Adult Adjustment to Relationship Separation

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B. Beh. Sc. (Hons)

This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Clinical Psychology within the School of Psychology, Griffith University.
SOURCES STATEMENT

I hereby certify that unless otherwise indicated, the work reported in this thesis is the result of original research conducted by the author. This material and data set has not been submitted for a higher degree at any other university.

Signed: ......................................................

Date: ..............................................
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ABSTRACT

Relationship separation is prevalent in Western society and ongoing problems for adults and children are common, resulting in high personal and social costs. A literature review revealed that no existing measure of separation adjustment assessed multiple domains of separation adjustment, and was psychometrically sound. Additionally, a literature review revealed that few studies have investigated change in separation adjustment over time using cognitive predictors. This thesis is a program of research investigating separation adjustment in recently separated adults. Five studies were conducted with three main aims: (1) to develop a multidimensional, psychometrically reliable and valid measure of separation adjustment; (2) to assess the trajectory of separation adjustment over time; and (3) to test the hypothesis that certain cognitive variables predict the trajectory of separation adjustment.

A conceptualisation of separation adjustment was developed consisting of the following five domains: Connection to the former partner, loneliness and emotional negativity (referred to as lonely negativity), parenting negotiation, parent-child relationship and general psychological adjustment. The Problems After Separation Test (PAST) was developed to reflect the first four of the five domains. In Study 1, 268 participants separated for up to 18 months, were recruited to assess the factor structure and internal consistency of the PAST. In Study 2, 209 participants were recruited to assess the stability of the factor structure, and temporal stability. In Study 3, participants from Study 2 were used to obtain convergent and divergent validity. The results of the first three studies showed that separation adjustment is a multidimensional construct, and that the PAST is a reliable and valid measure of separation adjustment.

Study 4 aimed to assess the trajectory of separation adjustment over a 6 month period using the PAST and another measure of general psychological adjustment.
Participants from both Study 1 and 2 were used, and a longitudinal cohort sequential design was employed. The sample consisted of three cohorts: those separated for up to six months, those separated between 6 and 12 months, and those separated between 12 and 18 months. The results showed that connection to the former partner, lonely negativity, and general psychological adjustment improved over time, but parent-child relationships and parenting negotiation were stable, and chronic parenting problems were common. Men showed greater parent-child relationship problems than women, possibly because men were most likely to be the non-resident parent.

Participants separating from a de facto relationship reported only slightly more problems on lonely negativity, general psychological distress and parent-child relationships than participants separating from a marriage. Study 4 also provides information on clinical and reliable change, suggested cut-offs that might be used to define normal, moderate and severe adjustment problems, and attrition analyses.

Using participants from Study 2, Study 5 aimed to assess cognitive predictors of change on connection to the former partner, lonely negativity and psychological distress. The cognitions assessed at each data collection were dysfunctional attitudes, attachment style, causal attributions, threat appraisal, and self-efficacy. Causal attributions were obtained by asking participants “For three minutes tell me about the problems you had in your relationship and what lead to the separation”. The responses were transcribed, a coding manual was devised, and inter-rater reliability of coding was good. Cross-sectionally, the majority of cognitions were associated with one or more domains of separation adjustment, however longitudinally, cognitions did not predict change in separation adjustment over a 6-month period. C cognitions themselves were found to be somewhat variable, which is not surprising given that stressful life events,
such as relationship separation would alter cognitions. Other variables that might be responsible for changes in separation adjustment trajectory are discussed.

The results of the combined 5 studies have both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, separation adjustment is a construct made up of distinct domains which have different trajectories. Connection, lonely negativity and psychological adjustment generally represent transient problems. Although the current research found that a non-trivial minority of participants continued to show distress on these domains two years post separation. On the other hand, parenting negotiation and the parent-child relationship was a chronic problem for many separated people, particularly men. Practically, the results of the current research suggests that most therapeutic attention should be directed towards improving parenting adjustment post separation. Limitations of the current research and suggestions for future research are discussed.
CHAPETER 1- SIGNIFICANCE OF RELATIONSHIP SEPARATION
ADJUSTMENT

Robert and Laura separated after 18 years of marriage. Initially they each experienced sadness that their relationship had ended. Both people reported sleeping problems, and had difficulty concentrating at work. Robert and Laura each had many changes to negotiate, including organising new living arrangements, some financial hardship, renegotiating parenting arrangements for their two teenage children, and changes in their friendship circles. Each reported that it was a very difficult period in their life.

A year later Laura had developed a new circle of friends, and started dating a man she met while on vacation. She was doing well at work, had recently been promoted, and had adapted to her new living arrangements. She reported that caring for her children by herself was challenging, and arranging child visitation with Robert was sometimes difficult. She still had moments where she felt sad that the marriage had ended, particularly on their wedding anniversary, but for the most part she was relieved to be out of the relationship.

Robert, on the other hand, was not adjusting to the separation. A year after the separation he still experienced significant upset, and was taking medication prescribed for depression. Robert’s supervisor at work had, for the most part, been understanding. However, the supervisor recently discussed with Robert that Robert was not performing well at work. Robert was rarely seeing his children, felt lonely and depressed, and stated that he no longer had anything to live or work for.

The relationship with a life partner is considered by most people as their most important relationship (Montgomery, 1995), and dissolution of that relationship has
profound consequences. There is the realisation that their most significant relationship has ended, and each partner has to adapt to numerous life changes. As the case of Robert and Laura illustrates, there are commonalities in what most adults experience after a relationship breakdown, but there are also considerable individual differences in adaptation to relationship separation. Almost all adults initially experience substantial distress, but only a minority of adults show chronic, severe maladjustment problems.

This thesis is a report on a program of research assessing and predicting adjustment of adults to recent couple relationship breakdown.

This chapter describes the nature and significance of relationship separation adjustment. Rates of separation across nations, consequences of poor separation adjustment, and models explaining the nature of separation adjustment are reviewed. Chapter 2 provides a conceptualisation of relationship separation adjustment, and critiques some of the existing methods of measuring adjustment to relationship breakdown. Chapter 3 reviews the literature on predictors of separation adjustment. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 report the findings of the research program. Chapter 4 is a report of the development and validation of a new measure of separation adjustment. Chapter 5 describes how people’s adjustment changes over time, and Chapter 6 assesses the ability of cognitive variables to predict separation adjustment. Finally, Chapter 7 is a discussion of the current program of research.

Relationship Separation Defined

This thesis is concerned with the adjustment of recently separated adults from a committed couple relationship. The terms relationship separation and relationship breakdown will be used interchangeably to mean the end of a committed intimate relationship. A committed couple relationship is defined as either a marriage, or
continuous cohabitation for 12 months or longer in a romantic relationship. Twelve months continuous cohabitation was chosen because a period of cohabitation is often considered to constitute a high level of commitment to the relationship. For example, recent legal changes in Canada essentially give the same legal status to de facto and married couples, once de facto couples have lived together for at least 12 months (Smock & Gupta, 2002).

The point of time at which relationship separation occurs is not easily defined in some couples (e.g., Amato, 2000). For example, while some couples separate and move residence immediately after they decide to end their relationship, other couples remain in the same house together sharing expenses. Some couples separate and reconcile several times before they end their relationship (Kitson & Langlie, 1984; Maneker & Rankin, 1997). Some couples have continued contact and socialise together, even though their romantic relationship has ended. In each of these examples the partners might or might not define themselves as separated. For this thesis, relationship separation is the act of permanently dissolving the couple relationship. This involves, for example, moving out of a shared home, or moving into a spare room, or verbal discussions leading to the finalisation of the relationship. A decision is made by at least one party that the intimate couple relationship has ended. Within this definition, couples that have separated might continue sharing expenses and child rearing responsibilities, and have continued contact with each other.

Relationship separation is different to divorce. Divorce is a legal process of ending a marriage. In Australia, separation for at least 12 months is necessary and sufficient grounds for divorce. However, many married couples that separate do not file for divorce. In the United States, for every 100 divorced people, there are 162 people who refer to themselves as separated (Bloom, Hodges, Caldwell, Systra & Cedrone,
Much of the previous research on relationship breakdown adjustment has only used divorced individuals (e.g., Wang & Amato, 2000), presumably because of the convenience of obtaining subjects though court files. However, divorced participants are not representative of all those who separate.

Rates and Influences on Relationship Separation

Data on the prevalence of separation, rather than divorce, are hard to collect. Divorce statistics are the most common indicators provided for the rate of relationship dissolution. As shown in Table 1.1, the rates of divorce vary substantially across countries. The rates are highest in Western countries, with the United States reporting the highest rate. Culture, economic prosperity, and ease of gaining divorce are some of the reasons provided to explain the high rates of divorce in Western society.

In Australia and Canada about 40% of marriages end in divorce (Le Bourdais, Marcil-Gratton, 1996; McDonald, 1995), while in the United States about half of all first marriages end in divorce (Amato & Booth, 2000). Demographers have argued that these figures greatly underestimate the actual rates of relationship dissolution. If couples that separate but never file for divorce are included in estimates, dissolution occurs in about 66% of USA first marriages (Castro-Martin & Bumpass, 1989). Furthermore, divorce rates only tell us about marriages that dissolve. De facto couples are believed to have an even higher rate of relationship separation (Donovan & Jackson, 1990; Green, 1983; Smock & Manning, 1997).
### Table 1.1 Crude Divorce Rates in Westernised Countries (ABS 3310.0, 2000).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country and Year of Statistic</th>
<th>Annual Divorce Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia (2000)</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada (1996)</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China (1998)</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuba (1997)</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong (1997)</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico (1996)</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand (1997)</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden (1998)</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States of America (2000)</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom (1996)</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Rate is the number of divorces per 1000 people.

Over the last three to four decades there has been an increase in the number of couples that live together either prior to getting married, or instead of getting married. The term “de facto” relationship means existing in fact, whether legally recognised or not. Rates of de facto relationships in Western countries range between 7% (USA) to 19% (United Kingdom) of all couple relationships (Pinsof, 2002).

Cohabitation has recently become a socially normative arrangement prior to getting married (McDonald, 1995). In Australia in 1976, 16% of married couples reported living together before marriage; this rose to 29% of married couples by 1980, and jumped to 71% in 2000 (ABS, 2000). While cohabitating often is a transitory period before marriage, some couples cohabitate long-term and opt to raise a family within this
arrangement. For instance, in 1996 in Canada, 1 in 7 couples were cohabitating, with half of these relationships bearing children (Statistics Canada, 1999). McDonald (1995) argues that cohabitation is preferred to marriage by some couples as those couples prefer the social meaning they attach to cohabitation rather than marriage. For example, some people associate marriage with conventionality, or male dominance of the relationship, and associate cohabitation with greater flexibility and individual autonomy (Smock & Gupta, 2002).

The rate of de facto relationship separation is less well researched than the rate of marriage dissolution. Most demographers suggest that de facto unions are more transient and less stable than marriages (e.g., Manting, 1994; Trussell, Rodriguez, Vaughan, 1992), usually ending through marriage or relationship separation. One quarter of cohabitating relationships in Canada had dissolved after a 2-year period with approximately equal proportions exiting by marriage and separation (Wu & Pollard, 2000). Another study conducted in Canada, reported a slightly higher rate with approximately 24% of cohabitating relationships separating within 3 years (Wu & Balakrishnan, 1995). In the United States between half and two thirds of cohabitating couples separate within 2 years of the commencement of cohabitation (Bumpass & Sweet, 1989; Smock & Manning, 1997). Overall, while divorce rates are considered high, cohabitation separation rates are higher.

In Western countries the divorce rate has risen since the turn of the century. For example, compared to 100 years ago in Australia, the divorce rate has increased 12-fold (Figure 1.1). There was a transient spike in divorce rates in the mid 1970’s, which often is attributed to the introduction of the Family Law Act in 1975 allowing a large back log of desired divorces to proceed. Aside from that spike, rates increased across the 1960’s and 1970’s, and have been relatively stable for the past 25 years.
There has been considerable debate concerning why the divorce rate in Western countries has risen. Demographers generally argue that a number of social and legal shifts occurring throughout this time have changed the nature of how people enter, define and exit relationships. Some of these changes include:

1. Changing social attitudes make it more acceptable for people in dissatisfied marriages to divorce (Chester, 1977). In fact, it is becoming much more common for people to enter a series of committed relationships across their lifetime. It appears that the stigma of divorce is diminishing.

2. Legal changes in many countries, particularly the introduction of no-fault divorce laws, made it easier for unhappy couples to divorce (Carmichael et al, 1997). Prior to the no-fault divorce laws in Australia, grounds for divorce were based mainly on adultery or desertion. In numerous countries, a dramatic increase in divorces occurred in the years that directly followed the introduction of these no-fault divorce laws. For example, the Family Law Act introduced no-fault divorce

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**Figure 1.1.** Australian divorce rates (Carmichael, Webster and McDonald, 1997)
in Australia in 1975, and in 1976 the divorce rate more than doubled from the previous year as the backlog of couples wanting to separate under the old legislation took advantage of the changes (see Figure 1.1).

3. Changes in government policy lead to the introduction of financial support for single parents. This has allowed separation for people, particularly women, who previously would not have been able to consider divorce for financial reasons (Carmichael et al, 1997). For example, in Australia, the Supporting Mother’s Benefit was introduced in 1973 and the Child Support Agency Scheme in 1988. These legal changes provided government financial support to separated women, and legally mandated enforcement of child support payments by separated parents.

4. Women are now more likely to be in paid employment, and be able to support themselves financially than in the past. For women in unsatisfying marriages this makes divorce an option that might not have been financially possible in the past (Harrison, 1986). In the United States there is a correlation between women’s labour force participation and divorce rates (South, 1985), suggesting that some women might still remain in unhappy relationships if they lack the financial means to exit.

5. Stressful world or local events and economic cycles also appear to play a pivotal role in divorce rates. For example, in Australia after World War two, the divorce rate rose more than 100% as hurried wartime marriages, war-related separations and trauma resulting from war took its toll (Carmichael et al, 1997). After Hurricane Hugo in South Carolina, Cohan and Cole (2002) discovered through time-series analysis that the year following the hurricane, divorce rates increased in the 24 counties declared disaster areas compared with the other 22
counties in the state. In addition, the results of American time series data shows that times of prosperity are associated with reduced divorce rates (South, 1985).

6. Increased human life expectancy has made it more likely that individuals in marriages will change and grow apart, and ultimately divorce. Pinsof (2002) asserts that, in the pre-industrial era, marriages lasted on average 15 years, with most marriages ending through death. Pinsof (2002) reports that the average duration of marriages now is not that dramatically different than it was 100 years ago. It is just that now marriages most often end in divorce rather than the death of a partner.

In summary, there is much speculation and debate on why there has been an increase in divorce rates. It is likely that a combination of the above legal and social changes has influenced the rate.

Consequences of Relationship Separation

Reviews of the last three decades of research on relationship dissolution (e.g., Amato, 2000; Bloom, Asher & White, 1978; Kitson & Morgan, 1990) consistently conclude that those who divorce, and their children, are worse off in many ways than their married counterparts. This section will briefly document some of the differences between married and separated/divorced people, and then present some models that attempt to explain separation adjustment.

Relationship Separation and Health in Adults

Separating and divorced individuals experience lower psychological well-being, lower levels of happiness and higher levels of depression than do their married counterparts (e.g., Doherty, Su, & Needle, 1989; Mastekaasa, 1994; Simon and Marcussen, 1999; Tschann, Johnston, & Wallerstein, 1989). Bruce and Kim (1992)
compared 54 people who reported recently separating or divorcing from their partner to three other groups of subjects; married, unhappily married, and long-term separated or divorced. They found that recently separated or divorced people had higher levels of major depression than any other group. In a large, national British sample, divorced mothers reported higher levels of depression than married mothers (Hope, Power and Rodgers, 1999). Simon and Marcussen (1999) compared individuals who experienced a separation with individuals getting married. They found that symptoms of depression increased after a separation, and decreased after marriage. Finally, Shapiro (1996) found that divorced adults compared to remarried adults report higher rates of psychological distress. Each of these findings demonstrates a correlation between separation and distress, but do not show that separation causes distress. For instance, there is evidence that depression increases the risk of marital separation (Beach, 2002).

There is an association between separation and high levels of alcohol consumption (Fillmore, Golding, Leino, Ager & Ferrer, 1994; Linsky, Straus & Colby, 1984; Magura & Shapiro, 1989; McMahon, Davidson, Gersh & Flynn, 1991; Stack & Bankowski, 1994), though the research on this association is predominantly cross-sectional. For example, Stack and Bankowski (1994) obtained reports from a sample of 374 divorced persons that indicated elevated risks of drinking relative to married persons. An increase was found in substance use, including alcohol consumption, marijuana and other illicit drugs over time for separated women (Doherty et al, 1989).

