"Men don't cry":
An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Black South African Men's Experience of Divorce

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Abstract

The decision to divorce marks a turning point for every individual involved. It can be viewed as more than just a legal process. From a psychological perspective, it does not matter who initiated the divorce, since it always comes with emotional ramifications for all those involved. Statistically, there is a high rate of divorce in South Africa and there have been significant shifts in trends over time. While black South African men's experience of divorce has been relatively neglected in the research on divorce, it is important for understanding contemporary social arrangements and processes, and, in particular, for broadening the understanding of black South African men's lives. How black South African men describe their experience and respond to marital dissolution may point to their positions in the gender-structured community as well as illuminate how they interpret the nature of social practice, marriage, divorce and their position in society. The aim of the research reported on in this paper was to explore black South African men's experience of divorce. The theoretical framework underpinning this qualitative study was broadly that of Symbolic Interactionism, with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) employed as both the research design and data analytic theory and process. The eight participants were volunteers who were recruited purposively. In keeping with IPA guidelines, data-collection proceeded by means of biographical questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The emerging themes were grouped into three superordinate themes, namely, perceptions of divorce, social support, and experiencing of pain. Each superordinate theme had corresponding subordinate themes and experiential claims. Weed's (2008) recommendations for the interpretative synthesis of interview data were applied.

Introduction

Divorce has been rated as one of the most stressful life experiences, second only to death, with a pervasive impact on the life situation of those who experience it (Amato, 2010; Gähler, 2006; Steiner, Durand, Groves, & Rozzell, 2015). Bearing this in mind, many studies on divorce begin with the assumption that it is a stressful life transition to which individuals must adjust (Amato, 2000; Amato, 2010; Hawkins & Fackrell, 2009; Webb et al., 2010). The divorce stress adjustment perspective

has been a dominant discourse within divorce literature. It views divorce not as a distinct event, but as a process that begins while the couple still lives together and ends long after the legal process has been concluded (Amato, 2000). This marital dissolution process typically initiates several events that individuals experience as stressful. These vary in intensity and duration from individual to individual, depending on the presence of a variety of moderating or protective factors (Amato, 2000). Amato posits that successful post-divorce adjustment occurs if the individual experiences fewer stressful divorce-related

outcomes, functions effectively in a new family, school or work context, and has developed an identity and life-style that are not tied to the former marriage (p. 1271).

Studies dealing with experience of, action in, and adjustment to divorce have focused mainly on women, on the assumption that women experience more difficulties than men in resuming a routine life after divorce (Amato, 2010; Locker, McIntosh, Hackney, Wilson, & Wiegand, 2010). Recent research findings have revealed that men also have considerable difficulty adjusting to divorce, and many develop physical and psychological health symptoms (Kulik & Kasa, 2014; Steiner et al., 2015). Due to the divorce, men usually experience a transition from the status of a full-time father to the status of a custodial father (Kulik & Kasa, 2014). As a consequence, divorced fathers lose part of their former parental and familial identity, with potentially damaging impact on their self-esteem (Amato, 2010; Kulik & Kasa, 2014).

The structure of the family in South Africa and the challenges it faces must be viewed against the background of the country's history of colonialism, apartheid, and the socio-economic systems that shaped its history. Understanding this history helps one to appreciate the diverse nature of South African families which are the product thereof. Many of South Africa's present social problems can be viewed as having emanated from the living and settlement arrangements that were part of the industrialisation process in the country (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009). Social ills, including various forms of abuse, divorce, HIV and AIDS, prostitution and gender-based violence, are some examples of the effects of industrialisation on social and physical dislocation. Colonialism and apartheid resulted in the degradation of the roles and responsibilities of the South African family (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009).

Divorce is associated with various social problems; for example, divorcees have smaller social networks and are more likely to lack social support. They more frequently experience negative events and have higher levels of psychological stress than do married individuals (Amato, 2010; Gähler, 2006). Given the divorce rate in South Africa, the magnitude of the impact of divorce on black South African men, and the dearth of research attention to this cohort, the divorce phenomenon clearly continues to be an area deserving of further exploration in the South African context. Exploring the effects of divorce – whether conceptualised as transient, to which people adjust, or as chronic with long lasting effects – remains an attractive area of research (Amato, 2010). This is the case regardless of which gender the research focuses on, as both can be adversely affected by this life stressor.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical assumptions underpinning this research are those of interpretative sociology, and, more precisely, symbolic interactionism, from which the methodology and the grounded theory method of data analysis are derived (Pascale, 2011). The theory of symbolic inter-actionism was developed in the fields of social psycho-logy and sociology. The theory comprises a broad set of premises about how an individual self is defined and how society is defined (Blumer, 1986).

