Ramona says that:

> *"I was bogged down by debts which my ex-husband had accumulated....I was afraid to talk about these things...later I felt as if I had broken out of shell and I was not so introverted anymore...I began to feel normal, like other people" (Int.3, p.22)*

Yvonne says that she feels like a different woman altogether:

> *"I feel like a different person, a different woman..." (Int. 1, p. 26)*

Her partner, Alan, continues:

> *"Yes, a lot...she has changed so much since we've been together...especially after our son was born." (Int. 1, p.26)*

Ramona talks about how difficult the beginning of their relationship was, when they had to re-learn to live with another partner in a committed relationship again. Ramona remembers that:

"It was hard to learn to live with another person, until I got used to it. We used to argue a lot more...it was harder. Nowadays we rarely argue. I feel I was more sensitive then...but it was till I got used to him (her partner)..." (Int. 3, p.9)

Planning for the future as a way of picking up the pieces and moving on was also something which the participants talked about. Yvonne remembers how:

"I used to go out and socialise with friends a lot and I used to burn all my money that way...but then one fine day I started to realise how much money I was wasting...so I decided it was better to start saving in order to buy my own place..." (Int. 1, p.12)

Ramona also recounts:

"I used to cry all the time...until one fine day I decided I had had enough. And I took to decision that I had to separate from my husband...When I took that decision, I immediately felt happier, because I already had a fairly good idea of how I was planning my life to be..." (Int. 3, p.6)

John talks about how he had realised that he could and needed to start looking forward and move on by looking at other separated couples and how they eventually re-partnered:

"I used to look at people who had gone through similar experiences and you find out that they have children now from a new relationship...and I say to myself, if so and so can do it, why can't I? I have a brain to think and I have a heart too. They have nothing better than I have. I have always believed that if others can do it, then so can I. I am that type of person." (Int. 3, p.13)

4.2.1.3 Looking inwards

During this transitional period in the lives of separated or divorced couples, it is also common for such people to not only look around them but also look inwards; a sense of inevitable introspection where one asks questions about oneself, where one reflects on one's predicament. The participants also, perhaps inevitably, compare their present with their past, present relationships with past ones. This is typically done alone but there are times when this is also done in a conversation with one's partner. John clearly states the importance of reflection and of sharing these with his partner:

> *"I always want to explain myself so that I make myself clear and whatever I would have had on my mind, or the process of the argument, would be fulfilled...this is helpful for the relationship, because I believe that if I were in her (his partner) shoes, I would want nothing less than a full explanation of her thoughts and attitudes." (Int. 2, p.3)*

When asked what helped her to move on, Ramona says that:

> *"No one...it was just me, believing in myself...and I knew what I wanted (in life) 100%...100%...I was sure...yes...I knew exactly what I wanted." (Int. 3, p.12)*

John describes how important it is to detach from people, to be alone, and to reflect on one's predicament, on one's relationship:

> *"I would want to be left alone, to be able to reflect and to ruminate. I would want to take my time to contemplate what would have gone wrong, what I could have done differently...even if this takes a few weeks." (Int. 2, p.4)*

Alan too talks about some of his own reflections and ruminations from the past:

> "I used to go out and drink and date women...beautiful women too, but with a horrible character (makes a disgusted facial expression)...and I used to think, no, how can one live with a person like that...I don't know...I used to say, this woman (a date of his) is a flower, for example, and then I used to think...no, no, this is not my life...surely!" (Int. 1, p.5)

Norbert describes very well the importance of being rational and self-reflexive:

> "...now I'm a rational person...very rational...I am very rational...when I was young, people, including family, did not heed emotions so much in those days and I think I suffered more than others...life was different then...but rationality is my forte'...this is one of the things which I learnt in life...that one of the signs of maturity is the ability to control one's emotions..." (Int. 3, p.12-13)

Peter, however, describes the problems of being too rational:

> "I do have this problem...I tend to ruminate and ponder over things...over and over...sometimes I do not sleep at night...other times I go without eating..." (Int. 4, p, 7)

4.2.1.4 Searching for the expected self

The participants, when they were going through the emotional, transitional period following marital dissolution, had a fairly good idea of what is called, their expected self. This incorporates beliefs about themselves, images of the type of person they should, or believe they should, be at some point in their future. These may include being in a relationship again, having children and raising a family and being settled down, amongst other social constructs.

Alan is being honest when he states that:

"…and here I am, because I am a soldier…and do not forget, soldiers want to be seen as proud and tough, to excel at everything and to be fearless…yet, inside, I used to feel lonely…" (Int. 1, p.13)

Alan also believes that a man is defined by his principles and one should always strive to abide by such principles, as the following extract from the interview shows:

Interviewer: "…you have very strong principles…quite rigid…"

Yvonne: "Yes, rigid…very rigid…but even with himself, however…"

Alan: "They (principles) keep you strong…those things keep me healthy…without them I would feel as if I had the liberty to do anything…no structure on which to build…" (Int. 1, p.31)

Ramona has always had a good idea of what her expected self should be:

"…my parents were always pointing out to me that I was in the right, and that I should take legal action against my ex-husband…and I already knew that I wanted a family with children of my own…and I used to think…I was 30 years old at the time…to start legal action, something which would probably take many years to conclude…no, I didn't want that…so I preferred to lose the war but win the battle…I was able to work and to stand on my own two feet again…" (Int. 3, p.27)

John describes his idea of expected self as necessarily being in a relationship:

"There are still people who have reservations if you have children from previous relationships…what used to preoccupy me was the idea of remaining single…I didn't like the idea of remaining single…there were times when I believed I was better off alone but, in truth, I was not…looking around and finding nobody…it is not nice…man was not made to be alone…" (Int. 2, p.10-11)

Yvonne talks about her belief of her expected self as a mother, compounded with familial and social pressure:

> "My parents used to ask me how long I was going to remain like that (single)...I just wanted to be left alone...then there was a period where I felt sad and very disappointed because I used to think that I would never have children of my own...I would never have a proper family...these were the years between 23 and 29...supposedly the best years when to have a family and raise a child...all my friends were married with children...you know?" (Int.1, p.14)

4.2.2 Coping Strategies

4.2.2.1 Seeking connections with family and friends

Sifting through the data, I could not help but notice the importance that the participants attached to social and familial interaction as coping strategies. All participants had already spoken about the emptiness and the loneliness that such a transitional period brings with it. The fact that Malta is a face-to-face community greatly facilitates this interaction and support.

Peter says that:

> "Yes, parents always help, in some way or other...God forbid that it's not like that...I used to keep things to myself as much as possible, but they see you broken down, carrying such a heavy burden...I am close to my parents and especially my sister...I am very close with my sister...she was always there for me." (Int.4, p.12)

Alan also describes the support his family and his ex-wife's family gave him and how appreciative he was of this:

> *"Yes, I appreciated it a lot...her (ex-wife) brothers still hold me in high esteem and I still talk to them...I appreciated it a lot...but I also had my family to rely on...very important..."* (Int. 1, p.13)

Ingrid says that her parents were supportive and happy for her:

> *"My family were very ok...they were supportive and they did not find any problem with the fact that I was going out with a separated man..."* (Int. 2, p.19)

Ramona also says that:

> *"Yes...my family helped me...my sister understood me 1`more than my parents...but my other brothers, not so much...it was like they did not want to get too involved"* (Int. 3, p.13)

Her husband, Norbert, affirms that going back to live with his parents was a Godsend:

> *"After marital separation I went back to live with my mum...and I stayed there...some people may see it as strange, but for me it was not strange at all...I stayed there till I thought it was time to move on to the next phase of my life..."*

When asked what helped her most during that transitional phase after marital dissolution, Yvonne says:

> *"Definitely my family...and belief in myself"* (Int. 1, p.14)

Social interaction was also considered beneficial in coping with the loneliness and emotional pain one experiences immediately following marital dissolution. So friends provide an ear, and a shoulder to cry on. Alan recounts how:

"after separation, I started going out, drinking with friends, on dates with anybody who was willing to date me...and there was her brother (Yvonne's brother) who was a friend of mine...and we were working in my garage one fine day, when he asked me if he wanted me to meet his sister...I asked him how old she was and then I told him to phone her..." (Int.1, p.2)

Yvonne recounts how:

"When I separated from my husband, I said to myself, that's enough...I don't want anything to do with men...and we were a group of friends and we used to go out a lot....parties, going to Gozo...it was a period of freedom...a bird let out of the cage...no commitments, nothing....it was a very enjoyable period in my life, while it lasted..." (Int. 1, p.10)

Some of the participants also reported, however, that there may be instances where such social interaction may be considered as detrimental to a relationship. John says that:

"I found the therapy that I needed at that time inside me...I never went to counsellors or therapists...I just reflected on my future...I was never one who sought groups of people to socialise...I never wanted that chaos...Up to this very day, I do not frequent such places of entertainment..." (Int. 2, p.12)

Peter and Mariella, too, say that they do not socialise much; they prefer to be on their own or with close family. Moreover, Peter says that 'friends' were the primary cause that his marriage failed:

"We don't have a lot of friends...even when we went on a cruise; we went alone...we are not that type of couple...I was never one to open up with friends about my problems, because so-called friends were

the cause of why I am where I am now...so I do not trust friends."
(Int. 4, p.13)

4.2.2.2 Re-learning the dating game

The process of re-partnering for separated and divorced couples often involves the couples having to re-learn the dating game. A number of years would have passed since they were actively participating in dating. Yvonne and Alan felt awkward yet excited too. John, as well as Ramona both say they tried dating a few times but there was no commitment. John and Peter both see the workplace as a fertile ground for dating. They both started their present relationship at their place of work. Yvonne recounts her first date with Alan:

> *"my brother set up the first encounter with Alan...he told that there was something he wanted to talk to me about...could he bring a friend over by?...I told him ok, but I am going to bring a friend too...we met at Dingli; he (Alan) tried to impress me with music by Enya, my favourite singer...he had got this information from my brother..." (Int. 1, p.3)*

John also talks about this process of re-learning the dating game:

> *"I used to go out on dates, after marital separation...go out for a coffee...then we used to get talking and the pretty soon I would realise that they were not the ones for me...or, they get put off when they get to know that I am separated and I have two girls from that marriage..." (Int. 2, p.10)*

Ramona talks about her relationships during this period:

> *"This period of transition lasted around 3 years…I used to go out alone, sometimes even on dates…but I never had any serious relationships during that time…" (Int. 3, p.5)*

Interestingly, both John and Peter see the workplace as an opportunity to embark on new relationships. John recounts how:

> *"We (John & Ingrid) met at our workplace, basically…I had been working there for two years and then Ingrid started working there too…and things took off from there…" (Int. 2, p.2)*

Peter has similar story to tell:

> *"We (Peter & Mariella) met on the place of work…I had already been working there when she was employed…she was new and, you know, one thing leads to another…you start having conversations and you gradually get used to each other's character…and then you start realising that there something deeper here, which I can go for…" (Int.4, p.1)*

4.2.2.3 Biding one's time and learning to trust again

Yvonne and John see the wisdom in biding their time before embarking on a committed relationship. This comes from being wary and not acting on impulse as a way of protecting the self, from not trusting too quickly. Yvonne states that:

> *"Even though I was pleased with all that attention he was giving me in the beginning…I had not been in a relationship in 6 years…and he was pampering me and phoning me all the time…and he used to ask me to meet up…and I used to desist…I used to tell him that I was not ready yet…I only relented after a month or so…" (Int. 1, p.4)*

John believes that:

> "No...my experience has taught me certain things...that one should never hurry up in a relationship...a relationship should take its course, its time, that one should not trust everybody...it does not mean that because you have a partner now, you can trust her on anything and talk to her about everything... (Int. 2, p.15)