Research tends to support a bi-directional influence between alcohol abuse and relationship separation, with alcohol abuse being predicted by marital problems, and alcohol abuse predicting a deteriorating relationship. Quigley and Leonard (2000) found that drinking patterns in the first year of marriage predicted violence in later years.
Violence in turn has been shown to be a predictor of relationship separation (Lawrence & Bradbury, 2001).

Across many indices of individual psychological disorders, including alcohol abuse, depression and anxiety, the individual disorder and relationship problems exacerbate each other (Halford, Bouma & Kelly, 1999; Snyder & Whisman, 2004). Thus, the high rate of individual problems in separated people probably reflects both individual characteristics that increase the risk of separation, plus the effects of separation itself.

Separated individuals tend to have poorer physical health, and have lower life expectancy than other people (e.g., Verbrugge, 1979). Kiecolt-Glaser, Kennedy, Malkoff, Fisher, Spicher & Glaser (1988) reported that separated/divorced men were more distressed, lonelier, and reported more illnesses than married men, and showed substantial immunosuppression. Separated individuals, especially men, also display higher age-specific mortality rates than married individuals (e.g., Hu & Goldman, 1990; Koskenuuo, Kaprio, Lonnnqvist & Sarna, 1986; Trovato & Lauris, 1989; Zick & Smith, 1991). However, these health and mortality patterns are correlational, and causality is unclear.

Finally, separated individuals are more likely to suicide than married individuals (Cantor & Slator, 1995). Cantor & Slater (1995) examined the separation and divorce phases of marital breakdown separately as predictors of suicide. They reported that separated (as compared with married) males were six times more likely to suicide, with young men (e.g., 21-30) at greatest risk. Separated female suicide rates were not significantly elevated in the separation phase, but in the divorce phase, both male and female rates were elevated compared to married people. Hu and Goldman (1990) found similar elevated suicide rates in 16 developed countries in divorced individuals.
relative to married persons. Hemstrom (1996) examined data from the Swedish Consensus-linked Deaths Registry and also found that suicide was higher in divorced than married individuals. Again, these studies do not demonstrate that relationship separation causes suicidal behaviour, rather they demonstrate a correlation between suicide and separation.

Separation and Health in Children

The focus of this thesis is on the impact of separation on the adjustment of separating adults. However, it is important to acknowledge the impact of adult relationship breakdown on children. On average, divorcing adults parent less effectively, and their relationship with their children is poorer than married parents (e.g., Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992; Umberson & Williams, 1993). Divorced parents also spend less time, are less supportive, provide harsher discipline, and provide less supervision to their children than married parents (e.g., Astone & McLanahan, 1991, Thomson, McLanahan & Curtin, 1992).

Meta analyses (Amato & Keith, 1991; Amato, 2001) and a large number of studies in the 1990’s (e.g. Kurdek, Fine & Sinclair, 1994; Teachman, Paasch & Carver, 1996) show that children from divorced parents consistently show poorer adjustment than children from intact families with a small effect size ($d = .17$; Amato, 2001). These poor outcomes include low academic success, more conduct problems and more psychological maladjustment.

The reasons that adjustment in children of divorcing parents is somewhat worse than for intact families is not entirely clear. Exposure to high levels of parental conflict predicts poor children’s adjustment (Booth & Amato, 1996). Hetherington (1999) found that the extent that children directly witnessed parental conflict, but not the level of parental conflict itself, was associated with adolescent behaviour problems.
Interparental conflict also interferes with children’s attachment to their parents (Hinshaw, Boris & Zeanah, 1999). This is particularly important, given that a positive parent-child relationship can ameliorate the negative effects divorce has on children and adolescents (Hines, 1997). Thus, witnessing conflict between parents has a very large impact on how children adjust. This suggests that couples who are severely distressed, and have ongoing conflict are likely to have distressed children.

In summary, the mental and physical health of separating adults is worse than married adults. There is also less effective parenting, and more conflict in separated than married parents, which can lead to poor adjustment in their offspring. However, there is much difference in how people cope and adjust after a separation. Some people may recover quickly with limited disruption to their lives, while others remain significantly distressed for a long period of time. The question then becomes why are some people prone to more adjustment difficulties than others after a separation?

Models of the Effects of Separation

Is Relationship Separation a Disruptive or Normal Process?

There are two separate viewpoints emerging on how relationship separation should be viewed. The more prominent and researched viewpoint proposes that relationship separation is a disruptive, stressful process that often has significant negative effects (e.g., Amato, 2000). Within this perspective, relationship separation is undesirable, and people often advocate procedures to try to enhance couple relationships and reduce risk of separation (e.g., Halford, Markman, & Kline, 2003). The alternative viewpoint proposes that relationship separation and divorce is a normal social transition that is part of the life course of most families (e.g., Pinsof, 2002) and that separation can have both good and poor outcomes. Pinsof (2002) argues that the duration of marriage now is no different than it was 100 years ago, except that partners
were separated through death. He argues that it is natural for people to change, grow apart, and separate.

Separation and divorce appear to be undesirable because, as previously discussed, compared to those individuals who stay together, separating couples and their children have poorer health and well-being. Though it is difficult to establish whether these negative outcomes are due to separation. Furthermore, most young unmarried adults expect to marry at some point in their lives, and expect that marriage will be life long (Glezer, 1997). Even couples who opt for cohabitation instead of marriage hope their committed relationship will last (McDonald, 1995). Most young people also endorse the view that separation is undesirable, but do agree that separation is a legitimate option to end an unsatisfying marriage (Glezer, 1997). In sum, relationship separation is the non-preferred option, and while it may be prevalent in some Western countries, it is not viewed as desirable or a normal transition.

In arguing that separation is generally undesirable, it is also acknowledged that it is undesirable to remain in a marriage or other committed relationship that is unsatisfactory. In some instances partners may be better off after separation. For example Aseltine and Kessler (1993) showed that among respondents who reported serious marital problems, separation and divorce is associated with a decrease in depression. Likewise, Cohen, Klein and O'Leary (2004) found that many people who were previously depressed recovered post separation.

Causal Versus Social Selection Models of Separation Adjustment

Three general models have been proposed to explain the adjustment of adults after separation. The crisis model suggests that relationship breakdown causes initial distress, but over time people adjust and return to pre-separation functioning. The chronic strain/stress model suggests that persistent stresses (e.g., economic difficulties,
sole parenting), continue after separation and that a return to pre-separation functioning is not likely. Mastakaasa (1994) noted that this idea is akin to the idea that marriage is beneficial, and that living as a single person is less satisfactory than living in a marital relationship. The third theory is the selection perspective, sometimes referred to as social selection. This model suggests that personal and problematic individual characteristics (e.g., poor family-of-origin experiences, personality dysfunction, alcohol dependence) predispose the person to relationship separation and lower scores on well-being after a separation. Adjustment problems post separation are argued to reflect relatively stable individual vulnerabilities.

There is some empirical support for each of the models. Many studies show that people report severe distress around the time of separation, and in most people the distress is alleviated two to three years post-separation (Booth & Amato, 1991; Kincaid and Caldwell, 1995; Hetherington, Law & O'Connor, 1993; Jordan, 1989; Kitson, 1992). This suggests the acute crisis of separation has a major but transient effect. However, other studies find significant ongoing distress after separation, with the exception of those who remarry (e.g., Aseltine & Kessler, 1993). These results suggest that separation can induce chronic adjustment problems.

There is also some research support for the selection hypothesis. Wertlieb, Budman, Demby and Randall (1984) found that the utilisation of medical and mental health facilities was higher among individuals who later divorced than among those who remained married, suggesting poorer premorbid well-being. However, this finding might reflect the health effects of relationship distress leading up to separation. Also supporting the selection hypothesis, early negative family-of-origin experiences may make people more vulnerable to later relationship separation. For example, people with negative family-of-origin histories such as parental divorce and violence, have poorer...
couple communication, which is a predictor for divorce (Halford, Sanders & Behrens, 2000; Sanders, Halford & Behrens, 1999).

A number of the studies that lend support to the selection hypothesis also provide support for the causal model. For instance, Davies, Avison and McAlpine (1997) found that many divorced mothers had histories of family-of-origin difficulties, including weak attachments and depression even prior to marriage. However, the association between divorce and depression remained significant even after the family-of-origin factors were controlled for, suggesting that separation at least exacerbates the vulnerability to depression.

Some studies lend support to some combination of the three models. For example, Lorenz, Simons, Conger, Elder, Johnson and Chao (1997) found depression increased significantly for women soon after the divorce, but then diminished over the next three years. However, those women divorced for three years were still higher on depression than married women. Unfortunately, like the majority of studies investigating separation adjustment, Lorenz et al (1997) did not measure pre-separation functioning. This makes it difficult to know if the divorced mothers had normal mood before the onset of relationship problems. If the divorced and married women displayed similar levels of depression prior to the onset of relationship problems, then the higher depression in divorced women three years later would support the chronic stress model. Alternatively, the divorced women might have been more depressed than the married women initially, but returned to the same level of functioning as they experienced prior to the separation, thus supporting the selection model. It is possible that acute stress, chronic stress and selection effects operate together.

The possible interaction of acute and chronic stress with selection effects can be illustrated using a case example. An individual with alcohol problems is at high risk for
relationship problems and separation (Quigley & Leonard, 2000). Individuals with alcohol abuse often report increasing drinking in response to stress (Marlatt, 1976; Keane & Lisman, 1982; Sayette, 1993). Therefore, their drinking behaviour makes them vulnerable to separation, and increased consumption at the time of separation. The stress of separation may continue for some time (e.g., financial hardship, litigation and child care responsibilities). During this time their drinking behaviour remains elevated relative to their pre-separation drinking levels. Hence, conceptualising this case would draw on a combination of the acute and chronic stress models, and the social selection model.

The stress-diathesis model of coping is a framework within which to integrate the three models. Hill (1949) first proposed a family stress and coping model to describe families' responses to war separation and reunion. Building on Hill's model, McCubbin and Peterson (1983) proposed a stress-diathesis model to describe post crisis adaptation to families who had husbands/fathers missing in action in Vietnam. The model, or adaptations of the model, have subsequently been utilised by many researchers investigating relationship separation adjustment (e.g., Buehler, Hogan, Robinson & Levy, 1985; Plummer & Koch-Hattem, 1986; Plunkett, Sanchez, Henry & Robinson, 1997; Tschann et al, 1989; Wang & Amato, 2000). The theory proposes that adjustment results from the interplay between compounding stressors both before and after separation, personal resources that assist in meeting the demands of the separation, and perceptions or appraisals of the separation experience. Lavee, McCubbin and Olson (1987) added that the families' resources and perceptions partially mediate or buffer the effects of stressors and strains on adjustment.

The stress-diathesis model has generally only been associated with the crisis and chronic stress models. Yet the selection hypothesis is also represented when
assessing personal resources. For example, Amato (2000) discussed the importance of moderating factors, and asked the question, “what factors make some individuals more vulnerable than others to divorce-induced stress?” (p. 1276). He then goes on to discuss personal resources of the individual that moderate adjustment. Similarly, Tschann et al (1989) show that better pre-separation psychological functioning for women positively influenced later post-separation adjustment. Hence, the concepts inherent in the selection theory of separation adjustment could be represented in a more comprehensive model of stress and coping theory post separation. Specific factors of the model will be introduced further in Chapters 2 and 3.

The stress-diathesis model has the ability to explain not only poor adjustment but also good adjustment. As Pinsof (2002) noted, varying outcomes occur post separation. Relationship breakdown is not always associated with poor outcome. As noted earlier, adjustment levels of some individuals may actually improve after a separation. For example, women leaving a violent relationship are generally better adjusted one year after separation compared to when they were in the relationship (Gortner, Berns, Jacobson & Gottman, 1997).

In summary, there is a high prevalence of separation in most Western countries, and it can have negative outcomes for both adults and children. Causal and selection processes can be integrated within a stress-diathesis-coping model of relationship separation to understand adjustment outcomes. The following chapter will analyse what constitutes adjustment, and how researchers have measured separation adjustment.
CHAPTER 2 - ASSESSMENT OF RELATIONSHIP SEPARATION ADJUSTMENT

This chapter focuses on the conceptualisation and measurement of relationship separation adjustment. The first half of this chapter is a critique of existing conceptualisations, and presentation of a conceptualisation developed for the current research. The second half of the chapter focuses on measuring separation adjustment and includes an examination of the psychometric properties needed in a measure, and a critique of the existing measures.

Existing Definitions of Separation Adjustment

Relationship separation involves specific challenges, such as adjusting to being single, single/sole parenting, or becoming a non-resident parent, and any definition of relationship separation adjustment needs to be sensitive to these special characteristics of separation. In one of the earliest studies of divorce adjustment, Goode (1956, p.19) proposed that divorce adjustment involves: “a disruption of role sets and patterns and of existing social relations, that is incorporated into the individual’s life pattern, such that the roles accepted and assigned do not take the prior divorce into account as the primary point of reference”. This definition suggests that the separated person assumes different roles, and reshuffles their social networks in order to establish themselves separately from the former partner and the marriage. Many of the conceptualisations that follow incorporate this idea.

Over 20 years later, Spanier and Castro (1979) content analysed interviews from a small sample selected from divorce court records. They suggested that separated people need to make two overlapping adjustments. The first adjustment is to the ending of the marriage, which includes dealing with the legal process, working out property
settlements, and custody arrangements where necessary, and dealing with persons in one’s social network. It also includes coping with the emotional effects of the separation such as feelings about the former spouse (e.g., love, hate, bitterness, and failure), and more general feelings such as depression, euphoria, relief and guilt. The second part of the adjustment process is setting up a new life-style which includes finding a new residence, living on less money, getting a job or applying for welfare, and adjusting to single parenting or limited access visits. It also includes finding new friends and intimate relationships, and an emotional adjustment to setting up a new lifestyle (e.g., feelings such as fear, frustration, loneliness or inadequacy and, possible feelings of freedom, happiness and heightened self-esteem when adjustment is accomplished) (Spanier & Castro, 1979).

Spanier and Castro’s (1979) concept of separation adjustment includes a wide variety of behaviours, thoughts, feelings and events that can be experienced after separation. The concept also incorporates some of the earlier ideas by Goode (1956) with regard to dealing with social networks and setting up a new life-style. However, the Spanier and Castro (1979) definition confuses aspects of adjustment and predictors of adjustment. For example, issues such as changes in finances, custody and residence could be seen as influencing separation adjustment rather than representing it. However it is difficult to differentiate predictors of adjustment, and adjustment itself because adjustment is a process that occurs over time, and generally is not considered linear (Amato, 2000). For instance, spending little time with one’s children maybe a predictor of the separation adjustment variable depression. However, the more depressed the person becomes, the less they may want to spend time with their children.
Perhaps as a response to the complex conceptualisation provided by Spanier and Castro (1979), several simpler definitions were proposed. Kitson (1982) argued that attachment\(^1\) to the former partner was central to separation adjustment. Berman (1988) conceptualised attachment as a mixture of negative and positive emotions, including anger and caring, and longing for the former partner. Parkes (1972) argued that attachment includes recurrent thoughts and images of the former spouse, attempts to contact or learn about him or her, feelings of emptiness, loneliness, and panic when the former spouse is not accessible, and positive feelings about the former spouse.

Another way researchers have tried to conceptualise separation adjustment is by applying constructs that are not specific to relationship separation. For instance, Gray and Shields (1992) described separation adjustment in terms of three phases of mourning (e.g., urge to recover the lost object, disorganisation, and reorganisation). Researchers also have used general indices of adjustment such as distress, depression and self-esteem when assessing adjustment (e.g., Doherty et al, 1989; Kincaid & Caldwell, 1995; Stewart, Schwebel & Fine, 1986; Tschann et al 1989). However, neither the mourning model, nor general indices of well-being are likely to encompass the complex experience of separation adjustment. For instance, a bereavement analogy does not encompass adjustment to co-parenting post separation. Similarly, just focusing on depression as a response to separation does not encompass the challenges of co-parenting.

\(^1\) Attachment as described by Kitson (1982) is somewhat different to the attachment construct developed by Bowlby (1973). In attachment theory, attachment refers to internal models of attachment that are argued to remain relatively stable across the life span (Bowlby, 1973). In contrast, attachment in separation adjustment is an emotional response to a former partner.
Separation adjustment also has been argued to be analogous to the experience of traumatic stress. Nearly thirty years ago Weiss (1975, p139) suggested that separated individuals often experience, “an alarm reaction, including hyper-alertness to indications of the lost figure’s return, great restlessness, and feelings of fear or panic. Difficulties in sleeping and, to a lesser extent, loss of appetite are also expressions of heightened vigilance”. Hyper-alertness, restlessness, fear and panic, and difficulties sleeping are all associated with responses to traumatic stress (Foa & Kozac, 1986), and some individuals may experience trauma-related symptoms after separation.