The basic premises of social interactionism, which are to some extent shared or assumed by interpretative phenomenological analysis, include the social nature of the self. Language plays a central role in the emergence of both the self and the social group, and a common set of symbols and understanding is at the core of group life (Blumer, 1986; Pascale, 2011). Human beings are reflexive (Blumer, 1986). The nature of human action is emergent, dynamic and processional. Meaning and actions are socially constructed, and action is an out-come of the meanings ascribed to situations. Meanings are both experientially derived and culturally biased. To understand individuals' lived experiences, actions and situations requires obtaining access to their definitions and understandings.

The theory of symbolic interactionism is linked with three basic principles. Firstly, individuals act toward things based on the meanings that the things hold for them (Pascale, 2011). This first tenet forms the basis of symbolic interactionism, but is not a defining feature. Secondly, shared meanings are generated through human interaction (Helle, 2005). This implies that meaning in symbolic interaction is collective and not individually determined; nor is it intrinsic to objects. According to Reynolds and Herman-Kinney (2003), it is the source of meaning that is important to symbolic interactionism and that separates it from analytic realism. In symbolic interactionism, objects and events are never merely backdrops to interaction. Pascale (2011) proposed that individuals imagine not only the likely position of other individuals but also of objects and places with which they interact. Inanimate objects – whether social objects, abstract objects or physical objects (Blumer, 1969; cited in Smith & Bugni, 2006, p. 126) – can accordingly be understood to have a kind of agency in that they have profound and integral effects on human responses and interactions. This makes the field of material culture alive socially (Smith & Bugni, 2006, p. 144).

The perspective of symbolic interactionism can be used to explain social phenomena such as the experience of divorce. This perspective posits that individuals act in accordance with how they interpret the meanings of the world. This rests on the recognition that language is symbolic, and that words therefore do not summon forth meaning on their own but symbolise the meaning inferred by those using the words they choose (Helle, 2005). An individual's interpretation of the world thus depends upon his or her own reading of the symbols and details of everyday life (Pascale, 2011).

Methodology

Research Design
In general, qualitative methods are concerned with how individuals experience, describe and interpret a specified phenomenon (Matthew & Ross, 2014). They do so by ascribing meaning to the phenomenon. Thus, the focus of such methods is to produce a rich description of some aspect of human experience (Langdridge, 2007). This is in direct contrast to quantitative methods, "which are concerned with counting the amount of the phenomenon or some aspect thereof" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 2).

The present study used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in seeking to understand the meaning for the participants of their lived experiences of divorce (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). As emphasised in the literature, IPA studies do not test a hypothesis but instead rely on participants being experts in the field of their own lived experience to generate detailed insight into the phenomenon under investigation (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005; Smith, 2015; Smith & Osborn, 2003).

IPA evolved as "a distinctive approach to conducting qualitative research in psychology, offering a theoretical foundation and a detailed procedural data analysis guide. As such, it has been utilised in a burgeoning number of published studies" (Brocki & Wearden, 2006, p. 3). It is important to note here that the approach has its origin in fields of inquiry such as phenomenology and symbolic interactionism. These "hold that human beings are not passive perceivers of an objective reality, but rather that they come to interpret and understand their world by formulating their own biographical stories into a form that makes sense to them" (Brocki & Wearden, 2006, p. 3). It is due to this that IPA can be said to be part of the relativist ontology, with a symbolic interactionist perspective (Murray & Holmes, 2014; Smith, 1996).

Selection of Participants
Sampling in IPA studies tends to be purposive as well as broadly homogeneous, with a small sample size able to provide a sufficient perspective given adequate contextualisation (Chapman & Smith, 2002; Smith & Osborn, 2003). The goal is to select participants to illuminate a particular research question and to develop a full and texturally nuanced interpretation of the data. Thus, IPA studies tend to be concerned with examining differences and similarities in small samples (Matthews & Ross, 2014).