Alan and Yvonne also talk about losing trust in people, especially of members of the other sex, and in relationships as a way of protecting oneself, so as not to get hurt easily again. For instance, Alan explains:

> "In the beginning, when we first met, it was a bit strange because I did not trust her at all..." (Int. 1, p.9)

And Alan again:

> "I used to say to myself...could it be? She (present partner) is only going out with me for the money or maybe because I like to have fun and enjoy myself... It is hard...when you reach a certain age and you want to start a new relationship, it is hard..." (Int. 1, p.10)

Yvonne, Alan's partner, says:

> " I two long relationships before I got married...one of 4 years and another one of 3 years and I was always the one to break up...and then when I got married and the marriage dissolved, I said to myself I've had enough....I wanted to have nothing to do with men..." (Int. 1, p.10)

Ramona too describes a similar feeling:

> *"I had so many problems...in those days; it (another relationship) was the last thing on my mind." (Int. 3, p.4)*

Both John and Ingrid speak about the perils of trusting too quickly again. John says that:

> *"You cannot trust people easily...it does not mean that because she is your (new) partner, then you have to trust her implicitly..." (Int. 2, p.15)*

Ingrid, concurs:

> *"It's the same with me... That was what I learnt (from previous relationship)...I used to trust blindly but then I learnt from my own mistakes...because people then take you for granted." (Int. 2, p.15)*

4.2.2.4 Shelving the past

Shelving the past or making peace with the past and turning over a new leaf was also felt to be an important coping strategy Yvonne and Alan, as well as Ramona. This was expressed as a feeling of being reborn. Yvonne says that:

> *"I don't really remember the old days...I feel like another woman."* (Int. 1, p.26)

And Alan, her partner says:

> *"She has changed completely since I knew her first...especially after the birth of our son..." (Int. 1, p.26)*

Ramona also believes that:

> *"I have managed to block a lot of memories from the past...sometimes I try to force myself to remember, but in vain...I have blocked a lot...I believe that to move forward, one has to make peace with the past. I cannot move forward if I'm still in pain...I suffered, I learnt, I moved forward. I am definitely not one still stuck to the past." (Int.3, p.20)*

4.2.3 Conceptualising Relationships

4.2.3.1 Knowing what works

This was a prevalent theme in the data collected. In fact, beliefs and comments about what relationships should and should not be and what makes for strong healthy relationships too, were ubiquitous in all interviews. All of the participants seemed to be speaking from a position of knowing, of genuinely speaking from experience.

Yvonne spoke about the importance of having common goals and priorities as beneficial to the relationship. John, Norbert and Ramona talk about their belief that having similar character traits will make for a stronger relationship. Taking decisions together as well as doing things together were also seen as important for building a solid bond between the partners in a relationship.

Yvonne declares that,

> *" There are no particular fears (about their future)...because we have the same priorities...more or less we have the same ones...it is not like a tug of war with him pulling one way and I pull the other way...."* (Int. 1, p. 34)

John talks about the importance of having similar character traits, when describing his partner, Ingrid:

> "She is a perfectionist and I, too, many times want to be perfect and exact….although I think she is more of a perfectionist than I am. She is punctilious and a woman of principle…and I see those things in me as well…" (Int. 2, p.2)

Norbert concurs with this when talking about his wife, Ramona:

> "…she is very capable in her work…and that is something which I like very much in a person…probably because I'm like that as well…that one is always professional and does not skive off work, for instance…" (Int. 3, p.4)

Interestingly, John added that finding space for individual endeavours and hobbies is also important for a healthy relationship, as opposed to having couples enmeshed together. After all, the fact that couples spend most of their time in each other's company is not a sure indicator of a healthy, thriving relationship.

> "I enjoy myself alone…I want to have time for myself…and I tell this to my partner, that there should be times during the week where we spend a few hours on our own, separate from each other…to give each other some space…maybe she spends some time with her parents, or shopping…I find no objection in this…" (Int. 2, p.12)

Yvonne and Alan state that mutual support and trust are crucial in any relationship; basically, the pillars of any strong, healthy relationship. This can

only be achieved by having direct, open lines of communication between the partners in a relationship. They say that:

> Yvonne: *"We decide together what to do...some things he decides; other things he leaves it up to me..."*
> Alan: *(referring to money matters) "If it were left up to me, I'd be starving by now because I would spend everything..."*
> Yvonne: *"I don't even tell him (about money matters) nowadays...that is what makes a couple...teamwork and mutual trust..." (Int. 1, p.27)*

John, too, speaks of the importance of having mutual support in a relationship:

> *"I want people who listen to me and people who encourage me...at least, my partner and my family...yes, with my partner I do feel like that...and we try to be like that with each other." (Int. 2, p.14)*

Ramona, John and Ingrid talk about honesty and open communication as fundamental for a healthy relationship and that this can be sustained by being open about any concerns and by listening properly to what the other partner is actually saying.

Ramona states that:

> *"Even though we were only friends in the beginning, I felt this connection with him...I felt that he was a very honest person...we used to spend hours talking on relationships, on children...with Norbert I felt that he was the one I want to spend the rest of my life with...he was different...he was honest and that was what attracted me to him." (Int. 3, p.16)*

John believes that:

> "I used to feel as if being interrogated (in his previous relationship)...we used to argue all the time...not talk about it like adults and be honest with each other...we used to argue and fight all the time." (Int. 2, p.21)

His partner, Ingrid, too, believes open communication and honesty leads to not taking people, or being taken, for granted:

> "We (with her previous partner) never used to talk...he just didn't bother...he used to go off with his friends or whatever without even bothering to send a message...there was no talk, no communication....I was taken continuously for granted." (Int. 2, p.21)

With regards children, on one hand, having children together was almost a precondition of at least one relationship. Alan and Yvonne both wanted children together and it was one of the main things that attracted her to him – the love of children. Alan recounts how:

> "We were at this place in Paceville, and I love children a lot, but because I couldn't have children with my ex-wife, I had forgot all about children...and I turned to her (Yvonne) and I asked her whether she loved children...and she burst out crying...anyway...I discovered that it was because she wanted to have children of her own so much...and I, too, I wanted children."

On the other hand, John spoke of having children as possibly detrimental for his relationship and children were definitely not in their plans for the time being. One must add, however, that John has two girls from his previous marriage.

This fact could have been weighing heavily on his mind when he was saying those words. John says that:

> "Children…we talked about this and we decided that we do not want children…not in any sense of disrespect…but we talked about it and decided that way." (Int. 2, p.27)

Furthermore, he talks about how having children from previous unions can be detrimental to forming new relationships.

> "I had friends who used to say how she (Ingrid) could go out with him…being separated and having two children already…you can find such people everywhere" (Int. 2, p.17)

Finally, John also talks about the importance of being organised and methodological in life and in a relationship:

> "I learnt this the hard way. When I went through a period in my life where I didn't bother about anything really, there was chaos. In everything in life, when you are organised, things always fall into place." (Int. 2, p.25)

4.2.3.2 Appreciating gender differences

One gender stereotype which emerged from the interviews is the belief in that what makes a man and what makes a woman is something fixed; it is all part of the myriad of social constructs that fill our daily narratives with dominant discourses. For instance, the belief that a man is rational, practical whereas a woman is emotional is one such stereotype. This was particularly manifest in the interview with John and Ingrid.

Ramona when describing Norbert says:

> *"Norbert is more pragmatic...practical...he can reason things out. I am more prone to panic...to think about problems before they are actually present..." (Int. 2, p.35)*

John says that:

> *"Yes, I'm a very rational man...in practically everything...but when it comes to our relationship, I follow my heart" (Int. 2, p.6)*

His partner, Ingrid, continues:

> *"I always follow my heart...I'm much more impulsive (than John)...I just do what I feel like doing..." (Int. 2, p.6)*

Alan says that:

> *"I am very rational and precise. Whenever I want to buy anything, I have to do all the necessary research..." (Int. 1, p.35-36)*

His partner, Yvonne, continues:

> *"If I want to buy a pan, I just pop out and buy one...but no, Alan has to see why we need the pan and what for, and then go on YouTube to check out the video clips and the reviews..." (Int. 1, p. 35-36)*

Moreover, Yvonne says that:

> *"When it comes to anything about our son, I usually take care of that..." (Int. 1, p.35-36)*

Alan and Ramona talk about the gender stereotype that men and women have differing parenting styles. Whilst it is true that there are different styles of how to raise children in a family environment, usually linked to discipline, it is erroneous to say that men are more disciplinarian whilst women are more lasses-faire' or lax when it comes to parenting. This is, of course, another very common social construct.

And Alan again:

> "I like discipline...I was born like that and I work in it (retired army official)...but Yvonne is not like that at all...she is too soft..." (Int. 1, p.35-36)

Ramona talks about her ideas of what makes a man:

> "I feel he (Norbert) is more mature than I am...I feel me is more intelligent too...I feel this during our conversations...even when I have something on my mind...and I turn to him...I feel I have a man next to me...a certain maturity" (Int. 3, p.9)

Alan also says that:

> "I feel that she knows that I'm a man...in the sense that she can always turn to me for anything...I will always be there...I will help her in any way I can and if she is doing anything wrong, I will tell her...I will not let her suffer..." (Int. 1, p.6)

4.2.3.3 Sharing common values

The participants also seemed to have a good idea of what good values are needed to build a solid relationship upon. These included, in no particular

order: the importance of planning together, having a sense of equality between partners and showing respect to one another, prioritising children above everything, being totally committed to the relationship and also rejecting materialism and saving for a rainy day.

Alan states that:

> *"Nowadays, I live for my family, for my son...they (children) change your life...they give you satisfaction and happiness...even if I'm flat broke, I wouldn't care, as long as I see my son happy." (Int. 1, p.15)*

Ramona, too, talks about her daughter:

> *"My concern nowadays is whether we can be there for our daughter when she's older...age is a bit of a concern for us...that we'd still be healthy...Norbert understands my concern, but being the practical, rational man he is, he tells me to stop worrying about things you can do nothing about." (Int. 3, p.34-35)*

Alan and Yvonne also talk about family as a value in itself:

> Yvonne: *"For me, family comes before everything in life...there is nothing before it"*
>
> Alan: *"I feel so lucky because now I'm complete...I was not able to have children from my previous marriage and now, at 40 years of age I had a baby (Yvonne) and at 44 years, I had another baby...(laughs)" (Int. 1, p.15)*

John talks about the importance of planning together and taking decisions together:

"We talk a lot about many things...we talk also about the future in a calm manner and we plan ahead for most things...sometimes we seem to plan too much, however!" (Int. 2, p.26)

Alan talks about being appreciative of what you have in your present relationship and of mutual respect:

> *"Yvonne respects me so much...and if I am down or broken, she will do everything to help me...and she has a way about it...she will not rest until she gets it out of me...because I am not one who opens up easily...you know, soldiers are meant to be tough...nothing can get to us...but inside, I was so tired..." (Int. 1, p.24)*

Ramona talks of her present marriage as the best part of her life ever:

> *"I really do not imagine my life without Norbert...I'm going through the best years of my life...God forbid something happens to happen...it's unbearable to think of something like that...the best years of my life, especially since we've had our little girl...may we always remain like this." (Int.3, p.34)*

Yvonne talks of the importance of mutual respect for a healthy relationship, and being there for each other through thick and thin

> *"Alan takes care of me completely...he respects me, he respects my family too...if we ever need anything, he's always there for us..." (Int. 1, p.7)*

Moreover, she continues:

> *"I feel that the fact that we share everything is important for our relationship...even when it comes to financial burdens, everything*

goes into one pocket...in my previous marriage, we used to have separate bank accounts...his money and my money didn't mix...and that led to bickering and piques...it was one of the things that led to the failure of my marriage..." (Int. 1, p. 25-26)

4.2.3.4 Older and wiser

This experience of re-partnering after marital dissolution left Ramona, Yvonne and John with the sense of having learnt from their past experiences, of being older and wiser, as it were and, consequently, of being changed people. Ramona states that:

> *"I am a completely changed woman...I used to be so introverted...I learnt to speak up and be assertive with most people...when I separated from my ex-husband, I became really me...marital separation has opened a lot of doors for me." (Int. 3, p.21)*

On similar lines, Yvonne says that:

> *"I entered this relationship as a more mature woman...a lot more experienced too...age and the experiences of life teach you a lot..."*
> *(Int. 1, p.25)*

Moreover, Yvonne, with hindsight, feels that if she had not built such strong walls around her, when her marriage broke down, she would have been in a better place:

> *"I had closed so many doors, and built so many walls around me to protect myself...it's not nice to close yourself in...it was a mistake because I would not have been so introverted and afraid all the time..." (Int. 1, p.20)*

John believes that:

> *"When you go for marriage a second time, people do it for different reasons, like social pressure, fear of ending up alone, maybe for sexual reasons...but I believe that such people should not worry about these things...choose your life and respect people so they will respect you back, because sincerity and honesty at the end of the day will always prevail..." (Int. 3, p.6)*

4.2.4 The local context mirroring foreign trends

The couples in my study did not seem to find difficulties, or have challenges, in their decision to re-partner in the Maltese context. All of them have been cohabiting for at least the past three years and only one couple, Ramona and Norbert, has remarried. So, in our culture, social stigma about re-partnering and cohabitation seems to be no longer an issue, except for possibly the elder generation.