Avoidance is also considered a part of the traumatic stress response, and avoidance of separation-related stimuli has been reported in people after separation. For instance, it is common for non-resident parents, mostly the males, to retreat from their children, citing that the experience of seeing their children, and having contact with their former partner as too difficult for them to manage (Loewen, 1988). Loewen (1988, p, 205) suggested that some non-residential fathers, “cultivate a certain numbness, not wanting to answer friends questions about their children, not wanting even to think about their children, because thinking about them can be painful”.

Only one study has specifically assessed traumatic symptoms. Thabes (1997) assessed traumatic responses in women who on average had been divorced for 14 years. She used the Impact of Event Scale (IES, Horowitz, Wilner, & Alvarez, 1979), and found that 5.5% of the sample continued to have intrusive thoughts, and 8% displayed avoidant reactions and thoughts related to the separation. This sample had been separated for a long time, and people more recently separated might have even higher rates of these traumatic symptoms.

In 1990, Kitson and Morgan proposed divorce adjustment is: “being relatively free of signs and symptoms of physical or mental illness; being able to function
adequately in the daily role responsibilities of home, family, work and leisure; and having developed an independent identity that is not tied to the status of being married or the ex-spouse" (pg 913). This definition builds upon some of the ideas presented by earlier researchers. For example, Goode (1956) wrote that the new roles assigned by the person do not take into account the prior divorce as the primary point of reference, while Kitson and Morgan wrote that adjustment occurs when one accepts an independent identity not tied to the marriage or the former partner. Similarities also exist with the concept of separation adjustment presented by Spanier and Castro (1979), and the concepts of attachment and general indices of distress. Kitson and Morgan (1990) provided a multidimensional perspective of adjustment incorporating both general, and separation-specific indices, which subsequent researchers have applied (e.g. Wang & Amato, 2000). While the Kitson and Morgan (1990) definition was specific to divorce, it could easily be applied to separation, and generalised to cohabitating as well as married couples who separate. A limitation of the definition is that it ignores how parents with children adjust in their relationship with their children, and the challenges of co-parenting after separation.

Since Kitson and Morgan’s (1990) paper a number of studies have included child-related factors in their conceptualisation of separation adjustment. For example, Boisvert, Pepin, Prevost, Freeston and Beaudry (1994) assessed care of children and interactions with ex-partner as part of their measurement of separation adjustment. Ahrons and Miller (1993) and Hoffman (1995) used parental involvement with their children after separation as an index of separation adjustment.

In light of the above discussion, separation adjustment can usefully be viewed as having three key components: general adjustment, separation-specific adjustment, and parenting adjustment. General adjustment includes psychological adjustment indices
that are not specific to separation, but rather are relevant to any stressful situation, such as anxiety, stress and depression. Separation-specific adjustment is related to changes specific to separation, including attachment to the former partner and rebuilding a new lifestyle. Finally, parenting adjustment is relevant to those who have children, and includes negotiation of parenting arrangements and the quality of their parent-child relationships. Each of these separation adjustment variables will be explored further, and evidence provided to justify its inclusion in a comprehensive conceptualisation of separation adjustment.

General Adjustment

As noted in Chapter 1, compared to married couples, separating individuals experience more psychological hardship, depression and distress (Aseltine & Kessler, 1993; Bruce & Kim, 1992; Davies et al, 1997; Mastekaasa, 1994), poorer health (Kiecolt-Glaser et al 1988), and higher rates of mortality (Hemstrom, 1996; Hendershot, 1977; Kobrin & Hu & Goldman, 1990; Zick & Smith, 1991;). Suicide rates (Cantor & Slater, 1994) are also higher for separated individuals than their married counterparts. There is also an association between relationship separation and increased alcohol consumption and illicit drug use (Doherty et al, 1989; Linsky et al, 1984; Magura & Shapiro, 1989; Stack & Bankowski, 1994).

Separation-Specific Adjustment

Connection

The term attachment has been used to describe the emotional closeness felt by separated individuals towards their former partner (Kitson, 1982; Kitson & Morgan, 1990; Weiss, 1975), or the amount of intrusive thoughts experienced about their former partner (Berman, 1985; Walsh, Jacob & Simons, 1995). As attachment can be
confused with attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973), in this thesis the term connection is preferred.

Excessive connection with the former partner seems to be common in separated individuals. Kitson (1982) reported that 25% of a divorcing sample remained highly connected to the former spouse for a significant period of time, even after the legal divorce. Unfortunately, she did not report how remaining highly connected was operationalised. Waggener and Galassi (1993) recruited a sample of 90 separated adults, 43 of whom were separated for 6 months or less, and 47 between 7 to 14 months. They found men reported more connection problems than women, and that there was greater connection for recently separated participants. This study suffers the same problem as the Kitson (1982) study in that a specific definition of the operationalisation of connection was not provided.

Rebuilding

Rebuilding is a process whereby the separated individual reduces their loneliness and negative emotionality, and increases their social activities after separation. The concept of rebuilding has received little research attention in comparison to connection. Rebuilding one’s life includes both emotional and behavioural components. Spanier and Castro (1979) and Berman (1985) describe the need to find new friends (behavioural), as well as dealing with the associated emotions of loneliness and isolation (emotional). Similarly, Wang and Amato (2000) described how the separation affects the person’s social life and peace of mind.

Kitson and Morgan (1990) discuss rebuilding as involving the separated person being able to function adequately in the daily role responsibilities of home, family, work and leisure. This also includes being able to enjoy oneself without the former partner, and making an effort to organise social activities, and seeing friends.
It is also argued that there is an emotional component to rebuilding. This involves finding purpose and continued meaning in life, feeling in control, and socially involved, and reducing the feeling of being on an emotional roller coaster ride (Walsh et al., 1995). Thus, rebuilding after a relationship breakdown involves the ability to reshape social networks, and deal with associated negative emotions such as loneliness and isolation.

Loneliness seems to be an important element of separation for many people. Paplau and Perlman (1982, p4) defined loneliness as the “absence or perceived absence of satisfying social relationships” and “the unpleasant experience that occurs when a person’s network of social relations is deficient in some important way, either quantitatively or qualitatively”. Weiss (1974; 1989) was struck by the amount of time separated people spent talking about being lonely. Weiss (1989, p. 3) reported, “I was puzzled by the upsurge of loneliness that seemed to follow the ending of even an unwanted marriage, by the persistence of loneliness despite new friendships, and by the suddenness with which loneliness could be abated”.

Weiss (1989) discussed two different kinds of loneliness; emotional and social. He said social loneliness arises from a lack of social networks and social ties, while emotional loneliness stems from a lack of intimate relationships. Clearly, while separating from a partner may have associations with both types of loneliness, emotional loneliness may be more directly related because it relates to losing an intimate relationship with their former partner. Interestingly, a PsychInfo search for the years 1960 to 2003, of the search words “divorce” and “loneliness” produced no matches.
Parenting Adjustment

Parenting after separation has been the focus of much research. As noted in Chapter 1, adult separation adjustment can have a profound effect on children’s adjustment. A brief review of children’s adjustment will be presented before looking at adult parenting adjustment, including the parent-child relationship, and parenting negotiations with the former partner.

Children from divorced families display small but significant deficits on psychological adjustment relative to children from intact families. As discussed in Chapter 1, the mean effect size across 29 studies of psychological adjustment in children post separation published in the 1990’s was $d = -.17$ (Amato, 2000). Small but consistent deficits are also evident in academic performance and social competence (e.g., Amato & Keith, 1991; Asetone & McLanahan, 1991; Beaty, 1995; Kurdek et al, 1994). Children from divorced families also are more likely to experience economic, social and health difficulties, and are more likely to drop out of school (McLanahan & Sandfur, 1994), than children from intact marriages. However, the effect sizes are small and long-term adjustment of most children after parental separation is the norm (Kelly, 2000)

The cause of the observed modest elevations of problems in children of divorce might not be due to the effects of the divorce itself. Marital dissolution is a process that often begins long before separation, and problems in children prior to the separation can be observed that are associated with ongoing conflict between parents (Amato, 2000). Children of divorced parents often have histories of more than a decade of exposure to marital discord (Grych & Fincham, 2001). Some children from high conflict marriages improve in adjustment after their parent’s separation (Amato, 2000).
The association of parental separation and conflict with child adjustment does not show poor adjustment is caused by parental divorce or conflict. As Sanders, Nicholson and Floyd (1997) noted, severe child behaviour problems can be very distressing to parents and could contribute to marital conflict.

The duration of problematic adjustment for children after their parents separate is not entirely clear. Some studies show that children’s problems resolve after parental separation (e.g., Bussell, 1995; Jedielek, 1998), while others report that problems persist or even get worse over time (e.g., Chase-Lansdale, Cherlin & Keirnan 1995; Cherlin, Chase-Lansdale & McRae, 1998). Amato (2000) showed that divorce is a risk factor for numerous problems in adulthood, including low socio-economic attainment, poor well-being, increased relationship problems and likelihood for their own relationship dissolution. Therefore some delayed negative effects occur for some children of separating adults.

Children who experience high conflict between their parents, either when they are married or after separation have disturbed patterns of emotional arousal and affect regulation (Lieberman & Van Horn, 1998), heightened aggression, impulsivity, anxiety and emotional problems (Cummings & Davies, 1994), and increased physiological arousal in response to conflict (McLoyd, Harper & Copeland, 2001). Thus, parental conflict is a key influence on child adjustment.

A number of factors mediate the effect of parental conflict on children’s adjustment. Exposure to physical violence, children perceiving themselves as the cause of the conflict between their parents, and the development of maladaptive coping strategies including anger, lead to more problematic behaviours in children whose parents have conflict (Amato, 2000; Grych & Fincham, 1990). Conversely, parental warmth buffers the impact of high conflict (Emery, 1999), while poor or distant parent-

Changes made by their parents after separation also impact on children. Many parents move residence after separation, often to a smaller dwelling in a poorer neighbourhood (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Children often change schools, and the child is required to adjust to a new schooling routine with different teachers, friends and curriculums, which can effect the child’s adjustment (Amato & Booth, 1997).

Parent-Child Relationship

A good relationship with one parent, and preferably two parents can protect the child against the negative impacts of separation (Buchanan & Heiges, 2001). The quality of the parent-child relationship is an important area of separation adjustment for both adults and children. Amato and Gilbreth (1999) found that active parenting after separation was beneficial for children and adults. Active parenting involved having a child-friendly home environment, knowing their children’s friends and teachers, attending school functions, assuming parenting activities including discipline, and spending time with children in day-to-day activities, such as bathing, helping with homework, and special time such as going for a picnic. Any or all of these aspects of active parenting can be altered by separation.

On average, divorced homes are characterised by less positive parent-child relationships than intact families (Buchanan & Heiges, 2001). In a longitudinal study spanning 12 years, Amato and Booth (1996) found that divorce erodes many positive aspects of parenting between fathers and children, but not between mothers and children. Presumably, the gender difference is due to fathers mostly being the non-custodial parent. Coiro and Emery (1998) also reported that the fathering role is more consistently altered than the mothering role. However, an earlier and much cited study
Hetherington, Cox & Cox, 1982) found that relationships between children and custodial parents (usually the mother) also showed signs of erosion. They found that one year after divorce, custodial mothers were less affectionate toward their children, communicated with them less often, punished them more strongly and were more inconsistent in their use of discipline than continuously married mothers. Similarly, Hanson, McLanahan and Thompson (1998) reported an initial decline in parental practices, including discipline post separation. However, the age of the children at the time of separation may influence the quality of the ongoing relationship, as divorce does not appear to weaken the ties between sons and fathers, or between daughters and mothers if it occurred during late adolescence (Amato et al, 1995).

At least some of the erosion in the parent-child relationship can occur a long time before separation (Amato & Booth, 1996). For example, Block, Block and Gjerde (1988) found that before separation, fathers who later divorced were less involved with sons, and experienced more conflict with sons than fathers who remained married. Mothers who later divorced showed a similar profile. Shaw, Emery and Tuer (1996) also demonstrated similar results to Block et al (1988), interestingly only with sons. Thus, poor parent-child relationships often occur before separation, though the problems can be exacerbated during separation (Amato & Booth, 1996).

Parenting Negotiation

How well parents manage parenting their children after separation is highly variable. Good parenting includes being able to discuss issues regarding the children, such as health and education, and being able to organise child contact arrangements with minimal conflict (King & Heard, 1999). Initially after separation conflict is typically quite high, as the couple attempt to resolve issues concerning the separation (Cummings & Davies, 1994; Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991). After the first year or two,
conflict tends to decrease as the couples disengage emotionally from each other (Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992). However, it has been reported that up to 25% of couples continue to experience moderate to high conflict over many years with the conflict usually involving child-related matters (Buchanan & Heiges, 2001) and child related conflict tends to remain a stable problem (Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992).

Christensen and Shenk (1991) reported that divorcing couples (couples who had separated in the last year) had less mutual constructive communication, more avoidance of communication, more demand/withdraw communication, and more conflict than non-distressed couples. Divorcing couples also exhibited less mutual constructive communication than a group of couples self-referred for marital therapy. Many couples who experience high conflict after separation also reported high conflict during their marriage, and it seems that post-separation conflict often reflects an exacerbation of a pre-existing pattern (Mathis, 1998). Even in the absence of conflict, Furstenberg and Nord (1985) note that there is often little communication about their children between formerly married partners.

Parental conflict after separation might reduce the non-resident parent’s contact with their children. Loewen (1988) speculated that fathers would begin to give up on their relationship with their children if it meant reducing conflict with the former partner. However, no or low conflict between parents post-separation might also reflect disengagement of one parent from their children. Several studies report an association between fathers involvement with their children post separation and co-parental conflict (Amato & Rezac, 1994; Furstenberg & Harris, 1993). Amato and Rezac (1994) suggest that a continued relationship between fathers and their children provides increased opportunities for conflict with their former partner. Assuming that eliminating all conflict is desirable may be inappropriate, because it might mean that the parents are not
communicating at all about their children (King & Heard, 1999). It seems likely that optimal parenting adjustment post-separation will involve active engagement of both former partners in parenting, and making decisions regarding their children that does not involve high conflict.

**Relationship Between Domains of Separation Adjustment**

Adult separation adjustment involves reducing connection to the former partner, rebuilding their life, being relatively free of signs of physical and mental dysfunction, continuing a positive parent-child relationship, and engaging in co-operative parenting negotiation. Previous research suggests that some aspects of separation adjustment are interrelated, while other aspects show no relationship to each other.

An association, based on cross-sectional research, has been found between connection and distress. Masheter (1991), using data from 265 respondents who had been divorced for up to two and a half years, found that poor well-being was associated with high preoccupation with the former partner. Masheter (1997) later replicated this finding in a court-derived sample of 232. Berman (1988) found in a sample of 60 recently divorced women, that continued connection was significantly correlated ($r = .4$) to emotional distress. However, he also concluded that connection and distress are two distinct constructs because coping and personality characteristics were related more to distress than connection, while the past relationship with the former partner was more related to connection than distress (Berman, 1988). Similarly, Brown, Felton, Whiteman and Manela (1980) found that connection was related to the amount and intensity of the interaction with a former partner over the previous four weeks, while distress was not.

Some evidence shows an association between connection and rebuilding. Wang and Amato (2000) found a relationship between connection and a factor they described as general adjustment ($r = -.42$). This factor contains items that refer to rebuilding. For
instance, there are items that relate to social situations, and peace of mind. It also seems likely that there could be an association between psychological well-being and rebuilding, though this has not been investigated.

There have been mixed findings in regards to an association between parent-child relationships and distress. Shapiro and Lambert (1999) and Umberson (1996) found that there was no association between change in relationship quality between fathers and children, and psychological well-being. On the other hand, Stewart et al (1986) found an association between custody arrangements (level of parent-child contact) and distress. The difference between the results of the studies may be due to Shapiro and Lambert (1999) and Umberson (1996) measuring quality of the relationship, while Stewart et al (1986) measured the quantity of time spent with children. The frequency of visits is not strongly related to the positivity of parent-child relations (Kelly, 2000).

Barron (2001) found no difference between a depressed group and a normal group of separated parents based on style of negotiation, and level of conflict, and resolution of custody. In contrast, Bickerdike and Littlefield (2000) found that differences in connection between spouses led to differences in problem solving, and levels of agreement. This suggests that connection may have a greater association with parenting negotiation than general psychological adjustment.

There seems to be an association between the parent-child relationship and parenting negotiation. When former partners communicate and negotiate regarding their children, parent-child relationships improve (e.g., Amato & Rezac, 1994).

In summary, in largely cross-sectional studies, some domains of separation adjustment show modest relationships while other domains bear no association. Relations between some domains (e.g., rebuilding and psychological distress; and
parenting negotiation and rebuilding) are still to be tested. These findings illustrate the complex nature of separation adjustment, and suggest that it is important to carefully assess each of the constructs rather than measuring only one domain. Future research clarifying the independencies between the different domains of separation adjustment, using longitudinal data will lead to a more thorough understanding of separation adjustment.