Since it is not a requirement for IPA, the researchers did not employ maximum variation sampling, that is, where researchers seek out participants who have a common experience but vary on as wide a variety of demographic characteristics as possible (Polkinghorne, 1989). Instead, the sampling was purposive and homogeneous. Thus, participants that were recruited shared the experience at the heart of the research and did not vary significantly in terms of demographic characteristics. The aim was to recruit individuals whose relative homogeneity was conducive to substantiating generalised claims regarding their shared experience. IPA studies are idiographic, in that there is little, if any, attempt to generalise beyond the particular sample. The focus of the present research was therefore on developing a detailed description of the divorce experience of a small number of black South African men who share that experience.

The study was granted ethical clearance by the Nelson Mandela University Research Ethics Committee – Human (REC-H) number H15-HEA-PSY-016 – before the study proceeded. It was acknowledged that, while it was important to meet the ethical criteria set by the REC-H before conducting the study, qualitative research also requires sustained reflection and review. The researchers maintained awareness of the extent to which talking about what could be a sensitive issue for the divorced men might constitute "harm". In line with IPA sampling criteria, a sample of eight divorced black South African men from the Eastern Cape was selected for the study. Seven of them were from Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality and one participant was from East London. The first two participants responded to an advertisement placed in a social newspaper on 22 June 2016. After failing to attract a minimum of eight participants with this advertisement, the researchers then advertised on a church networking website on 4 July 2016 and in two local commercial newspapers on 7 July 2016. Twelve prospective participants responded, and the researchers selected eight participants who met the inclusion criteria. Four were disqualified on the basis of the inclusion and exclusion criteria, two not having been culturally black but so-called "coloured" and two not having been legally married before the dissolution of their respective relationships.

Data Collection
The method of data collection used for this study was *phenomenological interviewing*, which Thompson, Locander, and Pollio (1989) have described as "the most powerful means of attaining an in-depth understanding of another person's experiences" (p. 138). The goal in phenomenological interviewing is to obtain a first person description of some specific domain of experience, where the participant largely sets the course of the dialogue (Cope, 2011). Although the researchers used a printed sheet of questions, it was used only as a guide. Most of the questions were loosely structured except for the first question, as suggested by Thompson et al. (1989), who stress that a phenomenological researcher must not prescribe the data flow, and thus the findings, with a priori questions regarding the phenomenon. The interview began with the broad question: *Can you tell me about your experience of divorce?* Subsequent questions were derived from the course of the dialogue.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data obtained followed the procedure of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This approach is dual faceted, in that it is both interpretative and phenomenological; while being concerned with the individual's subjective report of an experience, it views the analytical outcome as based on the joint reflections and frameworks of both participants and researchers (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Cope, 2011). IPA therefore "recognizes that the research exercise is a dynamic process" (Brocki & Wearden, 2006, p. 4). Whilst the researcher attempts to access the participant's personal world in order to gain "an insider's perspective" on it, such access both "depends on, and is complicated by, the researcher's own conceptions [which nevertheless are] required in order to make sense of that other personal world through a process of interpretative activity" (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999, pp. 218-219). IPA also acknowledges that interpretations are bounded not only by "participants' abilities to articulate their thoughts and experiences adequately", but by "the researcher's ability to reflect and analyse" (Brocki & Wearden, 2006, p. 5).

The principal objective of the analytic process was to understand the lived experiences of the participants and the meanings they attached to their experience of divorce and divorce adjustment. The findings are the researchers' interpretation of what the participants expressed of the meaning they ascribed to their lived experience. Due to this double hermeneutic, the analysis involves a high degree of subjectivity and is ultimately shaped by the researchers' interpretative frameworks. That "the truth claims of an IPA are always tentative" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 80) is therefore acknowledged.

Findings and Discussion

The aim of this research was to answer the question: "How do black South African men experience divorce?" It should, however, be noted that the experiences of the participants were revealed to the researchers through retrospective cross-sectional interviews, and therefore were not accessed directly (that is, by being observed). This implies that the researchers had to rely solely on the participants' narratives to access the lived meaning of their experience of divorce.