4.2.4.1 Waning Religious beliefs

Maltese cultural beliefs, including religious ones, the smallness of the Maltese islands making for a face-to-face community where everyone practically knows everybody else – these make for a unique setting for this research into the lived experiences of re-partnering for separated and/or divorced Maltese couples. Most of the participants felt regretful of or disappointed by how religion almost invariably dominates our thinking and our social constructs in Malta. Alan says that:

"I feel disappointed...very disappointed seeing her (Yvonne) going to receive Holy Communion and I cannot...very disappointed...I feel that religion has put me down, personally" (Int.1, p.29)

This is something which, as things stand, they unfortunately cannot share as a family. Ramona, too, believes that:

"To be honest, in Malta there is still stigma on the word 'cohabitation'..." (Int. 3, p.31)

In the interview, Ramona uses the Maltese word for cohabitee - 'pogguta'. In Maltese, this word has a derogatory connation which is lost in translation into English. It is a word, however, which is quickly slipping outside the Maltese lexicon as the Maltese use other, borrowed words and phrases from English to describe cohabitation. Perhaps it is no wonder that Ramona and Norbert have cemented their relationship with marriage – something the other participants have not done, or have no inclination to do. Her husband, Norbert, continues:

"In Malta, marriage still basically means Catholic marriage...although nowadays we (Maltese) have divorce and nobody frowns upon divorcees, the belief is still there. If you go to Italy, for example, they have divorce too, and nobody frowns upon you...but if you go to Sicily things get different...their culture more resembles ours..." (Int. 3, p.15)

According to the participants, being committed and respectful is the real basis for healthy relationships, and not marriage certificates. However, for some being legally married is more desirable. Ramona believes that:

"Nothing has changed from being separated to being married...it is just a certificate...you are simply making your relationship official in legal terms...we adopted our girl before we got married, so nothing really changed whatsoever." (Int. 3, p.27)

Alan says that:

"When I retired from the army, I was asked what my marital status was...had I been married I would have got a much higher pension than I got because I am separated...and I took it really badly." (Int.1, p.28)

John believes that not wanting to go through all the hassle of marital separation in Malta is reason enough not to get remarried:

"The system (legal) in Malta is too complicated and expensive...with lawyers and courts and all that...it's not worth it..." (Int. 3, p.23)

Moreover, John believes that:

"In marriage you tend to take your partner for granted...so it's better to be in a committed relationship...nowadays...a marriage certificate means next to nothing..." (Int. 3, p.22)

4.2.4.2 Maltese culture

Ramona believes the Maltese cultural context makes little or no difference to her lived experience of re-partnering:

"I don't think it makes a difference...being in England or in Malta, for example...the only difference is that if I were abroad, I would probably have left my ex-husband much earlier...because of my
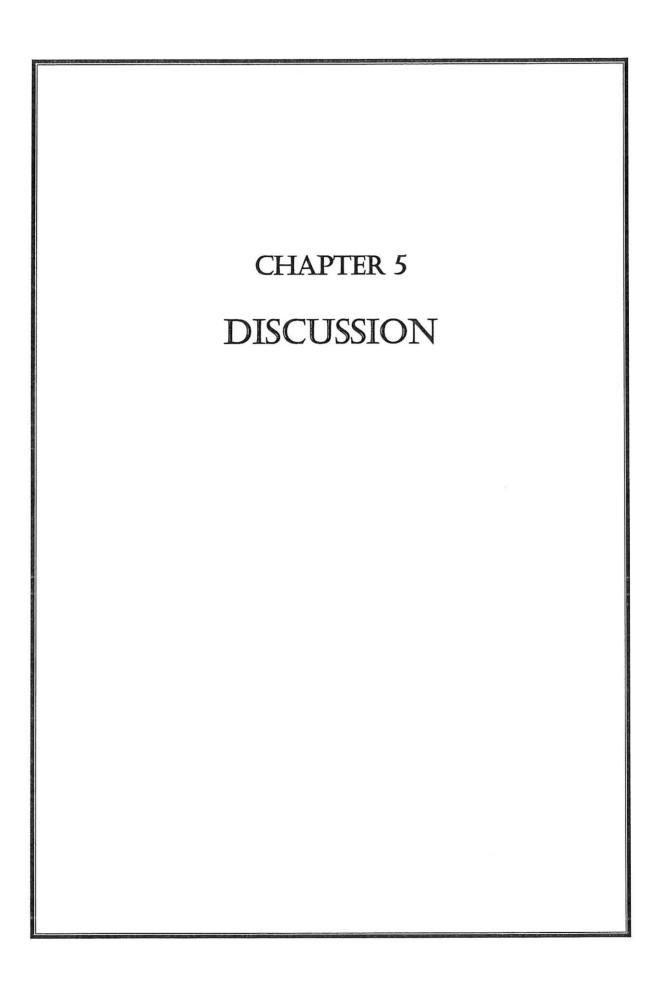
parents' beliefs and 'advice', I had to suffer for three years before I summoned enough courage and left him." (Int. 3, p.30)

On another note, Yvonne feels that her life totally revolves around her son. Her motherhood leaves no time for personal and relational growth. She admits she barely has time for Alan or for herself:

> *"My life is so full that I feel totally consumed...everything revolves around my son...I'm happy and I'm not complaining but I long for the time when I can do something for myself and take care of my personal relationship as well...that's what I'm aspiring to...having time for me and for my relationship." (Int.1, p.37)*

4.3. Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented the finding that emerged from the interviews conducted with re-partnered Maltese couples living in Malta. It traces the journey they make, individually and relationally, both on a rational and on an emotional level, from marital dissolution up to eventual re-partnering or remarriage. The following chapter will entail a discussion of the themes as presented in this chapter.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

The goal of this research was to gain a better understanding of the lived experience of re-partnering for separated or divorced Maltese couples. In this chapter I will endeavour to present the emergent themes from the interviews carried out with the couples in my study, through a discussion of the results whilst incorporating other studies' findings and pertinent literature.

5.2 Grieving the losses

With reference to Table 2 in page 52, the emergent Super-Ordinate themes indicate a common process amongst the participants, an often similar journey which they embark upon from the moment their first marriage dissolves to when they are in a committed relationship or remarried. This journey is not only undertaken individually and in the context of their present relationship but also, concurrently, within the social contexts of family and Maltese society in general.

It is not a simple, linear, forward-moving journey – from marital dissolution to re-partnering or remarriage. This journey is also one that takes the travellers back and forth sometimes, and one in which the travellers ultimately evolve circularly and relationally through various, inter-related contexts and co-constructed realities along the way.

The romantic, modern concept of self emphasizes a deep, emotional inner core that is a person's essence and true identity. Gergen (1991) has suggested that, in contrast to romanticist and modernist notions of the self as essential or fixed,

a postmodern model of identity is developing that allows the self to maintain multiple and contradictory identities. Gergen's (1991) notion of the postmodern self can help the therapist to depathologise and normalize the experiences of modern couples as they struggle with evolving self-understandings and shifting perceptions of their relationships (Lyle and Gehart-Brooks, 1999).

For all the participants in this study, bar two, the initial period immediately following marital dissolution was one which was mainly characterised by grieving; mourning the loss of their marriage, the loss of their plans and dreams and the loss of their identity. This is consistent with studies on the consequences of separation and divorce (Emery, 1998, Dowling and Gorell Barnes, 2000). Moreover, it is also consistent with the family life cycle model which talks about divorce as a major disruption in the expected family life stages (Carter & McGoldrick, eds, 1988). Mourning the losses is recognized as essential to the divorced persons' adjustment and to their ability to go on with their lives (Counts & Sacks, 1985). Moreover, men and women may undergo the mourning process differently (Baum, 2003).

Ramona and John both reported that they actually felt better when their respective marriages were over; they felt an overwhelming sense of relief. This can be explained by the fact that they were the initiators of marital separation and had both emerged from troubled relationships. For them, the mourning process happened much earlier. Maybe it was what prompted them to start the formal separation proceedings. For the other participants, however, it was a time of negativity, of pessimism and of stuckness. Losing their marriage may have meant losing their meaning of life.

Peter's major concern at this time was that he would lose contact with his son, rather than mourning the loss of his wife or marriage. Being separated from, and losing day to day contact with, their children severely challenged their (fathers) construction of fatherhood and involved re-examination of their role within the context of their involvement with their children (Delicata, 2007). Alan in this study also grieved the loss of material things like his house; he had to downgrade from a large house to a flat. This is in line with the findings of Riessman's (1990) study, cited in Baum (2003), when she reports that men tend to mourn the absence of their children and family, as well as their home, rather than the loss of their spouse. In contrast, women are more prone to mourn the loss of the marital relationship (ibid).

Moreover, men mourn usually mourn later, after the dissolution of their marriage, whereas a women's grieving usually starts earlier, even prior to actual separation (Baum, 2003). Alan describes well the period after separation when he recounts how he started drinking alcohol – he had never drunk alcohol before - and going on one night stands, a short while after he separated from his ex-wife. Ramona describes how she had cried all she had before she took the decision to separate. Once she did, she felt free, as if a burden was lifted off her shoulders. This is in line with the findings of studies like that of Gottman and associates, who delineate stages of divorce (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Gottman , 1993). They conclude that couples who eventually divorce first remain unhappily married for a time, then seriously consider dissolution, separate and finally divorce.

Contrary to a primary hypothesis in attachment theory (Bowlby, 1980) that grief is the product of loss of an attachment figure specifically, the identity continuity perspective implies that other types of losses can be associated with grief. This includes any loss of ability to enact a role central to the stability of one's day-to-day experience of self (DeGarmo & Kitson, 1996; Papa, Lancaster, & Kahler, 2014). Some participants talked about feeling lost, experiencing life as meaningless, and feeling rudderless, flowing with the currents of life. Both Alan and Yvonne describe how empty their lives were at the time. John too recounts how it is not nice to be alone and how man is not meant to be that way. Norbert, too, says how he spent years travelling and drifting around until one fine day in Portugal, when he was with friends, he realised that it was time to move on. It was an epiphany of sorts for him, and he never looked back.

From a family life-cycle perspective, the participants in this study can be seen to also have gone through the mourning loss of the intact family and giving up fantasies of reunion (Carter and McGoldrick, eds., 1988). This is a very emotional process which requires mourning what is lost and dealing with hurt, anger, blame guilt, shame and loss in oneself, in the spouse, in the children and in the extended family (ibid).