**Normal Versus Abnormal Separation Reactions**

One aim of assessing separation adjustment is to identify abnormal adjustment, and possibly to provide professional assistance when required. But what is abnormal separation adjustment? It may be normal for someone to be depressed, unmotivated, not go to work, and have intrusive thoughts about their former partner in the first week or so after separation. In fact, it might be considered abnormal if there was no distress expressed during the initial phase of separation. But is it abnormal if the same level of distress is experienced one year later?

Much research demonstrates substantial improvement in separation adjustment over the first 12 to 24 months post separation in general psychological adjustment (Amato & Booth, 1994; Hetherington et al, 1993). It could be considered abnormal to experience continued, intense adjustment problems 9 to 12 months post separation. Thus, a normal reaction one week after separation (e.g., crying incessantly when talking about the separation) might not be normal 12 months post separation. Similarly, it probably is normal to feel low mood, irritable, anxious, or strongly connected to the former partner in the first week after separation, but not two years later.

Some reactions to separation might be considered abnormal no matter what the timing. For example, contemplating or attempting suicide post separation is an
abnormal reaction. Other abnormal reactions regardless of when it occurs include stalking and extreme verbal aggression, and physical violence.

Figure 2.1 demonstrates a hypothetical normal reaction to separation with moderate distress at the time of separation, which abates over the next 6 to 12 months. Figure 2.2 demonstrates various possible abnormal responses to separation. Extreme initial distress (a & d) or moderate distress (c) that does not abate, or actually increases over time (b), are abnormal. In essence, it is argued that separation adjustment problems are a set of feelings and behaviours that are a normal response to a relationship breakdown, but adjustment is abnormal if the problems are severe, or fail to abate with time.

Figure 2.1. Normal reaction to separation
The concepts of abnormal separation adjustment are similar to those applied to bereavement in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders - Forth Edition (DSM-IV) (APA, 1994). In the DSM-IV it is suggested that bereavement can be a focus of clinical attention. They discuss bereavement as a set of feelings and behaviours that are a normal response, but recognise certain symptoms that are not characteristic of a normal grief reaction (e.g. guilt, thoughts of death, morbid preoccupation of worthlessness, marked psychomotor retardation, prolonged and marked functional impairment and hallucinatory experiences). There is also reference to chronic distress after bereavement that does not abate in intensity as abnormal.

Measuring Separation Adjustment

A new conceptualisation of separation adjustment was presented above. Measuring separation adjustment will now be discussed starting with some general comments on criterion by which to evaluate measures.
The first important step in developing a psychometric measure is to “develop a precise and detailed conception of the target construct and its theoretical context” (Clark & Watson, 1995 p.310). In examining the existing measures of separation adjustment, the conceptualisation of separation adjustment was critiqued, and compared against the multidimensional conceptualisation described in the first half of this chapter. After examining the conceptualisation of adjustment, the psychometric properties were evaluated to ensure the measures were reliable and valid.

Smith and McCarthy (1995) propose six objectives in the refinement of an instrument, and existing separation adjustment measures were evaluated relative to these criteria. The first objective is to assess dimensionality, which requires identifying the hierarchical or aggregational structure of a measure. The presence of factors is investigated which is generally undertaken by use of a factor analysis. Given separation adjustment contains a number of domains, a factor analysis should reveal a multifactorial structure.

The second objective is establishing internal consistency, which requires item scores to be highly inter-correlated, but not too high to suggest redundancy. This is normally tested by calculating item-total correlations, inter-item correlations, alpha value changes when items are deleted, and investigating factor loadings when factor analysis is conducted. In relation to separation adjustment, items should correlate highly with other similar items (e.g., connection items should intercorrelate).

The third objective is the determination of content homogeneity-validity, and involves content-based refinement at multiple stages of the development and refinement process. This can involve highly experienced and trained raters evaluating the items for their appropriateness and discrimination ability. In relation to separation,
multiple, experienced researchers in the area of relationship separation, would assist in
the development and evaluation of items.

The fourth objective is to include items that discriminate among participants. Item endorsement statistics are generally required in order to identify the spread of participant responses on a given item. With relationship separation, items should be included in the measure, which differentiate between high and low adjusting participants.

The fifth objective is establishing stability of the structure of the instrument. This involves replicating the instruments properties on an independent sample to ensure that items inter-correlate as highly on the second sample, and the factor structure remains stable across samples.

The final objective is the assessment of discriminant validity, which requires the development of a sufficiently specific measure that differentiates one construct from another. Establishing discriminant validity involves correlating the new measure against other measures designed to assess different attributes. For example with a separation adjustment measure, it is important to determine that it is not measuring another construct such as neuroticism, or social desirability.

**Review of existing measures**

A summary of the existing measures, and an evaluation of their conceptual and psychometric properties relative to criteria set out by Clark and Watson (1995), and Smith and McCarthy (1995) are presented below. A Psycinfo search was conducted searching for articles over the period of 1967 to 2001, and published in English, using different combinations of the search terms divorce, relationship separation, adjustment, test development, test construction, measur*, and assess*. This search yielded only two measures, one of which related to children’s adjustment. A second search using
the more general terms “divorce and adjustment” yielded 257 articles. Of these studies, 10 reported developing new measures of separation adjustment. The conceptualisation of separation adjustment, and psychometric evaluation of these 10 measures is critiqued in Table 2.2.

Critique of Conceptualisation of Separation Adjustment

In this section the existing measures of separation adjustment (Table 2.2) are critiqued in terms of the extent to which they assess the five areas of separation adjustment described in the first half of this chapter. Many of the existing measures assess connection with the former partner either as part of a more inclusive conceptualisation of adjustment (Ahrons, 1981; Fisher, 1978; Wang & Amato, 2000), or as solely representing adjustment (Brown & Reimer, 1984; Kitson, 1982; Masheter, 1997). Rebuilding, which combines the ability to re-establish social networks and contend with feelings such as isolation and loneliness is given little attention in most separation adjustment scales. In Wang and Amato’s (2000) 9-item measure, 2 items appear to represent rebuilding; having improved or worsened peace of mind, and having improved or worsened social situation. However, also in that factor entitled general divorce adjustment, items assess other issues such as being happy with the decision to separate, thinking the divorce was a good or bad idea, and that the divorce had improved or worsened their financial situation. Therefore, the factor presented by Wang and Amato (2000) appears to include more than just rebuilding items. Berman and Turk’s (1981) measure included a factor that is related to rebuilding, which they call loneliness. This factor includes items such as being lonely and getting involved in social activities.
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<th>Authors</th>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Method and Results</th>
<th>Evaluation and Limitations</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ahrons (1981)</td>
<td>68-item measure of relationship with former partner and children. It uses 3 different forms of scaling throughout measure.</td>
<td>There are 9 content areas (e.g. quality of co-parental communication, attachment, non-parental and parental interaction and parent-child involvement). Reliability co-efficients obtained from 93 women and 85 men over 3 time points for each of the content areas range .51 to .95 (mostly in .8’s).</td>
<td>No factor analysis to determine factor structure. Different scaling for different content areas makes it difficult to obtain an overall score.</td>
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<td>Berman &amp; Turk (1981)</td>
<td>The Checklist of Problems and Concerns (CPC) is a 35-item scale, assessing problems divorced individuals encounter. Problems are rated on a 4-point likert scale of how much worry it caused during the past month.</td>
<td>Items developed from literature review and pilot interviews. Administered to 90 divorced persons. Factor analytic procedure yielded 6 factors (ex-spouse contact, parent-child interaction, interpersonal relations, loneliness, practical problems and financial concerns). Cronbach's alpha ranged from .66 to .84</td>
<td>Limitations include conducting a factor analysis with 35 items using only 90 subjects. Only a 1/3 of sample men.</td>
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<td>Brown &amp; Reimer</td>
<td>Divorce Reaction Inventory (DRI) is 46-items and measures attachment to ex-partner on a 4-point likert scale.</td>
<td>52 subjects completed a 70-item DRI. Items discriminating between high and low attachment were combined into a 46 item scale. 51 subjects were used to cross validate the measure. Very good split-half reliability and internal consistency. Good concurrent validity with another measure of attachment. Correlated quite high with Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) .84.</td>
<td>Limitations include, small sample size, only measure one aspect of adjustment. No factor analysis to assess factor structure or unidimensionality. High correlation with BDI may mean that this measure is a measure of depression.</td>
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<td>Clarke-Stewart &amp; Bailey (1990)</td>
<td>Adjustment Behaviour Checklist; 60-item checklist of behaviours thought to indicate good or poor adjustment. Subject checks if occurred in last week.</td>
<td>No mention as to how items were devised and no reliability or validity data were provided.</td>
<td>Requires evaluation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fisher (1978)</td>
<td>Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale</td>
<td>No factor analysis was reported. Very little has been published on its use.</td>
<td>This scale has been used in a number of studies (Fisher,</td>
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<td>(FDAS)</td>
<td>is a 100-item self-report measure. It assesses 6 content areas (e.g., feelings of self-worth, emotional disentanglement from love partner, anger at former partner, grief work completed, and social trust and intimacy). A 5-point likert scale is used.</td>
<td>reliability and validity. Thriot and Buckner (1991) report that through personal communication (Fisher, 1988), the scale has internal reliability of .92 and &quot;high&quot; content validity. Hensley (1996) reports that the FDAS has a reliability coefficient of .98 (unknown source) and appears to have face validity. An unpublished document (Family Relations Learning Centre, 1978) reports reliability of subtests between .87 - .95. No validity statistics are available.</td>
<td>Despite its popularity it's lack of published psychometric properties to date, makes this instrument inappropriate to use.</td>
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<td>Gray &amp; Shields</td>
<td>30-item inventory based on Bowlby's theory of 3 phases of mourning – disorganisation, reorganisation and urge to recover the lost object. Subjects reported how experienced independent clinicians agreed upon 90 statements in which each item represented 1 of the 3 stages of Bowlby's theory. This was given to 123 separated/divorced adults. A factor analysis was conducted which found 3 significant factors.</td>
<td>This theory does not adequately cover all aspects of separation adjustment. Factor analysis was conducted using too few subjects. No replication sample. No discussion of</td>
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<td>Kitson (1982)</td>
<td>4-item scale assessing connection with former partner on a 5-point likert scale. Conceptually linked to bereavement (e.g denial, disbelief).</td>
<td>177 men and women completed the instrument. Factor analysis indicates unidimensionality with 82% of the variance explained. Reliability alpha = .80.</td>
<td>Attachment is only one aspect of adjustment. No independent sample was used to assess the stability of the factor structure.</td>
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<td>Masheter (1997)</td>
<td>15-item measure of preoccupation and hostility towards former partner.</td>
<td>232 divorced subjects obtained from courthouse records. Two factors obtained from factor analysis. Percentage of variance accounted for not provided. Cronbach’s alpha for the scales were high (preoccupation .82 and hostility .88)</td>
<td>Measure does not reflect the multidimensional nature of separation adjustment.</td>
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<td>O’Leary, Franzoni, Brack &amp; Zirps (1996)</td>
<td>43 item measure based on the Coping Resources Inventory for Stress (Curlette, Aycock, Matheny, Pugh &amp; Taylor, 1992)</td>
<td>Pilot testing for wording and clarity was first conducted. 53 males and 67 females were then used for further testing. Reliability for 3 coping subsets (personality characteristics, condition-related coping resources and individuals stress-coping skills) ranged from .67 to .82. Scores on subsets intercorrelated highly.</td>
<td>Items not specific to relationship breakdown e.g I feel able to cope with stressful situations; I feel comfortable discussing my personal thoughts/feelings with others. More a measure of general adjustment than separation-specific adjustment.</td>
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<td>Wang &amp; Amato (2000)</td>
<td>9-item measure. Four items use a 3 point scale, 5 items use 4 point scale. Designed to assess general adjustment to divorce and connection.</td>
<td>208 divorced individuals assessed. Factor analysis reported 2 factors accounting for 56% of variance. 41% accounted for by general adjustment variable and 15% accounted for by attachment. 1/3 of items cross-load onto the other factor.</td>
<td>No items relate to children. No other psychometric properties reported other than factor analysis.</td>
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MC – Multidimensional construct; DA – Dimensionality assessment; IC – Internal consistency; CH – Content homogeneity; DI – Discriminating items; R – Replication; DV – Discriminant validity; √ - satisfactory; x - not satisfactory.
There have been many studies that assess separation adjustment with a measure of general psychological distress (Diedrick, 1991; Wang & Amato, 2000). For example, Stewart et al (1986), Tschann et al (1989) and Kincaid and Caldwell (1995) all relied on global measures of psychological adjustment to assess separation adjustment. It is important to assess general psychological adjustment, and there are many well established measures of general psychological adjustment, so using the existing scales makes sense. However, exclusive reliance on general measures will not adequately address separation-specific or parenting adjustment issues.

Only two measures assess parent-child relationships post separation as part of their overall assessment of separation adjustment. Berman and Turk (1981) include a factor called parent-child interactions, which include talking with your child, and expressing your feelings to your child. Ahrons (1981) developed a factor called the non-residential parent-child involvement scale, devised only for the non-residential parent. Parenting negotiation is represented in only one of the 10 measures. Ahrons (1981) assessed conflict and support between the former partners when discussing child-related matters.

It should be noted that there are numerous studies investigating parent-child relations. However, the measures of parent-child relations used in those studies have not been included in the above table for a number of reasons. First, many of the studies investigating parent-child relations use only a single indicator of parent-child relations. For instance, Shapiro and Lambert (1999) assessed parent-child relations by asking fathers the following question, “Taking things all together, on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is really bad and 10 is absolutely perfect, how would you describe your relationship with (focal
child)?”. Additionally, Sun and Li (2002) measured parent-child relations by asking how the child got along with their mother/father? Other studies measure custody and access arrangements (Coysh Johnston, Tschann, Wallerstein & Kline, 1989), or social support compliance or visitation frequency (Braver, Wolchik, Sandler, Sheets, Fogas & Bay, 1993) rather than the quality of the parent-child relationship.

In summary, no one measure assesses all the proposed domains of separation adjustment. In fact out of the 10 measures, presented in Table 2.2, three do not assess any of these five domains. Four of the measures assess only one of the domains adequately, and the remaining three assess only two of the five domains of separation adjustment.

Critique of Psychometric Properties

Only three of the existing separation adjustment measures (Kitson, 1982; Masheter, 1997; Wang & Amato, 2000) conducted a factor analysis. Wang and Amato (2000) factor analysed the responses of 208 divorced individuals. Two factors were produced, however a third of the items cross-loaded (factor loading > .3) onto the other factor. Kitson (1981) conducted a factor analysis using 177 participants and found that the four-item attachment measure produced one factor, though two of the items had very low factor coefficients (< .2). Berman and Turk (1981) reported a factor analysis on their 35-item measure, but this was conducted with only 90 subjects. While guidelines for conducting factor analyses vary, experts in the field (e.g., Comrey, 1988; Guadagnoli & Velicer, 1988) usually suggest that conducting a factor analysis with less than 100 cases is inappropriate. Also a factor analysis where the ratio of items to participants is low (<1:5) provides low power and
unreliable results. Thus, none of the existing measures has a satisfactory factor structure.

The majority of reports on separation adjustment measures did include internal consistency assessments by way of Cronbach’s alpha. For a number of the measures (Fisher, 1978; Kitson, 1982; Masheter, 1997) this was the only psychometric indicator presented. No authors presented data on test-retest reliability.

The only authors to discuss the concept of content homogeneity explicitly were Gray and Shields (1992), who discuss how they thoroughly reviewed the literature, developed items, and had them rated by three independent clinicians with extensive practice experience. No other authors discussed if they consulted others when developing their test items. Some of the test developers stated that the test was developed after a review of the relevant literature, and pilot interviews with divorced people, but did not mention any other ongoing consultation with experts in the field (e.g., Berman & Turk, 1984).

Brown and Reimer (1984), and Berman and Turk (1981) were the only authors to address the issue of including items that discriminated among participants in their measure. Brown and Reimer (1984) discarded items that failed to discriminate between respondents. Likewise, Berman and Turk (1981) analysed the frequency distribution of the items and discarded items that were not endorsed by any participants. Ten of the initial 45 items were discarded, highlighting the importance of conducting this step in the production of the final scale.

No authors compared psychometric properties of their measure across independent samples. Ahrons (1981), possibly in an attempt to achieve
replication, calculated internal consistency on the same sample at three different time points. While assessing change or consistency over time is important, this is not replicating psychometric findings across different samples.

The final criterion in developing a psychometric instrument is discriminant validity (Smith & McCarthy, 1995). Like many of the other psychometric properties evaluated, this was generally not done for the measures of separation adjustment. Brown and Reimer (1984) reported that the DRI correlated highly \( r = .84 \) with the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI; Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock & Erbaugh, 1961). This suggests that the DRI may actually be measuring depression, rather than connection.