Attitude Towards Divorce

The findings indicate that the experience of divorce represents a painful process of disengagement in which a measure of temporary and psychological distancing is required to overcome the stressful nature of the experience. The participants' attitude towards divorce was mainly influenced by a spiritual understanding of marriage/divorce and cultural expectations, including seeing how one's significant other, who had also gone through the divorce, had handled it. One participant's account captured much of the participants' emphasis that time is a healer:

> *At first I was shocked and didn't even understand what was going on around me ... . I was just heartbroken ...then a month goes by and, as a man, I started asking myself why I was so upset?* (P1)

Another participant dramatically expressed the physical nature of the divorce experience in the following way:

> *At first it looked like a mountain and as time went by it became more like a molehill. I didn't think men experience such a thing as a broken heart but surely there is!* (P2)

The above statements suggest that participants naturally perceived divorce as a gendered experience in which "men don't cry". They are supposed to be strong and easily go through the divorce with a minimum of pain. The responses of the above two participants does not necessarily mean that the participants did not proceed to think about their situation and try to come to terms with the divorce. The following response by another participant highlights the very personal and challenging questions that he needed to resolve in his mind:

> *Did I make the right choice in the first place? Was she the right person for me? What wrong thing did I do? Could I have done something different? What could that have been?* (P3)

The perception of divorce seems significantly to shape how participants experienced divorce. This is the wider perceived attitude towards divorce that was expressed by the participants in the form of a spiritual understanding of divorce and marriage, and also cultural expectations, as well as the prior divorce experiences of significant others. Four participants felt that divorce is an acceptable aspect of family life:

> *Marriages fail; people divorce every day in my community. Two of my own brothers divorced and they went on to remarry. So, I was not the first and obviously not the last. As a man, I had to go through this process and remain strong.* (P2)

One participant saw marriage as a sacred covenant that should never be broken:

> *Malachi 2v16 says, "For the Lord God of Israel says that he hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts." What God put together no man shall separate it. God brings two people together in a marriage for life and no man should separate them. To me it was the darkest phase in my life. It took time for me to forgive myself. I prayed day and night.* (P4)

Another participant highlighted the following:

> *My parents said to me, "If she can't give you a child, why keep her? You can always find someone who will give us grandchildren." As a man, I agreed with them.* (P5)

The other participants seemed to hold preconceived societal views that there is stigma attached to divorce, even though none of them had, at a personal level, experienced any appreciable stigma. One participant commented on the ineffectiveness of disclosing that he is divorced when he said: *"People are not really helpful … they ask you, what type of man are you?"* But he is now able to make the vital distinction that:

> *I divorced, but that did not make you a failure in life, I was actually given a second chance at life.* (P6)

Another participant felt that:

> *As a culture we like to see people fall off their perches, …I do think we are an envious culture … we build people up to knock them down.* (P7)

A third participant expressed a similar view:

> *I suspect there's a general assumption around that, if a marriage fails, it is because the husband is abusing the wife. Or that he has found someone else to marry that's why he wants the divorce.* (P8)

These narratives offer a particular interpretation of the participants' attitude towards divorce as an experience of rationalisation. It was a masculinity rationalisation that drew on two preferred resources of making sense of marital dissolution, namely, power and control (Madhavan & Roy, 2012). This interpretation is based on insights into the participants' life and world and the range of experiential claims they made to support the reliability of their explanations. During the interviews, physical and emotional experiences were described as the participants reflected on the personal consequences, in terms of loss of power and control, of divorce.

The above findings may be attributed to the strongly patriarchal society that black South African men find themselves in as providers and protectors of the family (Hunter, 2006). Another reason for this kind of attitude may be a reflection of religiosity and the traditional role orientation of the participants. For that reason, divorce was more difficult for participants to accept, given that it deprived them of the opportunity to fulfil their roles and responsibilities as providers and protectors. Due to the particular cultural expectations of the participants, these findings differ from previous findings by Kulik

and Kasa (2014), Gaffal (2010), and Cohen and Finzi-Dottan (2012). The cultural expectations and coping resources of most participants from Western countries enable them to cope better with divorce. Such resources include levels of education that correlate with higher incomes, which enables them to remain involved in their children's lives post-divorce.