John even admitted that in his case, this process lasted years, possibly indicating that he had emotional issues which were not adequately resolved. In fact, research (Hetherington et al., 1977; Ahrons, 1980) shows that it takes a minimum of two years and a great deal of effort to readjust and proceed to the next life cycle step – re-partnering and possibly remarriage.

5.3 Re-adjustment and re-structuring

In fact, Carter and McGoldrick, (eds., 1988), also posit that the aftermath of marital separation is a time of restructuring and realignment. Both marital and parent-child relationships would need to be restructured. For instance, living apart from your ex-spouse and from your children may present an emotional challenge as one struggles to adapt. It can be very emotional trying to agree with your ex-spouse, who until very recently was your other half, on how to break up amicably.

But as they say, the road to hell is paved with good intentions and marital separation often ends up in bickering and legal battles. Most of the participants experienced this challenge, of struggling to adapt and restructure their lives. Ramona, however, did not want to go through all this hassle and preferred to concede on some issues than to enter into legal wrangles with her ex-husband; losing the battle to win the war, as it were.

All the participants except Ramona went back to living with their parents during this time. Families play a pivotal role and their support is crucial at this stage. Familial support is a characteristic of face-to-face communities like Malta, where one raises one's children, they get married, they have their own place but they never really move away. According to stage five of the life-cycle model (Carter & McGoldrick, eds., 1988), parents should be launching their children and moving on at this time. While this would have happened, and the system would have been restructured accordingly, the parents find themselves having to deal with the re-entry into the system of their children and grandchildren too.

The challenge at this time is one of reorganisation rather than dismantling (Peck & Manocherian, 1988, in Carter & McGoldrick, eds., 1988). Roles, boundaries, membership and hierarchal structure change, with virtually every subsystem within the family affected. Relationships with all systems outside the family change as well, including extended family, friends, school and community. Nevertheless, the couples in this study seemed to be negotiating new roles and coping with re-adjustment very well.

The process or re-adjustment also involves re-negotiating parenting in the cases where the participants had children from previous unions. Two couples from this study had such children: Peter and Mariella, where Peter had a son from his previous marriage, and John and Ingrid, where John had two girls from his previous union. Both Peter and John reported ongoing parental conflict with the respective children's mothers. Such ongoing conflict interferes with the couple's ability to build a co-parenting relationship, to the detriment of the children (Cummings and Davies, 1994). I would also posit that such unresolved conflict will impinge negatively on the couple's relationship and wellbeing.

Peter, more than John, talked about this conflict impinging on his present relationship with Mariella. This could possibly be because John was the initiator of marital separation and also because John is much more rational as a person than Peter. Peter's ongoing legal conflict with his ex-wife inevitably impinges on his present relationship. Research refers to the need to separate the marriage from parenting and for both spouses to think of their former partner as the parent of their children and not as wife or husband (Delicata, 2007).

5.4 Coping Strategies

Moreover, I would argue that the participants in this study follow the pattern of most Maltese separated persons and manage to temporarily go back to their parents', without too much thinking about it. This fact highlights the adaptiveness and the genuineness of the Maltese character and culture, which is recognised the world over as kind and generous. Moreover, the smallness of the island, where one never lives far away from anything, could also have been another reason why.

This move back to their parents will inadvertently have softened the marital separation blow for the participants as family members can provide all kinds of support, from emotional to financial. Ramona was the only participant who did not go through this phase. She had rented out her own place immediately. She states that she always knew what she wanted and had been preparing for this move from prior to separation. Her move, I believe, can be considered an atypical pattern for post-marital-dissolution behaviour and attitudes in Malta.

The divorce literature indicates that individuals vary greatly in their reactions to divorce (Hetherington, 2003; Bursik, 1991; Amato, 2000). Due to these varied responses to divorce, the literature defines post-divorce adjustment along both positive and negative lines. Positive adjustment is not confined to a lack of negative symptoms but may also involve positive change, which can be assessed with indicators such as psychological well-being, positive affect, overall happiness, life satisfaction, and coping.

When individuals are forced to adapt to a large number of negative life changes in a short time, their ability to cope can be impaired, leading to a decline in psychological functioning and well-being, as well as to poor adjustment (Amato & Wang, 2000). One primary criterion for this coping is an acceptance that the marriage has ended. This entails at least two different processes: the grief associated with immediate and gradual losses, and the establishment of an individual identity that integrates different segments of the divorce (Mazor et al., 1998).

This period of adjustment and coping is that part of the participants' journey which typically involved them picking up the pieces, of learning when to let go of their past, of making peace with their pasts, a time of feeling alive again, an exciting time of re-learning the dating game, a time for giving themselves asecond chance. All of the participants, in one way or other, recounted episodes from their experiences which exemplifies this period of their journey.

Ramona tellingly spoke about how one cannot move on in life unless one makes peace with the past. Mariella talked about how she helped Peter to make peace with his past and calm him down. Norbert recounts similar experiences with Ramona, too. Alan and Yvonne both spoke at length about how exciting their first date was, including all the preparations and surprises they prepared for each other. They seemed like sixteen year olds and not adults in their late thirties or forties. Ramona and Norbert too recount experiences on similar lines, when they recounted those early days; going out on dates, talking on the phone for hours, joking too. Peter and Mariella recount with a glint in their eyes how their relationship evolved from one of collegial

friendship to full blown courtship – they had got to know each other at the same workplace. This is in line with the literature on re-partnering (Hughes, 2000) which identifies the workplace as providing the environment for embarking on new relationships.

After years in the wilderness, as it were, the participants were basking in the warmth of each other's attention, care and support. Yvonne recounts how she used to tell her closest friends everything and how they used to pop over to Valletta during break at work, in order to spot her partner. She states it plainly – she loved all that attention being showered on her. She had been alone far too long. She felt as if reborn.

Four couples from this study also reported how social support – friends and colleagues – helped them to cope with adjusting to their new identities and move on with their lives. Peter and Mariella consciously avoid being too much with friends as, according to Peter, 'friends' had destroyed his first marriage. So they socialise with family, mainly. John and Ingrid, too, do not socialise much with friends. John prefers his own company and he says that he likes to spend quality time with his partner, planning for their future together.

5.5 Sowing the seeds of trust

Trust is the individual's expectations and beliefs about the reliability of others (King, 2002). Trust is essential for stable social relationships (Barber, 1983; Lewis & Weigert, 1985). In terms of individual well-being, trust is necessary in forming healthy relationships and the lack of trust interferes with effective

interpersonal functioning. Individuals low on interpersonal trust, for example, have been found to be more isolated and unhappy, to be less satisfied with relationships, and to have a negative self-concept (Mitchell, 1990).

All of the participants in this study spoke about trust, in one way or other. The basic assumption was that one should not trust too quickly, even though one was in a happy, committed relationship again. John clearly speaks about the fact that even though he has a partner now, it does not mean that he trusts her with everything. Alan and Yvonne, too, spoke about sowing the seeds of trust together, in the best interests of their relationship. Yvonne recounted the beginning of their relationship and how long it had taken her to finally let go and trust Alan with her Self, and not act on impulse. Ramona also was wary in the beginning of her relationship with Norbert, but she relented when she was convinced that he was genuinely interested in her and wanted to give their relationship a go.

5.6 Knowing what works

The participants seemed to talk from a position of knowing; they seemed to know what works for them in a relationship and what does not, what is best for them and for their relationship. They are interested in neither changing themselves nor changing their partners. They are more mature and assertive. All of them spoke about how this second committed relationship is working much better than their first marriage, hinting at a sense of being older and wiser. This could lead to a situation where one experiments less with one's

relationship, to a situation where, if something works, do more of it and if it is not broken, don't fix it. One can even discern a Solution-Focused line of thinking here, as to how relationships work.

From a family scripts perspective (Byng-Hall, 1995), the participants can be seen as writing corrective or reparative scripts to their past experiences of re-partnering, cohabitation and eventual remarriage. This makes sense in the lights of the participants not wanting to go through the negative experiences, hassle, pain and losses again. Moreover, the more coherent one's story about one's past is, the more likely it is that one has a secure attachment (Byng-Hall, 1998). So, I would hypothesise that they all seem to make that extra effort, go that extra mile, to appreciate, respect and support their present partners and not take them for granted and, consequently, nurture and improve their relationships.

5.7 The loving relationship

Having immersed myself in the data of this study, I could not shake the feeling that there was something which the participants were not talking about. It took me quite a few re-readings of transcripts and notes to realise what it was. The participants never once talked about, or even mentioned, love – the love between two adults in a relationship, that is, since all of them spoke about love towards their children, for instance. However, even when they did, they never used the word love, per se.

Perhaps it was my narrative, my input. But the more I thought about it, the more I found it exceptional and unexpected. Out of eight people, in four hours of interviews, nobody spoke about that thing which should be so ubiquitous, universal. Love is the gel which binds relationships, and here we were talking about relationships with no mention of love whatsoever. Whilst this is not the place to delve deep into philosophical or epistemological thinking about love, I strove to think why none of the participants bothered to mention something so supposedly important.

Social constructionist thinking teaches us that love is experienced differently and means different things to different people according to their particular cultural and historical contexts (Beall & Sternberg, 1995, cited in Charura & Paul, 2015), and a common pitfall is to assume that people are talking about the same thing when they refer to love. Since people define love differently, they show it differently and have different expectations of what it should look and feel like.

Love may be considered as a key aspect of the formation and maintenance of human relationships. A systemic perspective invites us to consider love not as an individual experience, but as a relational process, a loving relationship (Charura & Paul, 2015). Maturana & Varela (1992) describe love as "the acceptance of the other person beside us in our daily living." Without this acceptance, relationships are not formed. Love is a 'biological stickiness' which brings two people together in a sequence of ongoing interactions. Eventually a system is formed with its own rules, idiosyncrasies and expectations (Charura & Paul, 2015). The moment 'I' becomes 'We' is crucial. The acceptance of the

other and the sense of 'we-ness' reflect different aspects of the human loving relationship. Not only love can be seen as the glue that sustains relationships but it is also a source of energy for change (Charura & Paul, 2015).

Although the participants never mentioned the word love – perhaps also due to the fact that there was no direct reference to it in the open-ended questions – they all spoke about values and about what makes a relationship work, the 'we-ness' of giving and sharing that is so important in healthy relationships. Peter and Maria spoke of doing everything together, of not needing others, of complementing each other in a way that they have built their relationship upon such foundations. Ramona and Norbert spoke of their relationship having an almost mentor-like quality to it, especially in the beginning. They talked endlessly about everything. They feel that they complement one another very well. Alan, too, spoke about how he lives for his family – love as a conscious giving. Together with his partner, Yvonne, Alan spoke about living for the family, how the family comes first and foremost nowadays. Even John, who was perhaps the most rational and cynical from all the participants, spoke of the importance of doing things together with his partner and of planning together and having common goals and dreams.

It is my interpretation and opinion that the participants came across, in one way or another, as somehow jaded with the idea of romantic love that perhaps characterised their first marriages. This could be a reason why they failed to mention love in their interventions. Moreover, it could be that they are more wary now in their second committed relationship or remarriage, wary enough to not verbalise love, so as not to get hurt or taken for granted again. Naturally, I

also like to think they do have strong feelings for each other, that they are attracted to each other and that they have become attached to each other enough to feel safe in their respective, present relationships.

5.8 The local context mirroring foreign trends

The participants' journey in the local context, from marital dissolution to re-partnering or remarriage, seems to take practically the same route as that taken by post-divorce couples elsewhere. In post-divorce Malta, the trends are changing and cohabitation is more and more likely to be seen as an alternative to remarriage, in line with the literature (Bumpass and Sweet, 1989). Divorce, for these Maltese couples, has come to be seen as the legal means through which remarriage could be possible (Farrugia, 2014). Three couples out of four in this study are cohabiting and seem to have no immediate plans to remarry. It would seem, therefore that, in this study, the Maltese context does not seem to impinge on the process of re-partnering in any significant way.