Applying Smith and McCarthy’s (1995) six criteria in the refinement of an instrument, no existing separation adjustment measure is psychometrically sound. Five of the 10 measures reported two of the psychometric properties adequately, four reported one psychometric property adequately, and one measure did not report any psychometric properties.

Apart from the criteria proposed by Smith and McCarthy (1995), there are some other general considerations concerning appropriate sample characteristics (Clark & Watson, 1995) for developing a separation adjustment measure. In Berman and Turk’s (1981), Fisher’s (1978) and Gray and Shield’s (1992) studies, less than a third of their samples were men. Whether their questionnaires adequately measure male’s adjustment post separation is unclear. Many of the samples use only people who have divorced. For example, Wang and Amato (2000), and Masheter (1997) used samples that had been divorced for approximately one year, and whether these measures would be useful for people recently separated is unknown. Other test
developers do not restrict their inclusion criteria in relation to time since separation, making it difficult to draw accurate conclusions from their heterogenous sample. For example, Berman and Turk (1981) recruited a sample of adults who were separated from anywhere between 3 months to 15 years. Other authors have recruited participants from a specific group, where the representativeness of these samples to all separating adults is unclear. For example, Berman and Turk (1981) recruited participants attending Parents without Partners, and Kitson (1981), Brown and Reimer (1984), and Masheter (1997) relied on participants provided by county courts.

In sum, no existing measure of separation adjustment assesses each of the content areas proposed to be relevant to separation adjustment, or is psychometrically sound. Therefore, a new measure is needed. Chapter 4 will describe the development of a new measure of separation adjustment. In the next chapter, predictors of separation adjustment are reviewed.
CHAPTER 3 - PREDICTORS OF ADJUSTMENT TO RELATIONSHIP

BREAKDOWN

This chapter reviews research on the predictors of separation adjustment. The process of separation adjustment was conceptualised with a stress-diathesis model in Chapter 1. This model posits that adjustment is a function of the context in which separation occurs, stresses associated with separation and individual differences in coping and cognitive appraisal of the separation. The predictors of separation adjustment will be considered under these headings. Much of the evidence presented in this chapter is cross-sectional. Where it exists, longitudinal evidence will be presented.

Context of Relationship Separation

Legal Status of Relationship

There is an increasing popularity and social acceptance of cohabitation as either a prelude or an alternative to marriage (Cohan & Kleinbaum, 2002). Previous research has shown premarital cohabitation predicts a high risk of divorce (e.g., Booth & Johnston, 1988; Thomson & Colella, 1992). Many variables correlate with choosing cohabitation, and what mediates between premarital cohabitation and divorce is unclear. For example lower relationship commitment, more liberal and accepting views of non-traditional family roles, and a less negative view of divorce exist more in cohabitating than married couples (Smock & Gupta, 2002). Furthermore, in a national random sample in the United States, cohabitation was associated with lower levels of interpersonal commitment to their partner, lower levels of happiness and religiosity, and higher levels of negative interaction (Stanley, Whitton &
Markman, 2004). Any of these variables might mediate the impact of cohabitation on risk of divorce.

Recent work has highlighted the heterogeneity of de facto couples (Manning, 2002). Some couples live together with an intent to marry, and may be engaged (i.e., have formalised an intent to marry with a public statement) before they cohabit (Axinn & Thornton, 1992). Other couples cohabit with an explicit rejection of plans to marry. Rejection of marriage may be relationship specific, in that they do not wish to make that level of commitment to the person. Alternatively, some partners may reject the institution of marriage all together (Manning, 2002). Still other couples face significant financial loss if they marry rather than cohabit. For example, partners with children from previous relationships may lose some government financial assistance if they marry. People who cohabit also differ depending on whether they cohabit before or after engagement. Kline, Stanley, Markman, Olmos-Gallo, Peters, Whitton and Prado (2004) found that couples who live together before engagement have more negative interactions, lower interpersonal commitment, lower relationship quality and lower relationship confidence than those who waited to cohabit until after the engagement or the marriage.

Regardless of the heterogeneity of de facto couples, there are some clear differences between de facto relationships and marriages. People who cohabit tend to have less education and income than people in marriages (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Thornton, Axinn & Teachman, 1995). As mentioned in Chapter 1, de facto relationships have a higher rate of separation than marriages (Smock & Gupta, 2002). However, there also are similarities between de facto relationships and marriage. Brown and Booth (1996) reported that over three quarters of cohabitating couples plan to marry their
partner, and report similar levels of relationship quality to their married counterparts. In fact, cohabitators report more frequent interactions with their partner than married people (Brown & Booth, 1996). Cannon (1999) reported similar results suggesting that cohabitators do have similar quality relationships to their married counterparts.

Does separation adjustment differ between partners ending de facto relationships and those ending a marriage? This question has yet to be investigated. A PsychInfo search using different combinations of the search words, cohabitation, marriage, separation, adjustment and de facto returned no relevant articles on the separation adjustment of those leaving a de facto relationship. Cohabitators’ lower income and education relative to married couples may predispose them to more separation adjustment problems. On the other hand, cohabitators’ less traditional views of family roles and greater acceptance of separation might lead to less separation adjustment problems.

Given that cohabitation is a common arrangement in couple relationships, understanding adjustment to break up of such relationships is important. Cohabitating and married couples share many characteristics, but also have some distinctiveness, and it is unclear if separation adjustment would be similar or different for de facto and married couples. One aim of the current program of research was to test whether married and de facto relationship breakdown is associated with similar or different adjustment problems.

Time Since Separation

A number of cross-sectional studies have shown that increasing time since separation is associated with better general psychological adjustment and a reduction in connection to the former partner (Amato & Booth, 1994;
Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 1987; Kincaid & Caldwell, 1995; Kitson, 1992; Melichar & Chiriboga, 1988). Hetherington et al. (1993), and Davies et al. (1997) also showed that longitudinally there is a dramatic recovery in general psychological adjustment by the end of the second year for most separating individuals. However, while the majority of separating individuals recover good general adjustment, a minority continue to suffer long-term adjustment problems (Amato & Booth, 2000).

In relation to the parent-child relationship, numerous studies have shown deterioration in the relationship after a separation, particularly for the non-resident parent (e.g., Amato & Booth, 1996; Coiro & Emery, 1998; Hanson et al., 1998). In fact, a number of studies suggests that the relationship between non-resident parents and children can deteriorate further with non-resident parents, mostly fathers, withdrawing from the parenting relationship altogether (Dion, Braver, Wolchik & Sandler, 1997; Kruk, 1992). In relation to parenting negotiation, there is evidence to suggest that conflict decreases after the initial stress of the separation is over (Ayoub, Deutsch, & Maraganore, 1999), but how effectively parents negotiate and make decisions regarding their children appears to remain stable (Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992).

In summary, there is longitudinal evidence to suggest that general adjustment improves as a function of time since separation. There is considerable cross-sectional research to suggest that connection improves. Rebuilding has not been examined thoroughly either cross-sectionally or longitudinally. Longitudinal evidence is available suggesting that the parent-child relationship suffers for the non-resident parent over time. Finally, whether there is improvement in how parents communicate about their children, and make decisions about their well-being over time is unclear, due to
previous research focusing mostly on conflict between the former partners. If longitudinal studies of separation adjustment can identify the characteristics of long-term adjustment problems, this would allow intervention to be targeted selectively to those people at high risk of poor long-term separation adjustment.

**Gender**

Women often are reported to adjust better to separation than men (Diedrick, 1991; Helgeson, 1994; Pledge, 1992). For example in a 10-year longitudinal study, Wallerstein (1986) reported that men continued to display more adjustment problems than women. Waggener and Gallassi (1993) cross-sectionally found that men exhibit more connection difficulties than women. Additionally, longitudinal research shows that women have better parent-child relationships than men (Amato & Booth, 1996).

Women retrospectively however report more difficulties, and exhibit more severe psychological problems than men prior to the separation (Bloom & Caldwell, 1981; Diedrick, 1991; Riessman & Gerstel, 1985). Women are often more unhappy with their marriages before separation than men, and on average probably experience more distress than men at this point (Heaton & Blake, 1999; Kurdek, 1990; Wood, Thompson & Walker, 1989; Rhodes & Whelan, 1989). Women initiate separation more often than men (e.g., Kincaid & Caldwell, 1995), and for the women, separation may begin a reduction in stress associated with enduring an unsatisfactory marriage.

Not all studies report a gender difference in separation adjustment. Mastekaasa (1994) found little difference between men and women in a longitudinal study of well-being after dissolution. Although this was a large-scale longitudinal study, measurement of post separation well-being was
limited to three questions (e.g., satisfaction with life, strength and fitness, and happiness), rated on a 7-point scale. If a more extensive multidimensional separation adjustment measure was used, the results may have found gender differences on other domains of separation adjustment such as connection with former partner, or parent-child relationships.

It may be possible that some of the separation adjustment differences between men and women is a function of men and women being at different phases of the separation experience. Women experience more adjustment problems during the relationship, and initiate the separation more often. Hence women may start the separation adjustment process earlier than men. Men and women however might prove equally resilient in the long term, with men subsequently ‘catching up’ to women’s adjustment. This may be more accurate for some domains of separation adjustment such as separation-specific and general adjustment. In relation to parenting adjustment, men may not improve to levels exhibited by women because they often do not have the day-to-day opportunity to maintain a relationship with their children, as evidenced by previous longitudinal research (Amato & Booth, 1996). Overall, men and women may prove equally resilient on some domains of separation adjustment but not others.

Social Support

Social support can buffer the adverse consequences of stressful life events and ongoing life strains (Thoits, 1986). The large volume of research on social support tends to focus on three main areas: social embeddedness, received social support, and perceived social support (Norris, 2001). Social embeddedness assesses the size, activeness and closeness of a person’s network. Received social support is the actual helping behaviour that occurs in
response to a stressor. Perceived social support, the most widely researched aspect of social support, is the subjective experience of social support and the understanding that help is available.

After relationship separation, social embeddedness is correlated with better adjustment and less psychological distress (e.g., Kunz & Kunz, 1995; Thabes, 1997; Tschann et al, 1989). Sansom and Farnill (1997) and Raschke (1977) showed that there is an interplay between social support networks, stress and adjustment, in that higher levels of social participation and support were associated with lower levels of stress, resulting in better adjustment. In addition, dissatisfaction with perceived social support is correlated with distress symptoms, and low self-esteem (Waggener & Galassi, 1993).

Some researchers have found that well-meaning social support after separation may not be helpful. Picard, Lee and Hunsley (1997) reported that a third of their sample indicated they received advice that was unwelcome. Divorced women, on the other hand, reported having someone to listen to their personal problems was more beneficial than other types of support (Miller, Smerglia, Gaudet & Kitson, 1998). Thus it seems emotional support through listening is valued.

Norris (2001) warned that the effects of social support could be confounded by the person’s need or distress. For example, divorced women who received material support (e.g., money) experienced high distress, possibly because the women who received material support had fewer personal resources to deal with separation, and it is the lack of resources, not the social support that predicts poor adjustment (Miller et al, 1998).

There appears to be a gender difference in the effects of social support on separation adjustment. Women report more benefit from social support,
and satisfaction within their friendships, than do men after a separation (Kincaid & Caldwell, 1995). Women are more likely to seek social support than men (Pledge, 1992). Furthermore, former in-laws provide more support to women than men (Serovich, Price, Chapman & White 1992). Thus, women seek and receive social support more than men following separation.

Most social support and separation adjustment studies are cross-sectional, and rely on self-report ratings of social support. Pasch and Bradbury (1998) warned that self-report measures of social support and adjustment often share content and method variance. For example, people feeling depressed are likely to report interpersonal relationships and their social support more negatively. However, Vinokur, Schul & Caplan (1987) assessed interpersonal transactions of social support in 486 males and their significant others at three different time points. Structural equation modelling showed recipients’ perception of social support was determined strongly by actual interpersonal transactions as reported by significant others, moderately by the person’s negative outlook bias, and only weakly by their anxiety and depression.

Social support may influence some domains of separation adjustment more than others. The influence of social support on psychological distress, has been investigated more than the influence of social support on the other domains of separation adjustment. Having someone to confide in, and socialise with is hypothesised to assist rebuilding, and having someone to pick up the children from school, and help with child-rearing may improve parent-child relationships. The effects of social support on these aspects of separation adjustment warrants investigation.
Development of a New Relationship

A number of studies report that improvement in separation adjustment often occurs when individuals repartner (e.g., Aseltine & Kessler, 1993). Hetherington et al (1982) found that remarried people were happier, and less lonely and anxious, than separated people who had not remarried. Separated people who date regularly also have better adjustment than those who do not date (Spanier & Castro, 1979). Kiecolt-Glaser et al (1987) found that the development of a new relationship is associated with less connection to the former partner. In a longitudinal study, Wang and Amato (2000) found that going out with someone new and remarriage predicted better general divorce adjustment, lower connection to the former partner, and more positive life appraisals. Finally, Weston and Funder (1993), found longitudinally, that re-partnering was associated with increased life satisfaction. However, it is possible that better adjustment enhances the chance of re-partnering.

Furthermore, the association between developing a new relationship and better separation adjustment may be confounded with other variables, such as time since separation or social support. Time might lead to better adjustment and an increased chance of forming a new relationship, or social support might enhance separation adjustment and the chance of finding a new partner.

Like other predictors of separation adjustment, developing a new relationship may differentially influence different domains of separation adjustment. For instance, finding a new partner was associated with reduced connection with the former partner (Wang & Amato, 2000) and psychological distress (Aseltine & Kessler, 1993). In contrast, Kelly (2000) found that non-resident parents who develop a new relationship decrease the time they spend with their children, which could impact negatively on parent-child relationships.
It is also possible that the development of a new relationship by the resident parent may hinder parenting negotiation, as the non-resident parent feels their role as a parent may be assumed by somebody else.

Stresses Associated with Relationship Breakdown

Stresses are events that occur during relationship breakdown that can have an effect on separation adjustment. Stresses include financial changes, litigation, the demands of children, and changes in the level of contact with children. Research on the impact of these stressors on separation adjustment have been inconsistent with some studies finding a negative effect of stresses (e.g., Garvin, Kalter & Hansell, 1993; Sansom & Farnill, 1997; Tschann et al, 1988) and some studies finding that stress does not impact on separation adjustment (e.g., Wang and Amato, 2000; Weston & Funder, 1993). In reviews, inconsistent findings have been attributed to different methods of assessing stresses and separation adjustment in each of the studies (Wang & Amato, 2000).

Financial Changes

Both males and females report financial hardship, and a decrease in their standard of living after separation (Hanson et al, 1998; Duncan, 1994; Hoffman & Duncan, 1988). For both men and women, smaller decreases in income are associated with better general psychological adjustment post separation (Tschann et al, 1989), and a more positive life appraisal (Wang & Amato, 2000). Kincaid and Caldwell (1995) report that depressive symptoms were associated with financial problems in a sample of mostly (71%) separated women. The impact financial hardship has on other aspects of separation adjustment, such as connection to the former partner and the parent-child
relationship, has not been explored. It does seem likely that financial stress affects parenting negotiation, either by the resident parent requesting extra financial assistance, or the child-support paying parent wanting a reduction in the amount of support provided.

Research in Western counties shows that women generally are worse off financially than men after a separation, particularly if the women have primary responsibility for care of children (Braver, 1998; Holden & Smock, 1991; Smyth & Weston, 2000; Weston, 1986; Weston & Funder, 1993). This financial disadvantage for women continues for many years post separation, whereas the financial circumstances tend to improve more quickly for men after separation (Weston & Funder, 1993).

**Legal Proceeding**

Surprisingly, there has been little investigation into how legal proceedings affect separation adjustment. It is generally recognised that litigation is a stressful experience (Dudley, 1991). It is likely that current and pending legal proceedings including divorce, maintenance or child support issues, contact and residence issues, property settlements, and domestic violence or intervention orders, can be major sources of stress and impact on separation adjustment (Sclater & Richards, 1995). This stress can be chronic, as the resolution of litigation can take some time. Furthermore, severe psychological distress can delay the process of dispute resolution (Sclater & Richards, 1995), which can then impact further on adjustment. The relationship between separation adjustment and legal proceedings also can be influenced by conflict. Dudley (1991) found that high conflict couples were the most litigious of separating couples.
The legal processes associated with separation are often perceived as unfair, particularly around parenting issues. Funder (1991), reported that many males felt the family law system was biased against men, who often cite statistics showing that more than four out of five children primarily reside with their mother after separation. Additionally, Watts (2002) reported that an Australian Family Court judge estimated that the resident parent (mostly mothers) was allowed to move in 18 of the last 20 relocation cases heard by that judge. This means that the non-resident parent (usually the father) would live far away from his children, and have inconsistent and limited contact with his children. While the objective merits of claims that the Family Law Courts discriminate against men has been a source of great dispute, and outside the scope of this thesis, it is clear that many separated men feel aggrieved by court decisions. These grievances might then impact on some of the domains of separation adjustment, such as connection with the former partner or parent-child relationships.