The attitude of participants towards divorce has been reported frequently in the divorce literature as a contributing factor to the adjustment process (Baum, 2003; Lin & Raghubir, 2005; Locker et al., 2010; Steiner et al., 2015; Waite & Gallagher, 2002). Some of the participants in the present study, who indicated that they were committed to their marriages, struggled with adjusting to divorce. They indicated that they could not trust a second marriage, as they were not yet over the first. This was compounded by the fact that most of the divorces involved infidelity, resulting in participants harbouring negative feelings in respect of their former spouses and lacking trust in new relationships.

Social Support

The reason that one of the participants found the divorce experience difficult to deal with was due to a

> *… strong commitment to my wife, which made it difficult for me to accept that she was having an affair with the family doctor.* (P4)

The feelings of hurt experienced by one participant, although temporary, may have exacerbated a sense of loneliness, heightened anxiety, and increased withdrawal due to his inability to share his concerns with others:

> *I had no one to talk to; no one understood what I was going through.* (P1)

Another participant felt that:

> *… in the end you are alone, very lonely, with no one to talk to after all those years in marriage.* (P6)

The other participant (P8) reinforced this point by saying that he did not receive any support from either family or friends during these difficult and trying times. For another participant (P2), the feelings of shame and embarrassment meant that he increasingly alienated himself from those around him: *I was pretty ashamed of the whole thing. I just couldn't explain to anyone what was going on.* The reason most of the participants had never confided in someone about what they were going through prior to being interviewed may reflect the cultural beliefs the participants share, as summed up by one of the participants (P5) when he said that *"It probably isn't very helpful if you tell people that you have marital problems"*. Another participant experienced difficulties in coming to terms with the reality of social

disengagement and isolation associated with the divorce experience when he said:

> *There was nobody around me to tell me any different ... no one who could kind of say to me "Look, you are not a failure; you tried but it didn't work out".* (P1)

The experiences of the participants resonate with previous studies on the impact that divorce stress has on the individual who initiated the divorce. It can include a loss of self-esteem, a sudden reduction in social stature, and a decline in status in the individual's own eyes as well as those of others (Cohen & Finzi-Dottan, 2012; Davis, Shaver, & Vernon, 2003; Frisby, Booth-Butterfield, Dillow, Martin, & Weber, 2012). While being unable to engage with affected relational actors was expected, two participants' cases highlight a more unhealthy process of social regression and self-stigmatised detachment. This led to psychological symptoms of severe depression that reflect an insecure attachment style (Gaffal, 2010). Those who displayed an insecure attachment style experienced negative divorce outcomes, as was indicated in the case of these two participants.

One participant's case highlights that even the last hope of support, that is, the individual's workplace, can suffer the emotional consequences of divorce:

> *I would arrive at work late and tired due to lack of proper sleep and my performance started deteriorating until I was fired. I wanted to be strong by not telling anyone at work what I was going through, but it cost me my job.* (P6)

It may be that the acute stress and feelings of impotence associated with the divorce experience radically affected the participant's performance in the workplace. Divorce stress can place severe strain on work relationships, to the extent of being dismissed, as in the case of one of the participants, and appears to be a common feature in the post-divorce period for black South African men.

An important concern in the divorce experience then becomes who the divorced individual can and does turn to during his or her descent into the immediate aftermath of divorce. Research has consistently highlighted the importance of embracing change after divorce (Amato, 2010; Gaffal, 2010; Hawkins & Fackrell, 2009). Factors that enhance the individual's ability to embrace change that emerged from the study included the availability and use of personal resources, such as income or educational qualifications. Not having these resources may make it difficult for the individual to think and plan ahead (Amato, 2010; Wang & Amato, 2000). Amato (2010) maintains that the ability of the individual to interact socially is a crucial factor in understanding why some individuals adjust more quickly than others, since they may seek out friends or family, and even professionals, to talk about the experience.

Participants in the present study experienced some level of stress due to the sense of betrayal and experience of hurt and loneliness resulting from the divorce. This created parenting stress, anxiety and depression in the case of those participants who had children from their marriages, thus inhibiting effective parenting (Hosegood, Richter, & Clarke, 2015). Most of the participants had to change homes, redefine their parental roles, and adapt to reduced contact with their children. The way in which the participants handled these immediate post-divorce phases influenced how successfully they adjusted in the post-divorce phase.