It is a fact that Malta is not the insular island it once was. Technology has made our islands part and parcel of the global community, with all the pros and cons that this brings with it. Much like what happened in America in the eighties, but nowadays more pertinent than ever, such radical changes in socialisation patterns allowed by new technologies have altered the way people perceive their identity and their relationships with others (Lyle & Gehart-Brooks, 1999).

Only one couple in this study has remarried – Ramona and Norbert. From the data gathered, it seems that Ramona opted for remarriage because her first marriage was difficult and not what she expected the real thing to be. She wanted very much to have another go at remarriage, also possibly because marriage carries the status of an individualised achievement that is gained once the couple would have earned compatibility, financial stability and also, parenting ability (Cherlin, 2004). All the couples in this study stated that cohabitation is basically marriage without the certificates. Just as the ones who had remarried, they, too, talked about their sense of belonging and their commitment towards their cohabiting relationship.

The Maltese cultural backdrop is in line with the literature on social constructs such as marriage and cohabitation. What is 'true and good', what is acceptable or not, is considered to be socially embedded, according to social constructionist thinking (McNamee & Gergen, 2002). Although marriage is still a valued social construct within Maltese society (Delicata, 2007), three couples out of four in this study opted to cohabit. To my mind, this could be attributed to the waning religious beliefs in Malta. In spite of this, according to Troisi (in Abela, 2009), religion is still considered as one of the top three priorities for the Maltese, with family being the top priority.

However, another reason could very well be that the participants no longer feel shunned or scorned in our society, because they are cohabiting. This is due to the rapidly evolving socio-cultural climate in Malta. Only recently, the Maltese government has amended the codes of criminal and civil laws with regards marriage and cohabitation (Marriage Act Amendment, ACT No. XXIII of 2017).

The cultural discourse shaping our sense of identity as Maltese is changing, and so are our beliefs, including those which were previously ingrained in the collective Maltese psyche.

Gergen (1991) describes such social changes as the shift from romantic and modern perspectives that emphasise a singular self to a postmodern paradigm that emphasises multiple selves and a saturated self. Gergen (1991) posits that: "Entering a relationship with a multiplicity of potentials, each a possible invalidation of the other, makes it enormously difficult to locate steady forms of relatedness." Recent changes in socialisation patterns have made it very difficult to maintain a sense of singular identity, thus threatening the foundations for committed relationships as conceptualised by romantic, modern perspectives.

So, when viewed with an understanding of the postmodern self, marriage can be interpreted as a commitment that is intrinsically fluid; there is no singular self that is making a commitment to the relationship but multiple evolving selves. Therefore, for committed relationships to endure, each partner must be willing to continually redefine his or her identities and relationship, allowing the marital contract to evolve with changing needs and desires (Lyle & Gehart-Brooks, 1999).

I wonder what the future holds for the couples in my study. Will the fact that they are possibly in a better position to know what works and what is best for them and their partners in a relationship, help them to move on to the next step of their journey, remarriage? Perhaps it is the fact that they seem to want to co-create something different and better to what they had in their first marriage that

will lead them to feel safe enough to remarry. Or maybe they feel safe and content as things stand, knowing that cohabitation is working, whereas one never knows what feelings and attitudes the act of remarriage might unearth for the participants, unless they would have communicated freely and laid their cards on the table, as it were.

It would be wrong of course to put remarriage at par with cohabitation. The literature (e.g. Thornton, Axinn & Yie, 2008; Bumpass, Sweet & Cherlin, 1991; Brown & Booth, 1996) suggests that marriage and cohabitation are actually quite dissimilar, that people enter into them with different aims and expectations, and that they are experienced differently by both adults and children. This is why further research needs to be done into the area of re-partnering after marital dissolution and cohabitation in Malta.

Similar to foreign trends (Bumpass and Sweet, 1989; Bumpass and Sweet, 1995), non-marital cohabitation in Malta has changed from a relatively rare, shunned event to a fairly stable alternative to marriage. Sharing a household, living as a couple, may provide people with personal care, reciprocal attention and support, companionship, and the division of household tasks. Possible negative aspects include frustrations when one partner invests less time, money, and effort in the cooperative undertaking than the other, and less than had been presumed in the informal contract between the partners (deJong Gierveld, 2004). In weighing the options, some may conclude that remarriage requires too great a sacrifice. Instead, some opt for a consensual union because it is characterized by less strict rules, so much so that remarriage nowadays is competing with consensual cohabitation (ibid.)

5.9 Conclusion

Viewed through a postmodern, social constructionist lens, re-partnering is a process which varies from individual to individual. It is in turn influenced by wider social contexts, beliefs, attitudes and expectations. Nevertheless, the results of this study have shown that indeed there does seem to exist a common path, a similar journey that such travellers, in the Maltese context, often follow on their way to re-partnering and remarriage. For me, as a novice researcher, it was an emotional and eye-opening journey. Although borne by my own experiences of marital dissolution and eventual re-partnering and remarriage, I managed to maintain a curious stance throughout the whole process. The participants' stories of courage, determination and self-belief are things that I will surely carry with me always in my own personal and professional journeys through this life.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

6.1 The journey

This study has tried to give a voice to Maltese couples who have journeyed through marital separation to eventual re-partnering. One the couples interviewed in this study took the next step and divorced their respective first spouses and got remarried again. This study has tried to map this journey of re-partnering by eliciting shared meanings. I believe that this study shows that there are enough common characteristics in the participants' experience to be able to plot a journey that is familiar to the four couples in this study. The details of the trip, however, will always be unique and fluid.

I will now proceed by presenting the limitations and clinical implications for systemic practice of this research. I will then conclude by putting forward recommendations for future studies and outlining some final thoughts on this journey.

6.2 Limitations of this Study

I have opted to interview committed heterosexual couples who have been living in Malta for the past three years, for the purposes of my research. The focus was their lived experience of re-partnering after marital dissolution. Consequently, homosexual couples were excluded from this research. Furthermore, couples who have been together for less than three years were also excluded, in order to satisfy the relevant criterion for inclusion in this research. Three years of cohabitation might not be enough time for the couples to really settle into their relationship and learn to live with each other's beliefs,

attitudes and idiosyncrasies. Therefore, such factors can be considered as limiting, since the findings of this research cannot be generalised and are not representative of all re-partnered couples residing in Malta.

The fact that the interviews were conducted jointly might be considered also as a limitation to this research. One cannot exclude the fact that had the interviews been conducted on an individual basis, more, or even different, information might have been elicited in the privacy of such settings, which could have shed a different light on the findings. Some individuals might have felt uncomfortable disclosing sensitive information in front of their partner, despite being in a committed relationship. Nevertheless, conducting joint interviews allowed me the invaluable opportunity of observing the connection and some of the dynamics of such a relationship. I was able to observe the body language of the participants, who spoke first, who spoke most and who was more tentative in his/her interventions.

The researcher's personal bias and preconceived ideas might also be considered as limitations. My personal experience of marital dissolution and re-partnering, my ideas about culture, my beliefs and values might have all been an influence on my research. Professionals have to be fully aware of their values and projections in order to avoid gender inequity and stereotypes (Rivett and Street, 2009).

My gender as male might have affected the dynamics of this study. Whilst gender per se should not be a limitation, it might have coloured my lenses during the interviews and data analysis. Sammut Scerri et al. (2012) refer to the power dynamic that could be perceived or created between the participant

and the researcher. Had the researcher in this study been a woman, additional or different data and subsequent interpretation might very well have been elicited.

The findings of this study are from a sample of four interviews. This is consistent with IPA studies. However, such a study would require replication with larger numbers for the findings to be generalised to the rest of the Maltese population. Moreover, in this study there was no distinction made in the selection criteria between cohabiting, separated couples and cohabiting, divorced couples. Additionally, no distinction either was made between re-partnered and remarried couples, for the purposes of data analysis. There might even be differences in the perspective of people who re-partner after separation or after divorce. The main criterion for inclusion in this study was that the participants had to be re-partnered and cohabiting for the past three years.

Further research in this area has to make the distinction between cohabitation after separation or divorce and remarriage, especially nowadays in post-divorce Malta, in order to give a fuller, and therefore more complex, understanding of the transitional period of re-partnering after marital dissolution. Being re-partnered and being remarried carry different meanings in post-modern Malta. A longitudinal study, say in ten years' time, could also be done to test, validate and replicate the findings in this research.

6.3 Implications for Family Therapy and Systemic Practice

Family therapy provides a safe haven for couples to discuss challenges they meet during their transition from marital dissolution to eventual re-partnering. Together with the systemic therapist, they can co-construct new or alternative meanings of their experiences. Systemic theory, with its ability to connect such different, complex meanings is well-suited to address the challenges and concerns that marital dissolution and re-partnering generate. This study has sought to open a window and shed light on the lived experience of re-partnering for separated Maltese couples.

Despite eliciting commonalities in the participants' experiences of re-partnering, it is crucial to keep in mind that each experience is unique. Systemic family therapists have to be continuously sensitive and genuine towards clients and their discourse, both in terminology and in metaphors (Radina et al., 2008). Systemic therapists should focus on strengthening the relations and the bonds that keep re-partnered couples together, keeping in mind the multiple contexts and evolving complexities of each couple.

It is important that family therapists help the couples to, individually and relationally, identify and process any unresolved issues coming from the dissolution of the first marriage. As this study has shown, men and women go through this process differently, both conceptually and behaviourally, and it is important that, as professionals, we need to acknowledge these gender differences. Perhaps it is also right time that informative classes for cohabiting couples start to be held, in the same way that pre-marriage preparation classes have been organised in Malta for many years, mainly by the Catholic Church.
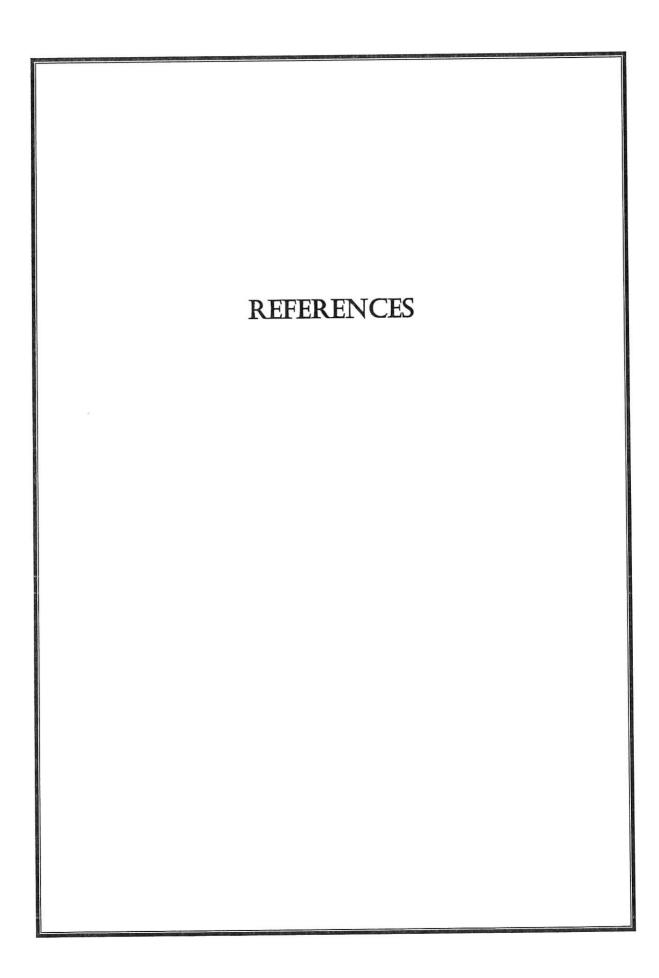
6.4 Concluding thoughts

With hindsight, I find that I too have undertaken this journey along with the participants of my study. I realise that as much as there are my truths, the participants have all given me their own, too. As a post-modern researcher, I have come to value more this state of fact, that no one truth predominates. Experiences may be similar but never the same. It has been a journey which heightened my awareness of the complexities involved in such a transitional period of life after marital dissolution.