**Presence and Contact with Children**

Raising children after separation can be a physically, emotionally and financially demanding task (Bretherton, Walsh & Lependorf, 1996; Emery, 1988; Wang & Amato, 2000). Couples who separate and who do not have children report far fewer separation adjustment difficulties (Smith-Barnet, 1990; Wang & Amato, 2000), and higher life satisfaction (Weston & Funder, 1993) than couples with children.

In the United States 85-90% of children live with their mothers after divorce (Amato & Booth 1996; Braver, 1998; Bray & Hetherington, 1993; Seltzer, 1991; Depner & Bray, 1993; Furstenberg, 1990; Walsh et al, 1993). In
Australia, 83 percent of all residential or custodial parents are women (ABS, 2001).

According to the resident parent in a recent Australian study involving 14,000 people, 39% of the youngest children in the family had no contact in the last 12 months with the other parent, and a high proportion (56%) of children never stayed over night with the other parent (Wooden, Freidin & Watson, 2002). However, Braver (1998) found that reports by resident parents underestimate the level of contact between children and the non-resident parent. In the same Australian study, Wooden et al (2002), found that 72% of the non-resident parent group believed that contact with their children was inadequate. In a similar study of Australian children of divorce who reside with a primary care-giver, 42% visited at least once a fortnight with their other parent, while 36% visited their other parent either rarely (once a year, or less often) or never (ABS, 1997). In an American study, Furstenberg, Morgan and Allison (1987) found that 23% of noncustodial fathers had no contact with their children during the previous five years. Most non-custodial parents initially declare a high level of interest in contact with children, but over time the level of contact, and the quality of the relationship usually diminish (Dion et al, 1997; Kruk, 1992).

In regards to separation adjustment, fathers report that losing day-to-day contact with their children is often the most stressful aspect of separation (Umberson & Williams, 1993). The mental health of 60 men; 20 men in intact families, 20 separated men with custody of their children, and 20 separated non-custodial fathers was compared cross-sectionally (Stewart et al, 1986). Men without custody of their children reported more depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and more general adjustment problems than divorced fathers with
custody and married fathers. Cantor and Slator (1995) report that caring for children after a separation may be protective against suicide. However, lack of child custody may not cause mental health problems, as poor mental health might reduce the chance of gaining custody. Alternatively, other variables such as personality style (Dion et al, 1997), conflict management and dysfunctional attitudes may contribute to both low contact with children and poor mental health.

Some studies show little relationship between involvement with children and adult psychological adjustment. Rosenbaum (2000) found no significant correlation between contact with children and psychological adjustment in 94 divorced males. Barron (2001) found no difference between depressed and non-depressed divorced parents in the amount of time spent with their children. Rettig, Leichtentritt and Stanton (1999) found that involvement with children was not a significant predictor of family and life satisfaction in a sample of non-custodial fathers three years following divorce. It has been suggested that over a period of time after separation, non-custodial fathers find alternate fulfilling relationships with a new partner, and possibly with new children that contributes to life satisfaction and well-being (Rettig et al, 1999; Marsiglio, 1995).

A number of studies report that custodial parents, usually mothers, report high levels of stress in relation to caring for children. Milardo (1987) conducted a cross-sectional study and found that custodial mothers were less socially active, and had fewer friends, than did their separated counterparts without children. It is unclear whether the stress of caring for children is a chronic stress, lasting till children grow up, or if the stress abates with time.
Why is contact often low, and likely to diminish between children and the non-custodial parent? Ahrons and Miller (1993) found in a 5-year longitudinal study that low levels of conflict between former partners predicted the father’s continued involvement with their children. However, other variables could be mediating this association between conflict and low parent-child contact. The non-custodial parent’s perceived low involvement in decision making regarding the children (e.g., Braver et al, 1993), alcohol abuse and non-payment of child support (e.g., Dion et al, 1997; Furstenberg & Nord, 1985) are each associated with low amounts of time spent with children by the non-custodial parent, and also might be related to conflict with the former partner. Furthermore, child contact decreases with relocation or re-marriage of one of the former partners (Kelly, 2000).

Initiator Status

Partners who retrospectively report initiating the separation have better physical, psychological, and social adjustment than people who report their partner initiated the separation (e.g., Kiecolt-Glaser et al, 1988; Kincaid & Caldwell, 1995; Wang & Amato, 2000; Weston & Funder, 1993). Wallerstein (1986) reported in a 10-year follow-up of divorced women that initiator status continued to moderate improvement in quality of life long after the separation or divorce. In addition, females are reported to be the initiators in the majority (65 to 70%) of separations (Kincaid & Caldwell, 1995). Initiators report significantly more events as precipitating the separation than non-initiators (Kincaid & Caldwell, 1995). The non-initiator, most often the male, often report feeling shocked when the initiator announces the termination of the relationship (Jordan, 1996).
Initiator status interacts with the structure of a person's social support system (Kincaid & Caldwell, 1991), and connection to the former partner (Kiecolt-Glaser et al, 1988). The more social support one perceives, and the less connection felt towards the partner, the more likely people are to initiate a separation. These interdependencies show it could be initiator status, or variables correlated with initiator status, that influence separation adjustment. Alternatively, the retrospective reports of who initiated the separation might be biased by factors such as depression leading to self-blame for the relationship separation.

The work of Braver, Whitley and Ng (1993) show that measures of initiator status can be unreliable. For example the questions, "which one of you was the first to want out of the relationship?" or "who filed the legal papers?" have both been asked in studies, and the designation of initiator status can be quite different based on the different questions. Braver et al (1993) surveyed couples that had filed for divorce at three different times over a four-year period. At each data collection they were asked questions regarding who initiated the separation or divorce (e.g., “which spouse filed the legal papers?”; “which one of you was the first to want out of the marriage?”), and there was much variability in responses depending upon whom you asked, exactly what question was asked, and at what time point. However, with all measures, the female was designated the instigator two thirds of the time.

In sum, research suggests that there is an association between reporting having initiated the separation and less connection and distress. The association of initiator status on other domains of separation adjustment, including rebuilding and parenting adjustment, has not been explored.
Individual Characteristics

Personality and Premorbid Functioning

Very little has been written about the role of personality in separation adjustment. In the marital literature, a number of studies have identified personality characteristics that put people at risk for divorce. For example, neuroticism (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Kelly & Conley, 1987), extraversion, and psychoticism as measured by the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ; Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975), and nonconformity, and low endorsement of traditional values (Kelly & Conley, 1987) each predict divorce. Hence, there will be an overrepresentation of these personality characteristics in separated individuals. However, there are no studies predicting separation adjustment from personality.

There is some evidence that personality dysfunction influences the payment of child support, and child visitation after separation. Dion et al (1997) found that psychopathic deviance (social irresponsibility) predicts non-custodial parents not visiting their children, or paying child support. While an interesting finding, a correlate of personality such as conflict style may be responsible for the non-payment of child support, or lack of visitation.

Tschann et al (1989) retrospectively assessed (via clinical ratings) five dimensions of pre-separation functioning; emotional capacity, social relationships, coping with daily living, and problems with work. They found that pre-separation functioning was a strong predictor of women’s two-year post separation adjustment. It is debateable whether a retrospective measure of pre-separation functioning is reliable and valid, as current levels of functioning of the subject may bias the results. A longitudinal study assessing participant’s functioning in currently satisfying relationships, and following them till some
separate is required to determine the impact of personality and pre-morbid functioning on the different domains of separation adjustment.

Cognitive Processes

There is extensive empirical evidence suggesting that negative thinking plays a central role in the poor emotional adjustment to stress (e.g., Barlow, 1993; Beck, 1963; Dattilio & Padesky, 1990; Dobson, 1989; Lazarus, 1966). Baucom and Epstein (1990) identified five main types of cognitive processes that have been shown to play a role in the development and maintenance of poor marital adjustment. These cognitive processes include selective attention, assumption and beliefs, standards of behaviour, expectancies, and attributions for why events happen. There is also much evidence to suggest that targeting cognitions in therapy reduces various psychological problems and disorders (e.g., Devilly & Spence, 1999; Jacobson & Addis, 1993; Michenbaum, 1977; Shapiro, Barkham, Rees, Hardy, Reynolds & Startup, 1994; Wells, 1992). Yet, very little research has investigated the effect cognitions play in mediating separation adjustment. Identification of cognitive predictors of separation adjustment is likely to lead to the development of appropriate psychological treatment programs.

In the stress-diathesis model of depression specific patterns of cognitions are argued to make a person sensitive to specific stressors (Beck, 1987). Beck (1967) postulated that individuals develop schemata on how they view themselves, their environment, and their future. These schemata are referred to as the cognitive triad, and it is argued that negative events can activate negative schema and this can produce depression. In a similar manner schema might be activated during a relationship separation, mediating
poor separation adjustment. For instance, if a person developed a negative view of themself as a child, a separation experience in adulthood may result in depression because the person feels like a failure.

There are many different types of cognition that might relate to separation adjustment, but in this thesis attachment style, dysfunctional attitudes, attributions, appraisals and self-efficacy will be the focus.

Attachment Style

Attachment style has been defined as a cognitive working model of close relationships in adulthood (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazen & Shaver, 1987; Leonard, 2002). Attachment theorists argue that emotional bonds developed in infancy form the basis of adult attachment style (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth, 1978). In other words, adult attachment style is considered a stable and enduring trait, which determines the process of thinking about, and responding to relationship events, including relationship breakdown (Feeney & Noller, 1990). Working models of attachment have also been hypothesised to act as either a cognitive resource or vulnerability, that may assist or hinder in the appraising and coping with stressful life events (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998). People with secure attachment react to stressful events with less distress than people with insecure attachment (Feeney & Kirkpatrick, 1996; Mikuliner & Florian, 2001).

Attachment theorists (Collins & Reed, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazen & Shaver, 1987), have postulated different models or types of attachment such as: avoidant (discomfort with closeness, distrustful): anxious-ambivalent (worries that partner does not love them or will leave them) and secure (easy to get close to others, does not worry about being abandoned). More recently, researchers advocate using a continuous measure of
attachment dimensions rather than categorical ratings due to the enhanced reliability of the former (Brennan, Clarke & Shaver, 1998; Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994). For example, in the attachment measure devised by Brennan et al (1998) individuals obtain a score on two dimensions that reflect anxious-ambivalent and avoidant attachment styles. Low scores on these dimensions are indicative of a secure attachment style.

There is evidence that insecure attachment increases the risk of couple relationship breakdown. Longitudinal research on 193 unmarried undergraduate students, found that subjects endorsing an avoidant attachment style was associated with increased chance of relationship break-up (Feeney & Noller, 1992). Kirkpatrick and Hazen (1994) replicated this finding in a four-year prospective study of 177 adults showing that secure attachment predicted fewer relationship break-ups.

Mikulincer and Florian (1998) speculated that anxious attachment exacerbates the level of distress after separation, and that discomfort with closeness would lead to strong negative emotion after separation, as the person’s usual mode of detachment and self-reliance becomes ineffective in dealing with the strong negative emotions. Birnbaum, Orr, Mikulincer and Florian (1997) found that of 120 divorcing participants, avoidant and anxious-ambivalent participants reported higher distress than securely attached participants. Feeney and Noller (1992) also reported that people high on anxious-ambivalent attachment were the most upset after a separation. However, in contrast to Birnbaum et al (1997), Feeney and Noller (1992) found that after a separation, avoidant participants reported feeling quite relieved. The difference in results could be due to the nature of the participants in the two studies. Birnbaum et al (1997) used a predominantly middle age divorcing
sample, while Feeney and Noller (1992) relied on a student sample with an average age of 18 who had separated from a dating relationship. Alternatively, relief as measured by Feeney and Noller (1992) may generate quite different responses compared with distress, which was assessed by Birnbaum et al (1997). For instance, it is possible that someone with an avoidant attachment may report relief, but still feel distress at the end of a relationship.

Attachment style is not as stable as was initially thought by attachment theorists. Attachment style can be moderated by certain life events. Fuller and Fincham (1995) found that 35% of subjects in couple relationships changed their attachment style rating over a 2-year period. Ruvolo, Fabin and Ruvolo (2001) found that men and women experienced more insecure attachment after a separation. Kirkpatrick and Hazan (1994) found that attachment style was moderated to some extent by the experience of a break-up or the beginning of a new relationship. In a longitudinal study, they found that 50% of securely attached participants who experienced a relationship separation, subsequently reported an insecure attachment style.

Interestingly, while research has assessed the relationship between psychological distress and attachment style after separation, no studies have assessed the impact of attachment style on connection to the former partner. For instance, insecure attachment styles may predict more problematic connection to the former partner than a secure attachment style. In particular, anxious-ambivalent attachment maybe related to connection because of the person’s fear of abandonment from the partner. In addition, no studies have assessed the impact of attachment style on the other domains of separation adjustment including rebuilding and parenting adjustment. It is likely that people with an insecure attachment style may have problems negotiating with
their former partner in relation to their children, and/or have difficulties maintaining a relationship with their children.

**Dysfunctional Attitudes**

Dysfunctional attitudes are schema or beliefs that screen and process information in an unrealistically negative manner, thus producing negative expectancies about the cognitive triad; self, environment and future (Norman, Miller & Dow, 1988). Dysfunctional attitudes are considered to be relatively stable or enduring beliefs hypothesised to predispose an individual to depression (Oliver & Baumgart, 1985; Whisman & McGarvey, 1995), and general psychopathology (Hollon, Kendall & Lumry, 1986). These dysfunctional attitudes are argued to develop in childhood, and activated in adulthood during times of stress, and cause depression (Beck, 1976). For instance, Olinger, Kuiper and Shaw (1987) and Wise and Barnes (1986) found that individuals with greater dysfunctional attitudes reported more depressive symptoms in reaction to negative life events.

Given previous research shows an association between negative life events and dysfunctional attitudes (e.g., Robins, Block & Peselow, 1990), it is likely that dysfunctional attitudes may influence certain aspects of separation adjustment, particularly general psychological distress, given the relationship between dysfunctional attitudes and depression and general psychopathology. One study by Lakey, McLeister, Sirl, Drew and Butler (2000) found that divorced participants showed higher levels of dysfunctional attitudes than happily married participants. However, the impact of dysfunctional attitudes on the domains of separation adjustment, remain unexplored. It is also likely that dysfunctional attitudes might contribute to relationship breakdown and operate in accordance with social selection effects.
Attributions

Attributions in relationships are causal inferences that are made in reference to the causes of events relevant to the relationship (Harvey, Wells & Alvarez, 1978). Doherty (1981) proposed a model that involves the initiation of attributions and efficacy in response to conflict in close relationships. While it was developed for the assessment of marital conflict, it shall be generalised to include cognitive processes that occur post-separation. Doherty (1981) indicated that the first cognitive process concerns why the conflict arose. Or as with the case of separation, why the separation occurred. Here the model draws mostly from attribution theory. The second process entails determining whether the conflict can be resolved. Or in the case of separation, can the individual cope with the consequences of separation? Here the model draws on self-efficacy theories. These two cognitive processes will be discussed in more detail as to how they relate to separation adjustment.

The role attributions play in marital stability and satisfaction has been researched widely (e.g., Baucom, Epstein, Sayers & Sher, 1989; Fincham & Bradbury, 1987; Howe, 1987; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Noller & Ruzzene, 1991). The most commonly investigated attribution dimensions, adapted from the reformulated learned helplessness model (Abramson, Seligman & Teasdale, 1978), are global-specific, stable-unstable, and external-internal. A common finding is that distressed spouses are more likely to blame their partner for negative marital events, and rate causes of negative partner behaviours as more global and stable than do non-distressed couples (e.g., Fincham, Beach & Baucom, 1987). In relation to separated individuals, it could be hypothesised that poorly adjusted separated individuals are more likely to blame their partner (external) for the separation, and to see their
former partner as having all bad traits (global), and that their former partner is
not likely to change (stable). This pattern of thinking would be particularly
detrimental to parenting adjustment, particularly parenting negotiation.

In the separation literature there has been a number of studies
investigating the internal-external causal attributions made by adults about the
cause of a separation, and its relationship to general psychological distress.
(Fletcher, 1983; Lloyd & Cate, 1985; Lussier & Alain, 1986; Newman & Langer,
1981; Stephen, 1987). Internal-external attributions have been classified in
various ways but usually focus on the cause or responsibility for the separation
using the following domains: self, partner, external, and relationship. For
example, a self focused attribution is, “it is all my fault the relationship ended; I
should not have been so stupid and so demanding”, while a partner-blaming
attribution is “all he ever did was shout at me. He never wanted to go out and
would just sit by himself all weekend”. An example of other attribution is, “her
mother was always interfering, and phoning everyday. She was just always
there”, and an example of a relationship attribution is, “we never really
communicated well together. We both just sulked until one of us gave in”.