The individual's ability to accept change influences his or her adjustment processes (Amato, 2010; Hawkins & Fackrell, 2009; Lin & Raghubir, 2005). Participants struggled with accepting the divorce. One participant lost his job because he had become an alcoholic and was always absent from work. Other participants also began to perform poorly at work, although they managed to recover well and are now performing better.

Experiencing Pain

Betrayal was clearly detrimental to the participants, and there was a strong sense that betrayal led to deep hurt. Three participants' former spouses had been involved in extra-marital affairs. Another participant saw marriage as a sacred covenant between two people and did not expect anyone committing to it to break that covenant:

> *God brings two people together in a marriage for life and no man should separate them.* (P4)

Initially, the participants did not think of the divorce experience in physical terms, but later in the discussion they began talking about the physical manifestations of the divorce experience. A statement by one participant that *"I didn't think there was such a thing as a broken heart, but surely there is!"* (P8) is an example of how it had not been anticipated that divorce could be so painful, both physically and emotionally. Participants felt the pain in the heart, but nevertheless did not consult a physician, possibly because of fear of being seen as weak. It could presumably be the belief that "real men don't cry". They discussed their feelings regarding the divorce experience in terms of very real pain and distress and offered powerful accounts of somatised emotions.

One participant was *"deeply hurt and could feel the pain in my heart"* when he discovered that his wife of ten years was cheating with the family doctor:

> *The children used to call him uncle, and now I don't know what they call him .... You know each time I think about it, I feel like it happened yesterday. I can see every step that*

> *I went through to get the divorce. It was a painful and very slow process. Every time we go to court something comes up. If it's not about the children, it's about properties, and then the cost of lawyers.* (P4)

What hurt the above participant most was that when, on suspecting that his wife was having an affair, he had confronted her, she had denied it, and had only on the second occasion admitted it.

When he discovered that his wife was cheating with his best friend, another participant felt:

> *... less of a man and it's like everyone knew that I was a failure because I failed to make her pregnant* [using his hand to indicate a bulging stomach]. *I couldn't sleep or eat. All I could do was lie in bed the whole day. It was painful ... . I was also irritated by the idea that my wife was having an affair with my best friend, of all people!* (P3)

Since they had been trying for a child for three years with no success, he suspects that his friend could be the father of the child his ex-wife is carrying. Yet another participant (P7) said:

> *...after putting everything into the marriage ...this is how she paid me back* [smiling and verging on tears at the same time]. *I was angry with her, in fact it was more than just anger ...it was rage.*

He went on to say:

> *I sacrificed my career so that she could have a life ... then she dumps me because she is now educated. Yes ... she now has a degree from NMMU and I don't.*

For all the participants, the experience of pain was either emotional or physical. Two participants described the divorce as *"heart-breaking"*. A third put it this way:

> *...although we were both working, I was always the one paying accounts (home loan, furniture and clothing), but when we divorced she took everything .... It's like I never worked .... Each time I think about it, I become very angry and lose my cool. ...It was a horrible experience.* (P6)

The fourth participant (P8) was more concerned about the welfare of his children:

> *Now my children are calling someone else "Dad" ... that is not the way I wanted to raise them.*

The hurt from the experience of being divorced could have led to one of the participants abusing alcohol and ultimately losing his job. Although, for some of the participants, the pain was a direct result of infidelity by their former spouses, other participants reported being hurt by the divorce itself. To them divorce represented the loss of family, the loss of children, and the loss of the protection and provision role they had played as husbands and fathers.

For some of the participants, the major concerns were betrayal, separation and pain that were experienced in the pre-divorce phase. All these objects were threatening to the participants and they indicated their feelings in practical, concrete and even emotional ways. All the objects are interlinked and saturate the concern about marriage, love and divorce to such an extent that they must be acknowledged as essential elements in the black South African men's culture and life.

From the perspective of symbolic interactionism, the objects of concern, namely betrayal, pain and separation, have been understood as potentially dubious objects in some claims. These have, however, been verifiably real in these circumstances as a source of stress, panic, confusion and depression. The participants expressed these objects in both their intensity and their physical embodiment through the experiential claim – that the participants suffered emotional pain due to the marital dissolution. It also shows that the pain was severe and real, even when compared with other perhaps more visibly distressing events such as death, and, as such, suggests that the pain required medical help.