It was a journey into the lived experiences of such human beings, one which has humbled me. I have come to look at re-partnered relationships in a different, more positive light than before this study. I was sincerely pleasantly surprised at how, like the participants in this study, I have managed to live in harmony with my partner, now my wife, during this transitional process, with all its entailing complexities. I would like to thank the couples who have generously shared their experiences and I will cherish their narratives throughout my therapeutic work with families and couples.

I know that this is the end of this journey; yet, I also know that somehow it is not. Life has taught me that it is never the end; it is simply the start of another new beginning, one that I am eagerly looking forward to and one where I hope to extend my knowledge both in the confines of therapy and in the real world, by creating awareness on, and around, this subject. In a rapidly changing local context, re-partnered separated couples have to be in charge of their lives and their relationships and not be swept along by the tides of social pressure and

dominant discourses. I very much intend to keep nurturing such relationships in my work as a budding systemic family therapist.

REFERENCES

Abela, A, Casha, C, Debono, M, & Lauri, M. A. (2015) Attitudes about remarriage in Malta, *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, 56, 5.

Abela, A. (2009). The changing landscape of Maltese families. In J. Cutajar & G. Cassar (Eds.), *Social transitions in Maltese society* (pp. 23-50). Malta: Miller Publications.

Abela, A. Frosch, S. & Dowling, E. (2005) Uncovering beliefs embedded in the culture and its implications for practice: the case of Maltese married couples, *Journal of Family Therapy*, 27, 3-23.

Ahituv, A., & Lerman, R. (2004) *Job turnover, wage rates, and marital stability: How are they related?* Retrieved from http://www.urban.org/publications/411148.html

Ahrons, C.R (1980) Redefining the divorced family: A conceptual framework, *Social Work*, Nov: 437-441.

Ahrons, C.R.H. & Rodgers, R. (1987) *The Divorced Family*. New York: Norton.

Amato, P.R. (2000). The consequences of divorce for adults and children. *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 62(4), 1269-1287.

Amato, P.R. & Wang, H. (2000) Predictors of Divorce Adjustment: Stressors, Resources, and Definitions. *Journal of Marriage and Family,* 62, 3, 655-668.

Amato, P.R. & Rogers, S.J. (1997) A longitudinal study of marital problems and subsequent marital dissolution. *Journal of marriage and the Family*, 59, 612-624.

Amato, P. (1987) Family Processes in One-Parent, Stepparent, and Intact Families: The Child's Point of View. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 49*, 327-337.

Anderson, H. (1997) *Conversation, Language and Possibilities*. New York: Basic Books.

Anderson, E.R., Greene, S.M., Walker, L., Malerba, C.A., Forgatch, M.S., & DeGarmo, D.S. (2004). Ready to take a chance again: Transitions into dating among divorcing parents. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 40, 61-75.

Anderson, E.R., & Greene, S.M. (2005) Transitions in Parental Re-partnering after Divorce. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, 43, 3-4, p. 47-62.

Azzopardi, C. (2007). *Expectations of marriage before and after marriage among Maltese Catholic couples* (Doctoral theses, University of East London, London, United Kingdom). Tavistock Clinic: London.

Baum, N. (2003) The Male Way of Mourning Divorce: When, What and How. *Clinical Social Work Journal,* 31, 1.

Beall, A.E. & Sternberg, R.J. (1995) The Social Construction of Love. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships,* 12, 3, 417-438.

Becker, G.S., Landes, E.M. & Michael, R.T. (1977) An Economic Analysis of Marital Instability. *The Journal of Political Economy*, 85, 1141-1188.

Bernard, J. (1972) *The Future of Marriage.* New York: Bantam.

Birrell, B. & Rapson, V. (1998*) A Not So Perfect Match: The Growing Male/Female Divide,* Centre for Population and Urban Research, Melbourne: Monash University.

Bjornholt, M. & Farstad, G.R. (2014) Am I rambling? : On the advantages of interviewing couples together. *Qualitative Research*, 14, 1, 3-19.

Bowlby, J. (1989) *A secure base: Clinical applications of attachment theory.* London: Routledge.

Bowlby, J. (1980) *The making and breaking of affectionate bonds.* East Sussex: Brunner-Routledge.

Bramlett, M.D. & Mosher, W.D. (2002) Cohabitation, marriage, divorce and remarriage in the United States. *Vital and Health Statistics,* 23. Hyattsville: National Centre for Health Statistics.

Buber, M. (2013*) I and Thou.* London: Bloomsbury Publishing

Bumpass, L., & Sweet, J. (1989) Children's Experience in Single-Parent Families: Implications of Cohabitation and Marital Transitions. *Family Planning Perspectives,* 21, 6, 256-260.

Bumpass, L., Sweet, J. & Castro-Martin, T. (1990) Changing patterns of remarriage. *Journal of Marriage and Family,* 52, 747-756.

Bumpass, L., Castro-Martin, T. & Sweet, J.A. (1991) The impact of family background and early factor on marital disruption. *Journal of Family Issues,* 12, 1, 22-42.

Burck, C. (2005) Comparing qualitative research methodologies for systemic research: the use of grounded theory, discourse analysis and narrative analysis. *Journal of Family Therapy,* 27, 237-262.

Bursik, K. (1991) Adaptation to Divorce and Ego Development in Adult Women. *Journal of personality and social psychology,* 60, 300-6

Byng-Hall, J. (1995) *Rewriting family scripts: Improvisation and systems change.* New York, NY: Guilford

Byng-Hall, J. (1998) Evolving ideas about narrative: re-editing the family mythology. *Journal of Family Therapy,* 20, 133-141.

Carter, B. & McGoldrick, M. (eds.) (1988) *The Changing Family Life-Cycle: A Framework for Family Therapy, 2nd Edition.* New York, NY: Gardner Press.

Centre of Family Studies & National Statistics Office (2011). *A study on attitudes about remarriage.* University of Malta: Msida.

Charura, D. & Paul, S. (2015) *Love and Therapy: In Relationship.* London: Karnac Books.

Cherlin, A. (2004) The Deinstitutionalization of American Marriage. *Journal of Marriage and Family,* 66, 848–861.

Cherlin, A. (1992) Marriage, marital dissolution, remarriage. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Coleman, M. & Ganong, H.L. (1990) Remarriage and step-family research in the 1980s: increased interest in an old family form. *Journal of Marriage and the Family,* 52, 925-940.

Conrad, P. (1987) The experience of illness: recent and new directions. *Research in the Sociology of Health Care*, 6, 1-31.

Counts, R.M. & Sacks, A. (1985) The need for crisis intervention during marital separation. *Social Work,* 30, 2.

Cummings, E.M. & Davies, P.T. (1994) Maternal Depression and Child Development. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry,* 35, 1, 73-122.

Dallos. R. & Draper, R. (2010) *An Introduction to Family Therapy: Systemic Theory and Practice.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Dallos, R. & Vetere, A. (2005) *Researching Psychotherapy and Counselling.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Dean, G. & Gurak, D.T. (1978) Marital Homogamy the second time round. *Journal of Marriage and the Family,* 40, 559-570.

Delicata C. (2007). *Fathering from the outside: How do non-custodial fathers manage to maintain a relationship with their sons?* (M.A. thesis) *London: University of East London.*

DeGarmo, D.S & Kitson, G.C. (1996) Identity relevance and disruption as predictors of psychological distress for widowed and divorced women. *Journal of Marriage and the Family,* 58, 4.

De Graaf, P.M. & Kalmijn, M. (2003) Alternative routes in the remarriage market: Competing-risk analyses of union formation after divorce. *Social Forces,* 81, 1459-1498.

de Jong Gierveld, J. (2004) Remarriage, unmarried cohabitation, living apart together: Partner relationships following bereavement or divorce. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66, 236–243.

Dowling, E. & Barnes, G.G. (2000) *Working with Children and Parents through Separation and Divorce: The Changing Lives of Children*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave.

Duvall, E.M. (1977) *Marriage and family development* (5th ed.). Philadelphia, Lippincott.

Emery, R. E. (1998) *Marriage, divorce, and children's adjustment*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Ermisch, J.F., Jenkins, S. & Wright, R.E. (1990) Analysis of the Dynamics of Lone Parenthood: Socio-Economic Influences on Entry and Exit Rates, in OECD (ed.) *Lone-Parent Families: the Economic Challenge*, pp.69-90. Paris: OECD.

Etherington, K. (2004). *Becoming a reflexive researcher: Using our selves in research.* London, England: Jessica Kingsley.

Farrugia, T. (2014) *The lived experience of couples in remarried relationships following divorce, in Malta.* Faculty of Social Wellbeing, Dept. of Psychology, University of Malta: Msida.

Flick, U. (2002) *An Introduction to Qualitative Research (2nd Ed.).* London: Sage.

Földházi, E. (2010) New partnership after first divorce — an event history analysis. *Demográfia*, 53, 5, 78–101.

Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge.* Brighton: Harvester

Friedman, E.H. (1988) Systems and Ceremonies: A Family View of Rites of Passage, in Carter, B. & McGoldrick, M. (eds.) (1988) *The Changing Family Life Cycle: A Framework for Family Therapy*. New York: Gardner Press.

Funder, K., Harrison, M. & Weston, R. (1993) *Settling Down, Pathways of Parents after Divorce*. Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.

Galea, K. D. (2013) *A retrospective study of the experience of young adults who pass through parental separation and their parents' formation of new relationships*. Faculty of Social Wellbeing, Dept. of Psychology: University of Malta: Msida.

Galea, P. (2012) Cohabitation, single parenting, extended-family parenting and the role of kinship and religion. *International Journal of the Jurisprudence of the Family, 2*, 163-177.

Gergen, K.J., McNamee, S. & Barrett, F.J. (2001) Towards Transformative Dialogue. *International Journal of Public Administration, 24*, 7-8, 679-707.

Gergen, K.J. (1991) *The Saturated Self: dilemmas of identity in contemporary life*. University of Michigan: Basic Books.

Gergen, K.J. (1985) The social constructionist movement in modern psychology. *American Psychologist*, 40: 266-75.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. (1967) *The discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago: Aldine.

Goldman, N., Westoff, C.F. & Hammerslough, C. (1984) Demography of the Marriage Market in the United States. *Population Index*, 50, 5-25.

Gottman, J. M. (1993). A theory of marital dissolution and stability. *Journal of Family Psychology, 7*, 51–75

Gottman, J. M., & Krokoff, L. J. (1989) Marital interaction and satisfaction: A longitudinal view. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 57*, 41-52.

Graaf, P., & Kalmijn, M. (2003) Alternative Routes in the Remarriage Market: Competing-Risk Analyses of Union Formation after Divorce. *Social Forces, 81*, 4, 1459-1498.

Greenberg, L. (2014) What is happening to Bill and Jane? *Psychoanalytic Dialogues, 24*, 427-432.

Hetherington, E.M. (1989) Coping with Family Transitions: Winners, Losers and Survivors. *Child Development*, 60, 1-14.

Hetherington, E., Clingempeel, W., Anderson, E., Deal, J., Hagan, M., Hollier, E. & Bennion, L. (1992). Coping with Marital Transitions: A Family Systems Perspective. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development, 57*, 2-3.

Hetherington, E.M. (2003) Social Support and the adjustment of children in divorced and remarried families. *Childhood, 11*, 217-236.