Table 3.1 summarises five studies on attributions and separation
adjustment. The samples have quite different mean ages, and length of
separation. All of the studies are cross-sectional, except for Newman and
Langer (1981) which had a short follow-up assessment. A consistent finding is
that non-initiators of the separation make more relationship attributions than
initiators (Lloyd & Cate, 1985; Newman & Langer, 1981). Another consistent
finding across these diverse samples is that women make more self-blaming
attributions for relationship separations than men (Fletcher, 1983; Lloyd &
Cate, 1985; Stephen, 1987). However, the association between self-blaming
attributions and separation adjustment is inconsistent. Fletcher (1983) found that more self-attributions were associated with better adjustment, but Lussier and Alain (1985) found self-attributions were associated with higher connection to the former partner and poor coping. Additionally, Newman and Langer (1981) found that more person attributions (either self or partner) was associated with more problematic adjustment, and predicted less happiness and more negative feelings towards the former partner 6-months later than subjects endorsing interactive or relationship attributions.

It is likely that separation related attributions change over time. A longitudinal study, investigating both the stability of causal internal-external attributions over time, and the impact of attributions on various domains of separation adjustment is required. For instance, the studies reviewed above only took into consideration distress and connection. How the various attributions affect rebuilding or parenting adjustment over time is still to be explored.

Finally, the learned helplessness model was revised (Abramson, Alloy & Metalsky, 1989), and became known as the hopelessness model. As well as attributions regarding the cause of an event, the model also discussed how inferences about the consequences of the event, and inferences about the self, given the event, impact outcome. No studies have assessed how these two inferences influence separation adjustment.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Critique</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fletcher</td>
<td>29 men; 33 women</td>
<td>Interviews asking &quot;why did the marriage break up&quot;. Coded self, ex-partner, background, external or interactive.</td>
<td>Overall inter-rater reliability of .89 on attribution coding</td>
<td>No mention of which measure of coping was used</td>
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<td>(1983)</td>
<td>mean time since separation - 9.7 mths</td>
<td>Measures: Rotter's internal-external locus of control scale, Rosenberg's self-esteem scale and a self-report of coping</td>
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<td></td>
<td>mean length marriage - 10 years</td>
<td></td>
<td>Women make more self attributions</td>
<td>Outcome measures not specific to separation adjustment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>recruited - newspaper and local agencies</td>
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<td>Controlling for gender and self-esteem, those who gave more self attributions coped better</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lloyd &amp; Cate</td>
<td>100 student participants</td>
<td>Interview (graph retrospectively attributions at various stages in the relationship)</td>
<td>Intercoder agreement 90%</td>
<td>Student/dating sample not generalisable to general population (e.g., young sample, shorter relationship duration)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(1985)</td>
<td>mean age 20</td>
<td>Coded as dyadic, individual, network (interaction with other), circumstantial</td>
<td>For negative turning points in a relationship males gave more dyadic and circumstantial attributions, while females gave more individual attributions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>time since separation – up to 12 mths</td>
<td></td>
<td>Non initiators report more dyadic attributions while initiator gave more individual attributions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>average length of relationship 15.7 months</td>
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<td>Lussier &amp; Alain</td>
<td>97 women; 30 males</td>
<td>questionnaire - respondents assign blame (e.g. self, ex-partner, interactional) to questions.</td>
<td>Subjects who made more internal attributions were more connected, and less adjusted than those who blamed their ex-partner or interactional factors</td>
<td>Assessment is limited, Long-term separated, Women over-represented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1986)</td>
<td>mean time since divorce - 3 yrs, 8 mths</td>
<td>Attachment questionnaire</td>
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<td></td>
<td>community sample</td>
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<td></td>
<td>average age 40 years</td>
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<td>Newman &amp; Langer</td>
<td>66 women divorced between 1 and 3 yrs.</td>
<td>Questionnaire asking about why they became divorced. Rated either person or interactive attribution. Measure of self-esteem, social activeness, happiness and optimism. 6-mth follow up questions (happiness, how much they liked their spouse)</td>
<td>Subjects making interactive attributions were more happy, socially active, optimistic than subjects making person attributions. Subjects making more interactive attributions initially, were happier, and felt more positive towards their former partner 6 months later. Subjects who asked for the divorce made more person attributions.</td>
<td>No men in sample, Did not separate out self and partner attribution, No external attribution, Follow up assessment limited.</td>
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<td>(1981)</td>
<td>Volunteers recruited through media</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stephen (1987)</td>
<td>• 93 student participants</td>
<td>• Three 7-point scales measuring distress, attachment to former partner and prospects for satisfying future.</td>
<td>• Inter-rater agreement 88%</td>
<td>• Student/dating sample limits generalisability</td>
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<td>• average age 20 years</td>
<td>• Written response to &quot;what were reasons for break-up&quot;. Coded - other, self, interpersonal and external</td>
<td>• Females report more self and other attributions</td>
<td>• Results mainly correlational and while sig. were generally low (e.g., .3). With so many low correlations a type 1 error may be occurring.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• short-term dating relationships- mean time 1.4 years</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Males who make more interpersonal attributions have lower distress</td>
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</table>
Self-Efficacy and Threat Appraisals

Appraisal and Self-efficacy are other cognitive processes that are activated in response to conflict in close relationships (Doherty, 1981). Appraisals are the individual’s evaluation of the significance of the event (Folkman & Greer, 2000; Lazarus, 1966), and in the case of separation can be seen as how threatening the separation is to them. Self-efficacy is the belief that one is able to do certain things to engender a desired consequence (Bandura, 1977). In relationship separation this equates to being able to implement coping strategies in order to adjust to the separation. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) categorise these two processes into primary appraisal (evaluating how threatening a situation is) and secondary appraisal (evaluating coping ability).

Previous research has shown that high threat appraisals impact to produce poor health, anxiety, and low self-esteem and well-being in adults (Green, Pakenham, Headley & Gardiner, 2002; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Rapee & Heimberg, 1997; Sarason & Sarason, 1990; Skinner & Brewer, 2002). It is also likely that appraising the separation as particularly threatening will increase separation adjustment problems.

Previous longitudinal research has shown that coping efficacy mediates the relation between active coping and adjustment problems in children after separation (Sandler, Tein, Mehta, Wolchik & Ayers, 2000). Coping self-efficacy has also been shown to relate positively to marital satisfaction (Fincham & Bradbury, 1989; Fincham, Harold & Gano-Phillips, 2000), positive behaviour in marriage (Weiss, 1984) and communication behaviour in marriage (Sanford, 2003). Lower self-efficacy has also been shown to predict binge drinking behaviour (Blume, Schmaling & Marlatt, 2002), anticipatory
nausea in chemotherapy patients (Montgomery & Bovbjerg, 2001), and chronic pain (Jensen, Turner & Romano, 1991). Hence, it is likely that lower self-efficacy in the ability to cope will predict poor separation adjustment in adults. Wolchik et al (2000) advocates increasing coping self-efficacy in preventative interventions for adults after separation.

Birnbaum et al (1997) measured both threat appraisals and appraisals of coping self-efficacy after separation in adults. They modified Folkman and Lazarus’ (1985) appraisal scale to tap cognitive appraisals of divorce. The measure yielded 3 factors: coping ability, seeing the divorce as a threat, and seeing the divorce as a challenge. Birnbaum et al (1997) found, using a structural equation model, that an appraisal of a low ability to cope, and seeing divorce as a threat, predicted poor mental health. This study used a cross-sectional design, and it is important to assess how appraisals and efficacy expectations influence the different aspects of separation adjustment over time. For instance, does having an appraisal of a high ability to cope predict reduction in the level of connection, or promotion of rebuilding or parenting adjustment over time?

In sum, there is very little research investigating the cognitive processes associated with separation adjustment. Apart from studies investigating attachment style, there are no longitudinal studies investigating how cognitive processes influence the different domains of separation adjustment over time. Cognitive predictors may prove to be an important predictor of separation, given that cognitive processes have been found to be predictive for many other psychological outcomes and adjustments, such as depression and relationship satisfaction. In addition, assessing the impact cognitions have on separation adjustment is likely to influence the development of intervention strategies.
Critique of Research Evidence

There is considerable research investigating the prediction of separation adjustment. There is some evidence that the context of the separation, stresses, individual characteristics, and cognitive processes influence separation adjustment. However, much of the research is cross-sectional. Where longitudinal research does exist, it is limited by separation adjustment being measured at only one time point. For instance studies aiming to predict separation adjustment using predictor variables and outcome measures (Booth & Amato, 1991; Coysh et al, 1989; Tschann et al, 1989; Wang & Amato, 2000; Weston & Funder, 1993), do so by assessing the predictor variables at one time point and separation adjustment at a later time point, without taking into consideration the effects of earlier separation adjustment. Only one study (Weston & Funder, 1993) assessed separation adjustment more than once, and they found that separation adjustment, as measured by life satisfaction, was the most influential predictor of later life satisfaction, highlighting the importance of assessing separation adjustment at multiple times.

Another major limitation is the narrow outcome measures used when assessing the course of separation adjustment. Specifically, most research only investigated general psychological adjustment, and there is little research on prediction of connection, rebuilding, parent-child relationship or parenting negotiation. It is also important to test whether the various domains of separation adjustment change over time, and for whom it is likely to change for. For instance do certain domains of separation adjustment change differentially for men and women, or for those separating from a de facto relationship or a marriage.
Researching all the variables that might influence separation adjustment would be very difficult, and a very large sample would be required to ensure adequate power of the analyses. Given that cognitive processes have received very little research attention to date, the current research will focus on these predictors. This was important to do because those cognitive variables have been found to be important in influencing responses to stress, and relevant to the development of relationship distress. Furthermore, cognitions are dynamic and changeable, and hence research on cognitions could inform interventions to enhance separation adjustment.

Overview of Research Program

In this thesis a series of studies are presented that focused on three aims. The first aim was the development of a psychometrically sound, multi-dimensional measure of separation adjustment. The second aim was to describe the longitudinal changes in the various dimensions of adjustment after separation. The third aim was to test the prediction by cognitions of separation adjustment. Chapter 4 describes studies relevant to the first aim of developing a sound measure. Chapter 5 relates to aim 2, describing longitudinal change in separation adjustment. Chapter 6 describes a study testing the prediction by cognitive processes of separation adjustment.
CHAPTER 4 - DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROBLEMS IN ADJUSTMENT AFTER SEPARATION TEST (PAST)

The aim in this chapter is to describe the development of a new measure of separation adjustment, the Problems in Adjustment after Separation Test (PAST). A conceptualisation of separation adjustment was provided in Chapter 2, in which the separated individual is assessed on five different domains of functioning. The first of these is general psychological adjustment which is adequately assessed by a number of existing measures (e.g., Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scale; DASS, Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995; Beck Depression Inventory; BDI, Beck, Rush, Shaw & Emery, 1979; Brief Symptom Inventory; BSI, Derogatis, 1993; Impact of Event Scale; IES, Horowitz et al, 1979), and therefore the new measure does not assess this domain. The next two domains are connection with the former partner and rebuilding. The last two domains are parent-child relationship, and parenting negotiation with the former partner. The PAST is intended to assess the severity of difficulties across these four domains of separation adjustment, and be sensitive to changes over time.

There are a number of generally accepted guidelines for the development of psychometrically sound measures (Gregory, 1992). Based on these guidelines, a summary of the desired psychometric properties of the PAST, and the methods used to test these properties, are presented in Table 4.1. A key aim of the research reported in the current chapter was to assess the PAST on each of these properties.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Desirable Outcome</th>
<th>Data Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content Validity</strong></td>
<td>Items reflect multidimensional nature of adjustment to relationship breakdown.</td>
<td>Review literature, define areas of assessment, consult experts in the field and pilot the measure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Construct Validity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Item analysis</td>
<td>Examine frequency of item endorsement. Select items with greater variance and distribution range in response.</td>
<td>Remove items that do not have adequate variability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Dimensionality assessment.</td>
<td>Expect 4 factors to account for a large portion of the variance: rebuilding, connection with former partner, parenting negotiation, and parent-child relationship.</td>
<td>Principle axis factoring techniques to ascertain the factor structure. Remove items that do not load adequately, or that cross-load. Replicate using a different sample.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Theory-consistent individual differences.</td>
<td>Expect that separation adjustment will be variable across participants.</td>
<td>Descriptive statistics; mean, SD, variance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criterion</td>
<td>Desirable Outcome</td>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Theory-consistent longitudinal effects.</td>
<td>Expect some separation adjustment domains to be variable over time.</td>
<td>Compare initial score with 6-mth follow-up using repeated measures ANOVA (see Chapter 5).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Convergent validity (See Table 4.2 for specific hypotheses).</td>
<td>Expect moderate to high convergence between PAST domains and other similar constructs.</td>
<td>Correlations between each domain of the PAST and other similar scales.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Divergent validity (See Table 4.2 for specific hypotheses).</td>
<td>Expect little to moderate correlation between domains of the PAST and dissimilar constructs.</td>
<td>Correlation between domains of the PAST and other dissimilar measures.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reliability**

| a. Temporal stability. | Administer the measure on two occasions: scores at time 1 and time 2 should be relatively stable. | Intra-class correlations between the two administrations (week apart) should be high. |
| b. Internal consistency. | Expect high correlations between items in each factor. | Assess coefficient alpha’s for each subscale, item-total correlations above .3, and alpha value changes when items are deleted. |

Based on principles of test construction by Gregory (1992)
In addition to the properties reported in Table 4.1, normative data were collected on the PAST. Given that the PAST does not assess general psychological adjustment, normative data was also obtained for a separated sample on two measures of psychological adjustment. In Chapter 2, psychological distress and traumatic stress were argued to represent general psychological adjustment after separation, and were used in the current study.

The evaluation of convergent and divergent validity described in Table 4.1 requires further elaboration. Convergent and divergent validity was evaluated for each of the domains of the PAST. Given that the domains of the PAST assess different aspects of separation adjustment, the relationships between the domains of the PAST, and the measures of convergent and divergent validity were expected to vary. Table 4.2 summarises the expected relationships between the different domains of the PAST and other measures.

Social desirability can be a source of bias in many self-report measures. All of the domains of the PAST were expected to be relatively independent of social desirability. The PAST was intended to assess adjustment to the specific stresses of relationship separation. Neuroticism is seen as a pervasive individual difference in the tendency to experience negative affect. While such an individual difference might influence the level of distress experienced after separation, it was not expected to explain high proportions of variance in separation adjustment, and hence should only have a low to moderate relationship with the domains of the PAST. The only exception to this was rebuilding. A moderate relationship was expected between rebuilding and neuroticism, given that rebuilding assesses feelings of upset and negative emotionality as a response to the ending of a relationship.
Table 4.2 Hypothesised Relationships Expected Between the Domains of the PAST and Other Constructs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Connection</th>
<th>Rebuilding</th>
<th>Parenting</th>
<th>Parent-Child Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social desirability</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Mod</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Distress</td>
<td>Mod</td>
<td>Mod/High</td>
<td>Mod</td>
<td>Mod</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahron’s measure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict with ex-partner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mod/High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mod/High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidante reports</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>Mod/High</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebuilding</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mod/High</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mod/High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-Child Relationship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mod/High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Mod=Moderate

General psychological distress can be experienced in a range of life contexts, whereas the PAST aims to assess adjustment to the specific stress of separation. If this is a valid distinction then general psychological distress should be somewhat distinct from separation-specific adjustment and parenting adjustment as assessed in the PAST. Given the distressing nature of relationship separation some association between psychological distress and the PAST domains was expected. A moderate relationship was expected.
between general psychological distress and connection, given that reducing the closeness with an intimate partner can be very difficult. A moderate to high relationship was expected between rebuilding and general distress because trying to reestablish a new life as a single person, and trying to develop new social structures can result in feelings of isolation and distress. A moderate relationship was expected between distress and the parenting domains of the PAST, given that having to co-parent after a separation and maintaining a relationship with your child after separation can be upsetting and stressful.

It was expected that the parenting adjustment domains of the PAST will correlate with another measure of parenting adjustment post separation. Ahrons (1981) developed a scale for parents after separation, which contains two scales assessing co-parental conflict, and involvement with their child. Given the similarities in constructs, the Co-Parental Conflict scale, on the Ahron’s measure was expected to have a moderate to high relationship with the PAST’s Parenting Negotiation scale, and the Parent-Child Involvement scale on the Ahron’s (1981) measure was expected to have a moderate to high relationship with the PAST’s Parent-Child Relationship scale. However, as described in Chapter 2, there is little evidence that the Ahron’s measure is reliable or valid. It was used in the current research because it is one of the only measures developed assessing parenting aspects of separation adjustment.