Several conceptual studies have highlighted the self-evident nature of the divorce experience and the related consequences (Amato, 2010; Amoateng, Heaton, & Kalule-Sabiti, 2007; Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009; Lamb, 2010; Madhavan & Roy, 2014). The obvious experience associated with black South African men after divorce is the loss of the nurturing function through the loss of custody, social disengagement and isolation. Findings of the research suggest that a divorce experience not only impacts upon the self, but also impacts upon the personal life of the individual, given its interconnection with other spheres of the individual's life, including the church, the community and the workplace. In adding to the available literature, the emotionality of divorce is obvious in the present study. This highlights that the divorce experience exerts an exceptional demand in terms of physical and emotional commitment, since the individual is faced with the complex interrelationships between the emotional and the societal expectations of divorce. Given the both "emotional and social costs" implied, the emotionality of divorce therefore provides "a more socialised view" of loss "than has hitherto been articulated" (Cope, 2011, p. 9). These costs thus become "the fundamental and inextricable social and affective characteristics" of the experience of divorce

that are its "defining features" (Cope, 2011, p. 9). As such, they point to the features that most crucially need to be taken into account in order to foster positive post-divorce adjustment (Kulik & Kasa, 2014; Moore & Govender, 2013).

The widespread impact of divorce experiences revealed by the study includes personal, social, relational and cultural factors (Amato, 2010; Steiner et al., 2015). What this demonstrates is that the divorce experience is both internal and external to the individual. Divorce, like marriage, is a public event in that it is observed by the respective families, friends and the network of contacts of the couple. This can cause stress and feelings of humiliation and remorse. The comments by one of the participants highlight that he felt he had "*failed"* the whole family, and he had consequently withdrawn from social interaction.

Findings from the research indicate that there are immediate post-divorce events that potentially impact adversely on the behavioural, emotional and health outcomes of the individual. These include legal costs, custody battles, including conflict over child support, division of property, and change of homes or schools. As divorce is a process and not an event, the findings of the research indicate that there are moderating factors that introduce variability in the way in which mediating events may influence the divorce experience (Amato, 2000; Gaffal, 2010; Wang & Amato, 2000). These moderating factors take the form of intrapersonal, interpersonal or structural roles and settings, and also relate to age, education, employment status and income.

The theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism offers a better understanding than do general stress theories (Amato, 2010) of how individuals view and understand marriage and divorce. Although studies of post-divorce adjustment outcomes have been criticised for focusing exclusively on negative outcomes (Ahrons, 1994; Barber & Eccles, 1992; Halford & Sweeper, 2013; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002), more recent studies have reported positive outcomes (Amato 2010; Gaffal, 2010; Kulik & Kasa, 2014; Steiner et al., 2015). This research

indicates that divorce stress tends mostly to occur before the actual divorce, although it is temporary and may be accompanied by positive outcomes (Amato, 2010).

The divorce experience of three of the participants suggests that they developed mild symptoms of what Ortman (2005) aptly described as "post infidelity stress disorder" (PISD). Its primary symptom is rage, as the individual becomes more impatient, irritable and angrier than usual. The participants described how they had needed time to come to terms with the divorce before they attempted to adjust. In the context of the present research, restoration-orientated dynamics emerged as having played a vital role in the immediate post-divorce experience. A restoration orientation, which involves therapeutic activities such as walking along the beach, was clearly important in one participant's adjustment. Engaging in a more directed therapeutic process through an employee wellness programme can be conceptualised as actively working through the divorce in order to construct meaning. This was not possible for most of the research participants due to the painful emotions and psychological and cultural barriers they faced, in that seeking professional help is considered to be indicative of weakness in black South African communities; thus, "men don't cry". However, comments by two of the participants provide confirmation that this meaning-making process is vital to adjustment.

Conclusion

This paper reported the divorce experience of a sample of black South African men based on their perceptions about divorce, feelings of stress, and suffering of pain. The findings have indicated several objects of concern for the participants, and these have been supported by the experiential claims of the participants. The objects included betrayal, hurt, loneliness, and trust. While the participants acknowledged that they had gone through a stressful process, they also accepted that they had learnt a great deal from the divorce. In general, the findings have indicated the limited range of coping behaviours that black South African men use during the divorce experience.

Referencing Format

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