Huddleston, R.J. & Hawkings, L. (1993) The reaction of friends and family to divorce. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage, 19*, 1, 2, 195-207.

Hughes, J. (2000) Re-partnering after divorce. *Family Matters*, 55, Autumn.

Kalter, N. (1990). *Growing up with divorce: Helping your child avoid immediate and later emotional problems.* New York: Collier Macmillan.

Kaufman, G. (2000) Do gender role attitudes matter? : Family formation among traditional and egalitarian men and women. *Journal of Family Issues, 21*, 1, 128-144.

Kavas, S. (2010) Post-*divorce experience of highly educated and professional women.* (Unpublished doctoral thesis), Middle East Technical University

Kim, J. (2011) *Should I marry again?* Retrieved from http://www.kdi.re.kr/data/download/attach/9273_04_Kim.pdf

Koerner, S., Rankin, L., Kenyon, D., & Korn, M. (2004) Mothers Re-Partnering After Divorce. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage,* 25-38.

Koo, H.P., & Suchindran, C.M. (1980) Effects of children on women's remarriage prospects. *Journal of Family Issues*, 1, pp. 497 – 515.

Koo, H.P., Suchindran, C.M. & Griffith, J.D. (1984) The effects of children on divorce and remarriage: a multivariate analysis of life-table probabilities. *Population Studies*, 38, pp. 451 – 472.

Khoo, S.E. (1989) *Re-partnering after divorce: The Formation of Second Families: Child Support Scheme Evaluation Study.* Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.

Khoo, S-E. (1989) *Re-partnering after divorce: the formation of second families.* Australian Institute of Family Studies, Child Support Scheme Evaluation Study, Report No. 4.

King, V. (2002) Parental Divorce and Interpersonal Trust in Adult Offspring. *Journal of Marriage and Family,* 64, 3, 642-656

Lampard, R. & Peggs, K. (1999) Re-partnering: The Relevance of Parenthood and Gender to Cohabitation and Remarriage among the Formerly Married. *British Journal of Sociology,* 50, 443-465.

Larkin, M., Watts, S. & Clifton, E. (2006) Giving voice and making sense in interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Qualitative Research in Psychology,* 3, 102-120.

Lewis, D.J. & Weigert, A. (1985) Trust as a Social Reality. *Social Forces,* 63, 4, 967-985.

Lyle, R.R. & Gehart-Brooks, D. (1999) Postmodernism and Divorce: Reflections on Gergen's Notion of the Saturated Self in Relation to Modern Divorce. *The Family Journal: counselling and Therapy for Couples and Families,* 7, 3, 245-252.

Mays, N. & Pope, C. (1995) Rigour and qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 311, July.

Mason, J. (2002). *Qualitative researching (2nd ed.)* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Maturana, H.R. & Varela,F.J. (1987) *The tree of knowledge.* Boston: Shambhala.

Mazor, A., Pumpi, M.A. & Gampel, Y. (1998) Divorcing Spouses' Coping Patterns, Attachment Bonding and Forgiveness Processes in the Post-Divorce Experience. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage,* 29, 65-81.

McNamee, S. & Gergen, K.L. (2002) *Therapy as social construction.* London: Sage.

Meggiolaro, S. & Ongaro, F. (2008) Re-partnering after marital dissolution: Does context play a role? *Demographic Research*, 19, 57, 1913-1934.

Merriam, S.B. (2009) *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation.* San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Ministry for Justice, Culture and Local Government (2017) Marriage Act and other Laws (Amendment) of 2017, ACT No. XXIII of 2017. *Government Gazette of Malta,* No. 19,840 - 01/08/2017.

Mitchell, C. E. (1990) Development or Restoration of Trust in Interpersonal Relationships during Adolescence and Beyond. *Adolescence,* 25, 100.

Mizzi, S. (1981) *Women in Senglea: The Changing Role of Urban Working-Class Women in Malta.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation. State University of New York at Stony Brook.

Mizzi, S. (1997) *Senglea revisited: 1972–1992.* Paper presented at the International Conference 'Mediterranean Women: Concepts, Processes and Images' Organized by The Mediterranean Institute of the University of Malta.

Mott, F.L. & Moore, S.F. (1983) The Tempo of Remarriage among Young American Women. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 45, 427-436.

National Statistics Office (2016) *Trends in Malta.* Retrieved from https://nso.gov.mt/en/publicatons/Publications_by_Unit/Documents/D2_Di ssemination_Unit/Trends%20in%20Malta%202016.pdf

Oppenheimer, V.K. (1988) A theory of marriage timing: Assortative mating under varying degrees of uncertainty. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94, 3, 563–591.

Papa, A., Lancaster, N.G. & Kahler, J. (2014) Commonalities in grief responding across bereavement and non-bereavement losses. *Journal of Affective Disorders,* 161, 136-143.

Pare', D.A. (1996) Culture and Meaning: Expanding the Metaphorical Repertoire of Family Therapy. *Family Process*, 35: 21-42.

Parker, R. (1999) Re-partnering following relationship breakdown. *Family Matters*, 53, Winter.

Peshkin, A. (1988). In search of subjectivity: One's own. *Educational Research,* 17, 7, 17-22

Pinsof, W.M. (2002) The death of 'Till death do us part': The transformation of pair-bonding in the 20th century. *Family Process*, 41, 2, 135-157.

Poortman, A.R. (2007) The First Cut is the Deepest? The role of the relationship career for union formation. *European Sociological Review*, 23, 585-598

Portelli, N. (2015) *The single-parents' experience of re-partnering.* Faculty of Social Wellbeing, Dept. of Psychology, University of Malta: Msida

Porter, S. (2007) Validity, trustworthiness & rigour: Reasserting realism in qualitative research. *Journal of Midwifery & Women's Health*, 60, 1, 79-86.

Potter, J. & Wetherell, M. (1987) *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour.* London: Sage.

Radina, M. E., Hennon, C. B., & Gibbons, H. M. (2008). Divorce and mid-and later life families: A phenomenological analysis with implications for family life educators. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage, 49*(1-2), 142-170.

Reid, K., Flowers, P. & Larkin, M. (2005) Exploring lived experience: An Introduction to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. *The Psychologist,* 18, 1, 20-23.

Rivett, M. & Street, E. (2009) *Family Therapy: 100 key points and techniques.* London: Routledge

Roulston, K. & Shelton, M.A. (2015) Reconceptualizing Bias in Teaching Qualitative Research Methods. *Qualitative Inquiry,* 21, 4, 332-342

Schmiege, C.J., Richards, L.N. & Zvonkovic, A.M. (2001) Remarriage: For love or money? *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage,* 36, (1-2), 123-140

Schröder, C. (2008). The influence of parents on cohabitation in Italy: Insights from two regional contexts. *Demographic Research,* 19, 48, 1693-1726.

Schwandt, T. A. (2001). Dictionary of qualitative inquiry (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Scicluna. M. (2009) For better or for worse: remarriage after legal separation. The *Today Public Policy Institute:* Valletta.

Setterston, R.A. (2009) It takes two to tango: The (un)easy dance between life-course sociology and life-span psychology. *Advances in Life Course Research,* 14, 74-81.

Skew, A., Evans, A. & Gray, E. (2009) Re-partnering in the United Kingdom and Australia. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies,* 40, 4, Summer.

Solomon, M. (1973) A developmental conceptual premise for family therapy. *Family Process,* 12: 179-188.

Smith, J.A., Flowers, P. & Larkin, M. (2009) *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research.* London: Sage

Smock, P., Manning, W. & Porter, M. (2005) Everything's there except money: How money shapes decisions to marry among cohabitors. *Journal of Marriage and Family,* 65, 90-104.

Spanier, G. & Glick, P. (1980) Paths to Remarriage. *Journal of Divorce,* 3, 293-298.

Spanier, G. & Thompson, L. (1987) *Parting: The Aftermath of Separation and Divorce.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage

Stewart, A.J., Copeland, A.P., Chester, N.L., Malley, J.E. & Barenbaum, N.B. (1997) *Separating Together: How divorce transforms families.* New York: Guilford.

Sweeney, M. (1995) *'Remarriage of men and women: the role of socio-economic prospects'.* CDE Working Paper no. 95-08, Centre for Demography and Ecology, Wisconsin: University of Madison.

Sweeney, M. & Cancian, M. (2004) The changing importance of white women's economic prospects for assortative mating. *Journal of Marriage and Family,* 66, 1015-1028.

Thornton, A., Axinn, W.G. & Hill, D.H. (1992) Reciprocal effects of religiosity, cohabitation and marriage. *The American Journal of Sociology,* 98, 628-651.

Valentine, G. (1999) Doing household research: interviewing couples together and apart. *The Royal Geographical Society,* 31, 1, 67-74.

Warnock, M. (1987) *Memory.* London: Faber

Weiss, R.S. (1975) *Marital Separation.* New York: Basic Books

Wengraf, T. (2001) *Qualitative research interviewing: Biographic narratives and semi-structured methods.* London: Sage

Weston, R. (1991) 'Once bitten, twice shy?' *Family Matters,* 29, pp. 22-25.

Weston, R. & Koo, S. (1993) Family reformation: a key adjustment strategy, in Funder, K., Harrison, M. & Weston, R. *Settling Down, Pathways of Parents after Divorce,* Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.

Willig, C. (2008) *Introducing qualitative research methods in psychology: Adventures in theory and method (2nd Ed.).* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Willits, M., Benzeval, M. & Stansfeld, S. (2004) Partnership history and mental health over time. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 58, 53-58.

Wu, Z. & Balakrishnan, T.R. (1994) Cohabitation after Marital Disruption in Canada. *Journal of Marriage and the Family,* 53, 723-734.

Wu, Z. & Schimmele, C.M. (2016) Re-partnering after Marital Dissolution in Later Life. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 78, 4, pp. 1013-1031.

Wu, Z. & Schimmele, C.M. (2005) Re-partnering after first union disruption. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67, 1, 27-36.

APPENDICES

Appendix I

Interview Guide

1. Can you introduce yourself please, without mentioning identifying factors?

2. Can you say something about how you met your present partner/spouse?

3. (How would you describe your present partner/spouse?)

4. How do you think your partner/spouse will describe you?

5. How did you live and experience that period of transition of separation and divorce? (How did you feel? What were your concerns at the time, if any?)

6. What helped you at that time to pick up the pieces, look forward and move on?

7. How would you describe yourself as a person?

8. How did you know then that it was time to move on in life?

9. Where there any factors which might have influenced this decision?

10. With hindsight, is there anything you would have done differently, and why?

11. How do you think your acquaintances, colleagues, friends and family think and feel about your re-partnering/re-marriage?

12. How do you see this relationship as different from your previous marriage?

13. Do you see any difference between being in a committed relationship and being married? If so, what is it?

14. What are your fears and expectations, in regards this relationship?

15. (How do you see yourselves, both as individuals and as partners in a relationship, in the future?)

Appendix II

Linji Gwida ghall-Intervista

1. Tista' tintroduci ruhek minghajr dettalji zejda, jekk joghgbok?

2. Tista' tirrakontali ftit fuq kif iltqajtu?

3. Kif tahseb li s-sieheb/siehba tieghek jiddiskrevik/tiddiskrevik?

4. Kif tiddeskrivu lil xulxin?

5. Kif ghextu z-zmien minn meta iz-zwieg spicca sakemm iltqajtu? X'esperjenzi kellkom? Kif kontu thossukom? Kien hemm xi haga li kienet thassibkom?

6. X'ghenek dak iz-zmien biex tibda tirkupra u thares 'il quddiem?

7. Kif tiddeskrivi lilek innifsek?

8. Kif indunajt li kien wasal iz-zmien li tibda thares 'il quddiem u terga' tibda relazzjoni ohra?

9. X'tahseb li kienu il-fatturi li influenza din id-decizjoni?

10. Meta thares lura, hemm xi haga li kont taghmel differenti, u ghalfejn?

11. Kif haduha l-hbieb, kollegi, familja u anke nies li taf meta saru jafu li inti ergajt sibt partner jew ergajt izzewwigt?

12. Kif tara din ir-relazzjoni differenti miz-zwieg li kellek?

13. Tara xi differenza bejn li tkun marbut f'relazzjoni u tkun mizzewweg/a? Jekk iva, x'inhi?

14. X'inhuma il-hsibijiet jew bizghat taghkom fuq din ir-relazzjoni f'dan iz-zmien?

15. Kif taraw lilkom infuskom, kemm individwalment kif ukoll bhala partners, fill-futur?

Appendix III

Information Sheet

Information Sheet for Master's Thesis in Systemic Family Psychotherapy

You will be given a copy of this information sheet.

Dissertation title: *Once Bitten, Twice Shy? The lived experience of re-partnering for separated or divorced Maltese couples.*

Researcher's name: Aldo Farrugia

Contact details: 99471003; email: aristea@maltanet.net

Supervisor's name: Ms. Carmen Delicata

You are being invited to take part in a research study as part of a student project. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

What is the aim of the research?

The research is a qualitative one. Through a semi-structured, in-depth interview of four separated or divorced couples living in Malta, the researcher intends to explore and elicit the experience of re-partnering for these couples following marital dissolution.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because you have experienced marital separation, eventual re-partnering and you are now in a steady relationship, living together as a family. You are either of Maltese nationality or, if foreign, have been living in Malta for, at least, the past three years. You have been in the present relationship for the last three years. I am interested in understanding how couples such as you, living in Malta, make sense of their relationship, how they make it work.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?

You will take part in this research by submitting to an interview. It will be a semi-structured – not more than 15 questions - in-depth interview. You will be talking about, and reflecting upon, your experiences of re-partnering. You will be interviewed as a couple and the interview will take around 1 – 1 ½ hrs. It will be audio-recorded. They will be conducted around November - December 2016. You will be contacted a week before the interview to re-confirm your participation.

What happens to the data collected?

The data collected from the interview will be recorded on SD card. It will later be transcribed for analytical purposes and stored on hard drive which is password protected. The data will be kept until the completion of the research and the Master's Thesis. Then it will be destroyed.

How is confidentiality maintained?

All the necessary legal provisions for data protection will be taken. There will be no identifying information and anonymity will be guaranteed. The transcribed data will only be seen by the researcher and by the supervisor when necessary. The same applies for the audio-recordings.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to yourself.

Will I be paid for participating in the research?

You will not be paid for participating. However, a complimentary gift will be given as a token of appreciation for your time and participation.

Where will the research be conducted?

The interview can be held either at a place of your convenience, either at home or at the offices of IFT-Malta in Paola. The location should be one free from interruptions.

Will the outcomes of the research be published?

The outcomes and findings of this research will be part of the final Master's thesis. The data presented will contain no identifying information that could associate it with you. It is hoped that the findings will in the future be included in papers which may be published in academic journals aimed at the helping professions.

Contact for further information

Researcher: Aldo Farrugia

Contact Details: 99471003; email: aristea@maltanet.net

Supervisor: Ms. Carmen Delicata

Contact details:

Appendix IV

Consent to Participate in Research

Identification of Investigators & Purpose of Study

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Aldo Farrugia, a Master's Degree student and family therapist trainee at IFT-Malta. The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of re-partnering or re-marriage of separated or divorced couples in the Maltese context. This study will contribute to the researcher's completion of his Master's Thesis in Systemic Psychotherapy.

Research Procedures

Should you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form once all your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. This study consists of an interview that will be administered to individual participants at IFT-Malta.

You will be asked to provide answers to a series of questions related to the experience of re-partnering for separated or divorced couples in the Maltese context. The interview will be audio-recorded and later transcribed for analysis. A time and date convenient to you to be interviewed will be arranged once you have given consent.

Time Required

Participation in this study will require 1 – 1½ hours of your time. 25

Risks

The investigator does not perceive more than minimal risks from your involvement in this study (that is, no risks beyond the risks associated with everyday life).

Benefits

Potential benefits from participation in this study include insight and new knowledge arising from the qualitative analysis of the experience of a particular target population – separated/divorced couples living in Malta. Since divorce is a new phenomenon in Malta, this study will be one of the first local studies to explore and examine such a target population and therefore will be of benefit to the public in general but, more specifically, to professional workers in the field.

Confidentiality

The results of this research will be presented as part of the completed thesis in part fulfilment of the Master's programme. The results of this project will be coded in such a way that the respondent's identity will not be attached to the final form of this study.

The researcher retains the right to use and publish non-identifiable data. While individual responses are confidential, aggregate data will be presented representing averages or generalizations about the responses as a whole.

All data will be stored in a secure location accessible only to the researcher. Upon completion of the study, all information that matches up individual respondents with their answer, including audio recordings, will be destroyed.

Participation & Withdrawal

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to choose not to participate. Should you choose to participate, you can withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. 26

Questions about the Study

If you have questions or concerns during the time of your participation in this study, or after its completion or you would like to receive a copy of the final aggregate results of this study, please contact:

Researcher: Aldo Farrugia

Email Address: aristea@maltanet.net Telephone: 99471003

Questions about Your Rights as a Research Subject

Supervisor: Ms. Carmen Delicata

Giving of Consent

I have read this consent form and I understand what is being requested of me as a participant in this study. I agree to the use of the findings as described above. I freely consent to participate. I have been given satisfactory answers to my questions. The investigator provided me with a copy of this form. I certify that I am at least 18 years of age.

I give consent to be audio taped during my interview.

_____

Name of Participant (Printed)

_____

Name of Participant (Signed) Date

_____

Name of Researcher (Signed) Date

Please keep this form for future reference.

Appendix V

Excerpt of Analysed Transcript from Alan & Yvonne's Interview

TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT - INTERVIEW 1

Transcript	Line No.	Emergent themes
EL: Challenge kbir u zgur...qed tifimni? Imma imbad...le irnexxieli...irkuprajt...imma batghejt...baghtejt hafna|...ma nafx x'ma bdejtx nivvinta...		Sense of relief and pride
YT: Anke fil-bidu li ntqajna, inti kont...		Self-Reflexivity - Persistence and resilience?
EL: Anke jien ehe...fil-bidu li ntqajna...kienet naqra stramba ghax ma tafdaha f'xejn...fil-bidu li ntqajna...	175	Difficult to trust again in self and others as protection of self
Int: Ma kontx tafda...		
EL: Ma nafda xejn...		
YT: Allura jien sirt naqra hekk...		
EL: Jekk il-mara li kelli kont intieha il-paga kollha...lil din...eee...(pauses)...u jien kelli dar kbira, per ezempju, spiccajt kelli inbieghha u intieha nofsa...li dik lanqas batghiet kwart minnha...imma ma kellniex problemi fuq hekk ta, jigifieri...ghax kollox bon aria u hlist kollox...imma hassejtha....anke tkun qieghed bilqeghda hemm...illallu kelli kcina bhal dik jien...illallu...ma ghandi xejn issa...spiccajt nghix ghand ommi nerga|...mux ghax ghand ommi kont hazin ta...imma qisek kont indipendenti u ergajt dhalt...(pause)...iebsa hafna...jiena hassejtha hafna, hafna, hafna...|	180	Difficult to trust again with regards finances; rumination Reflections and regrets;mourning
Int: Qisu l-ewwel sentejn tar relazzjoni taghkom kienu naqra... (iebsa)...		Reflections and regrets; Self-pity Regrets; Family support
EL: U zgur...		
YT: ehe...u kien hemm l-ewwel mara tieghek kienet ghadha tipprova tikkuntatjak...	185	Ruminations and regrets; Losing sense of self
EL: Mux hekk...imbad wara...meta saret taf li daqshekk jiena...riedet tipprova terga...		

Comment [T1]: Sense of relief/pride at having overcome such a tough challenge

Comment [T2]: Perseverance and resilience; sense of pride

Comment [T3]: Not trusting anybody to avoid getting hurt again; building trust slowly; possibly not trusting himself too

Comment [T4]: Implying that he does not give all his earning to his partner now; lessons learnt?

Comment [T5]: Reflections (and regrets?) on his separation

Comment [T6]: Refer to T57 above

Comment [T7]: It is like a demotion for him; a necessary evil?

Comment [T8]: Refer to T57, T59 above

Comment [T9]: Thinking of ex-spouse as a threat to new relationship

Comment [T10]: Refer to T69

Comment [T11]: Self-Reflexivity; comparing relationships

Comment [T12]: Lack of trust; protection of self;

Comment [T13]: Pain; lack of trust as way of protecting self; coping

Comment [T14]: Does not take relationships lightly; committed and loyal; hurt

Comment [T15]: Refer to T73

Comment [T16]: New-found sense of freedom after long realtionships; way of coping; social interaction as support of self

Comment [T17]: Finding the self

Comment [T18]: Self-reflexivity; looking tentatively at the future; finding the self

Comment [T19]: Excessive rumination; still painful when looking back? Thinking vs acting out

Comment [T20]: Finding ways of coping

Comment [T21]: Sense of emptiness; finding ways of coping

YT: Fil-fatt kienet regat... (tipprova)...|wara sena li konna ilna flimkien, kienet regghat...|

EL: Imbad tara id-differenza...

Int...|Tara id-differenza...

EL: Hafna...min jghidlek in-nisa kollha l-istess, nghidlu giddieb...|

Int: Hadd ma hu l-istess...

EL: Mux hekk...

Int: U qisu din li kienet thassbek allura f'dan il-perjodu...qisu...

EL: Dak iz-zmien tibda tghid...|u le...din qed tohrog mieghi minhabba l-flus?...ghax naf niehu pjacir?...iebsa....meta jkollok l-eta' u trid tibda relazzjoni ohra inti...iebsa hafna, ha nghidu hekk...|

Int: M'hix impossibli...

EL: Le, impossibli zgur li m'hix...

Int: U forsi minn naha tieghek? (to YT)...

YT: Jien naqra differenti ghax jien ili li tlaqt ir-relazzjoni (l-ewwel zwieg)...hemm...u|meta tlaqt, ghidt zgur ma rridx irgiel aktar f'hajti...jien |kelli zewg relazzjonijiet ukoll qabel...erba snin u tlett snin...kollha relationships fit-tul u inhassar...|allura imbad wara it-tielet wahda u kont izzewwigt, ghidt |daqshekk...daqshekk ma rridx naf iktar b'ragel|...u...|konna klikka hbieb u konna niltaqghu u nitilghu Ghawdex...u parties...imbad qisu l-ewwel sena tiehu gost bil-freedom, tohrog u bla commitment ta xejn|...imbad xtrajt post ghalija...orrajt...|biex ninqatgha minn mal-mummy nerggha...speci tiehu l-indipendenza tieghek...|u |wara sena, sentejn dik il-hajja, tibda taraha vojta...kollox vojt...jien hekk ha nghix hajti, speci?...imma xorta...kieku ma giex EL u tefghahili li jrid johrog mieghi, |hahseb kont indum hafna iktar ma nohrog ma xi hadd...(long pause)|...kont nara kif ha nizvoga fix-xoghol... courses...|

EL: |Anke jiena...l-istess...|

190

Seeing past relationships as problematic – threatening

Past relationships as problematic – threatening

No closure

195

Comparing relationships; self-reflexivity

200

Lack of trust in self and others as protection of self; Viewing relationships as problematic

205

210

Lack of trust in self and other men as protection of self;

Relationships as problematic Disappointed with men; Lack of trust in self and other men as protection of self;

Coping with pain and loneliness; social relationships as protection of self