An alternate version of the PAST was developed to assess how a close family member or friend (confidante) rates the person’s separation adjustment. It was expected that scores on each of the domains of the PAST should show moderate to high correlation with scores on the confidante version of the PAST.
The research reported in the current chapter was collected on two independent samples of separated individuals. Study 1 was the development of the initial pool of items for the PAST, item analysis, dimensionality assessment, and internal consistency, and participants for this study were from the first sample recruited. Study 2 was a replication of the factor structure found in Study 1, using participants from a second independent sample, and an assessment of test-retest reliability of the PAST, using a subgroup of the second sample. Study 3 investigated discriminant and convergent validity of the PAST, and combined participants from both samples.

Study 1: Development of the PAST

Method

A review of the existing measures of separation adjustment, and a series of interviews were conducted with recently separated individuals. Based on this information, and in collaboration with two senior relationship researchers, an initial pool of 41 items was developed to assess separation adjustment. The items were intended to reflect the separation-specific and parenting adjustment domains: connection to the former partner, rebuilding, parenting negotiation and parent-child relationship problems. Table 4.3 presents the separation-specific items, and Table 4.4 presents the parenting adjustment items.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connection</th>
<th>Rebuilding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I find it hard to do things without a partner.</td>
<td>I make an effort to organise social activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I constantly think about my former partner.</td>
<td>I feel like I am on an emotional roller coaster ride.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Days that have special meaning for my former partner and I are really difficult (e.g., birthdays, anniversaries).</td>
<td>I don't have much time to see my friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wish my former partner and I could try to make the relationship work.</td>
<td>I get angry more than I used to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am used to not seeing my former partner anymore.</td>
<td>I feel desperately lonely.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I miss my former partner a lot.</td>
<td>I need help with jobs around the house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t really know why my former partner and I separated.</td>
<td>I feel isolated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is hard looking at things that remind me of my former partner.</td>
<td>Little things seem to upset me now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel rejected by my former partner.</td>
<td>I feel like my life has less purpose in it now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I seem to have more bad days than good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I find it difficult to enjoy myself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am very busy and don’t seem to have much time to go out.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.4 Parenting Adjustment Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent-Child Relationship</th>
<th>Parenting Negotiation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel like a stranger to my child/children.</td>
<td>My former partner and I agree on the child custody arrangements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Despite everything, my child/children appear to be doing ok.</td>
<td>I agree with my former partner on discipline of my child/children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have contact with my child/children’s teacher.</td>
<td>My former partner and I avoid speaking to one another.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I sometimes have trouble getting the children to school and other activities they are involved (e.g., sports).</td>
<td>When I speak to my former partner we usually fight over the child/children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have difficulty disciplining my child/children if they are naughty.</td>
<td>My former partner and I arrange child visitation well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My relationship with my child/children has not suffered.</td>
<td>I fight with my former partner over the well-being of the child/children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I help my child/children with their homework.</td>
<td>My former partner and I can talk in front of the child/children without fighting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have met my child/children’s friends.</td>
<td>There is little for my child/children to do at my home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know all the names of my child/children’s friends.</td>
<td>I know all the names of my child/children’s friends.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants rated how accurately the statements represented their experience in the past two weeks from 1 “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree”. The first two domains of the measure assess connection with the
former partner and rebuilding, which together form a measure of separation-specific adjustment. All participants complete these scales. The second two domains are parent-child relationship and parenting negotiation, which together form a measure of parenting adjustment. The items in the last two domains are only completed by participants who had children from the recently ended relationship. A number of the items require reverse scoring. The PAST items are scored so that high scores represent high levels of adjustment problems (i.e. poor adjustment). Initially, the PAST was given to a sample of 22 separated adults to assess the face validity of the items to separated individuals and to check that items were easy to understand.

Participants

Two-hundred and sixty-eight recently separated participants were recruited through advertisements in State and National newspapers, interviews on local and national radio programs, and distribution of brochures describing the project to clients of relationship, or separation-based government services (Relationships Australia and Child Support Agency). Participants were invited to volunteer for a study of adjustment to recent relationship breakdown. The inclusion criterion for participation was that the person had separated from a marriage or de facto relationship in the last 18 months. In the case of de facto relationships, the relationship had to involve at least 12 months cohabitation. The recruitment advice indicated participants would complete a questionnaire package on their separation experience and adjustment, which would take approximately 90 minutes to complete. No money was offered for participation.

Of the 268 questionnaire packages distributed, 220 participants completed and returned the package. Of the 220 participants, 146 adults were
recruited from newspaper advertisements, 16 from radio interviews, 26 from Relationships Australia, and 35 from the Child Support Agency.

The demographics of the sample are summarised in Table 4.5. There were slightly more women than men, more people separating from a marriage than a de facto relationship, and people were predominantly in their thirties and forties. The current sample is similar to the divorcing population in relation to age. In Australia, in 2000 (ABS, 3310.0, 2000) the median age for men and women divorcing was 41 and 39 respectively. The current sample is also similar to the divorcing population in relation to their duration of the relationship. The current sample had been in their current relationship for approximately 12 ½ years, while the median duration of marriage for the general population in Australia was 12 years (ABS, 2000). More than half of the current sample reported having children. According to Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) figures (ABS, 2001) the average yearly earnings for employed males and females in 2001 (part-time and full-time) was $42 000 and $27 800 respectively, which are very similar to the average earnings reported in the current sample. In regards to education, in the current sample 6% had completed less than 10 years education, 28% reported completing either Grade 11 or 12, 24% reported completing Grade 12, and 42% reported completing a university degree. These figures show the current sample was skewed toward higher educated people relative to the general Australian population.
Table 4.5  Sample Characteristics for Study 1 Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n=92</td>
<td>n=128</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Age in years</td>
<td>43 (9)</td>
<td>37 (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Salary per annum</td>
<td>41 149 (22 175)</td>
<td>30 586 (19 826)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Months since separation</td>
<td>10 (6)</td>
<td>9 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Years of relationship</td>
<td>14 (10)</td>
<td>11 (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% married (as opposed to de facto)</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have children under 18</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Means and standard deviations in parentheses for interval level data; percentages for categorical data

**Materials**

Participants received a questionnaire package (Appendix 1) containing an informed consent form, a copy of the PAST, and questions regarding biographical and separation information. Participants also received the following questionnaires that were used to assess convergent and divergent validity (see Study 4 in this chapter);

The Eysenck Personality Questionnaire—short version (EPQ-R: Eysenck, Eysenck & Barrett, 1985) is a widely utilised and psychometrically sound measure of personality. It has 48 items, which comprise of four different factors or scales: neuroticism, psychoticism (hostility, non-conformism), extraversion, and social desirability. Participants respond to each item by circling yes or no, depending on whether the statement relates to them. Reliability coefficients for each of the factors for men and women range from $r = .79$ to $.90$ (Eysenck et al, 1985). For the current research, scores on neuroticism and the lie scale were used.
The Co-parental Conflict Scale and the Parent-Child Involvement Scale was developed by Ahrons (1981) as part of a larger study assessing parenting after a relationship breakdown. The Co-parental Conflict subscale contains four items, and assesses conflict between the parents post separation. The Parent-Child Involvement scale contains 10 Items, and assesses the parent’s participation in their child’s life. While no construct validity has been reported, reliability coefficients of the two scales at three different time points for the same participants has been reported (Co-parental Conflict $r = .84$ to $ .88$, and Parent-child involvement $r = .90$ to $ .92$; Ahrons, 1981).

The Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) has 21-items, and assesses depression, anxiety and stress over the past week. The total score on the DASS-21 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) has been widely used in previous research (e.g., Bor, Sanders & Markie-Dadds, 2002; Green et al, 2002; Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2001; Shortt, Barrett, Dadds & Fox, 2001;) as a measure of general distress. Each item is rated on a 4-point likert scale from 0 “did not apply to me at all” to 3 “applied to me very much, or most of the time”. The DASS-21 has good construct validity, and good internal consistency for each of the scales (ranging from $r = .87$ to $.94$), and good concurrent validity with other measures of anxiety and depression (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995).

**Procedure**

Recruitment for the current study took approximately 12 months. Potential participants were requested to telephone the researcher. When a telephone call was received, biographical details, and time since separation was obtained from the potential participant. If the participant was eligible, they were given an explanation about the research, and sent a questionnaire.
package to complete. A follow-up telephone call was made three weeks later if the questionnaire was not returned, and a second call was made three weeks later if the questionnaire still was not received.

The current study originally was intended to be cross-sectional, but a longitudinal component was added about 9 months after recruitment commenced. Participants were contacted either 6 or 12-months after the administration of the initial questionnaire package, and permission sought to reassess them in relation to separation adjustment. Some participants were sent 12-month follow-up questionnaires because the decision to add a longitudinal assessment was made after their 6-month follow up was due. Those in the sample recruited later in the process completed 6-month follow up data, and those recruited earlier completed 12-month follow up assessments. The first 90 participants were sent a questionnaire package 12-months after the first administration, of whom 74 returned the questionnaire. The remaining participants (n = 130) were sent a 6-month follow-up questionnaire, with 98 returning the questionnaire. Overall, 78% of the sample completed the longitudinal component of the study.

Results

Item Analysis

The first step was to remove items that were not discriminating between participants. For each item, percentage endorsement of either strongly disagree (5) or disagree (4) was calculated, and for strongly agree (1) or agree (2). The item was dropped if < 20% of respondents endorsed agree or disagree, or if < 20% endorsed disagree or strongly disagree. Two items from the separation-specific scales was deleted and one item was removed from the
parenting adjustment scales. This left 22 items in the separation specific scales, and 16 items in the parenting adjustment scales.

**Construct Validity**

Separation-specific adjustment and parenting adjustment were factor-analysed separately, as not all of the sample had children. For all analyses, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using Principle-Axis factoring extraction with obliminal rotation was performed through SPSS (Norusis, 1993). Obliminal rotation was chosen because some relationship was expected between the factors.

For separation specific adjustment, the initial EFA identified three factors with an eigenvalue greater than 1. However, two items had low communality and one item loaded on a factor by itself. These were removed from further analyses, and the remaining 19 items were factor analysed. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling (KMO) index was .92, indicating that factor analysis was appropriate. Two factors were extracted with eigenvalues greater than 1, which accounted for 49.4% of the variance. Factor loadings were generally high (mean .64). When absolute values of .3 or less were suppressed, no cross-loadings were found. The obliminal rotated factor loadings from this analysis are summarised in Table 4.6.

Factor 1 accounted for 39% of the total variance. The highest loading items were: “I feel desperately lonely”, “I find it difficult to enjoy myself”, “I feel isolated”, and “I feel like my life has less purpose in it now”. A number of other items relate to negative feelings. This factor was labelled “lonely negativity”, and reflects two aspects of the rebuilding concept proposed in the conceptualisation of separation adjustment presented in Chapter 2. It is not surprising that items related to loneliness loaded onto the same factor as items
of negativity, given the association between loneliness and negative emotion (Shapiro, 1999).

The second factor accounted for 10% of the variance. The highest loading items were: “I miss my former partner a lot”, “Days that have special meaning for my former partner and I are really difficult”, and “I constantly think about my former partner”. All items loading on this factor related to the former partner, and this factor was labelled “connection to the former partner”. Factor 1 and factor 2 correlated modestly at \( r = .55 \).

As a preliminary check on the stability of the factor structure, an EFA was conducted using the data collected from the participants at either 6 or 12-month follow up. As is evident in Table 4.6, the factor loadings are similar, and the structure is identical in the two factor analyses. Thus, the factor structure was stable over time.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Number</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Factor loadings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Lonely negativity</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I find it difficult to enjoy myself</td>
<td>.805 (.747)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I feel isolated</td>
<td>.788 (.782)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>I feel desperately lonely</td>
<td>.716 (.822)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>I feel like my life has less purpose in it now</td>
<td>.641 (.683)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Little things seem to upset me now</td>
<td>.594 (.738)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>I get angry more than I used to</td>
<td>.589 (.800)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I don't have much time to see my friends</td>
<td>.564 (.553)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I find it hard to do things without a partner</td>
<td>.561 (.575)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>I sometimes have difficulty controlling my emotions</td>
<td>.546 (.696)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>I feel like I’m on a constant emotional roller-coaster ride</td>
<td>.532 (.726)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>I make an effort to organise social activities</td>
<td>-.444 (-.380)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I miss my former partner a lot</td>
<td>.906 (.913)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Days that have special meaning for my former partner and I are really difficult</td>
<td>.809 (.696)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item Number</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Factor loadings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Lonely</strong></td>
<td><strong>Connection</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>negativity</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I constantly think about my former partner</td>
<td>.784 (.600)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I wish my former partner and I could try to make the relationship work</td>
<td>.754 (.798)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>It is hard looking at photos and other things that remind me of my former partner</td>
<td>.698 (.632)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>I feel rejected by my former partner</td>
<td>.600 (.549)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I am used to not seeing my former partner any more</td>
<td>-.523 (-.449)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I don’t really know why my former partner and I separated</td>
<td>.379 (.464)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Factor loadings in parenthesis represent loadings at follow up.

One hundred and twenty-seven participants had one or more children under the age of 18 from their relationship. These participants completed a set of separate questions related to parenting. An initial EFA to estimate the number of factors from eigenvalues was conducted using the 16 items. Two factors were identified that had eigenvalues over 1. One item had very low communality and was removed from further analyses. Another EFA requesting 2 factors was conducted. Another two items were removed due to very low factor loadings. The final EFA of 13 items produced a KMO of .79. Two factors with eigenvalues greater than one were extracted, which together...
accounted for 46% of the variance. The obliminal rotated factor loadings are presented in Table 4.7.

Factor 1 accounted for 25% of the total variance. The highest loading items were: “My former partner and I arrange child visitation well”, “When I speak to my former partner we usually fight over the child/children”, and “My former partner and I can talk in front of the child/children without arguing”. Items loading on this factor relate to the ability to co-parent and negotiate matters regarding the children, and this factor was labelled “Parenting Negotiation”.

The second factor accounted for 21% of the total variance. The highest loading items were: “I have met my child’s/children’s friends”, “I have contact with my child’s/children’s teacher”, and “I feel like a stranger to my child/children”. The items on this factor relate to the closeness of the relationship with their child, and this factor was called “Parent-Child Relationship”. No cross loadings were produced, and most of the factor loadings were higher than .6. Factor 1 and factor 2 correlated at a low to moderate level (r = .39). As a preliminary check on the stability of this factor structure, an EFA was conducted on data collected from the participants at either 6 or 12-month follow up. The factor loadings were similar and the structure was identical to the first administration. The factor loadings for the follow-up assessment are presented in parentheses in Table 4.7.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Parenting Factor Loadings</th>
<th>Parent-Child Factor Loadings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My former partner and I arrange child visitation well</td>
<td>-.804 (-.634)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I speak to my former partner we usually fight over the child/children</td>
<td>.701 (.818)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My former partner and I can talk in front of the child/children without arguing</td>
<td>-.657 (-.648)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My former partner and I agree on the child custody arrangements</td>
<td>-.641 (-.695)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My former partner and I avoid speaking to one another</td>
<td>.601 (.548)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I fight with my former partner over the well-being of the child/children</td>
<td>.583 (.694)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I agree with my former partner on the discipline of my child/children</td>
<td>-.527 (-.640)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Despite everything, my child/children appear to be doing ok</td>
<td>-.481 (-.300)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have met my child/children's friends</td>
<td>-.817 (-.748)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know all the names of my child's/children's friends</td>
<td>-.808 (-.823)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have contact with my child's/children's teacher</td>
<td>-.720 (-.803)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Parenting</td>
<td>Parent-Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel like a stranger to my child/children</td>
<td>.596 (.570)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I help my child/children with their homework</td>
<td>-.558 (-.777)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Factor loadings in parentheses represent loadings at follow up.

The correlations between the different domains of the separation-specific scales and the parenting adjustment were all low. The correlation between rebuilding and parenting negotiation was $r = .14$; rebuilding and parent-child relationship $r = .17$; connection and parenting negotiation $r = -.06$; and connection and parent-child relationship $r = .07$

Internal Consistency

Internal consistency was calculated for each of the subscales. For the 8-item connection scale, and the 11-item lonely negativity scale, coefficient alpha’s were .88 and .90 respectively. For the 8-item parenting negotiation scale, and the 5-item parent-child relationship scale, coefficient alpha’s were .84 and .83 respectively. Table 4.8 presents test homogeneity or item-total correlations between each item and the scale total for each of the separation adjustment domains, and the alpha if that item was deleted from the scale. All Item-total correlations were above .3 and mostly above .5.

Discussion

A measure was developed that has four factors; lonely negativity, connection to the former partner, parenting negotiation, and parent-child
relationship problems. The factor structure was coherent, and was replicated in an analysis of the same sample at follow-up. Each factor showed good internal consistency.

Three of the four extracted factors had high loading items reflecting the key construct the factor was intended to assess. The lonely negativity factor was slightly different to what was intended. Originally, the idea of rebuilding was discussed in Chapter 2, in which a person reduces their loneliness and negative emotionality and increases their social activities (Berman, 1985; Kitson & Morgan, 1990; Spanier & Castro, 1979; Wang & Amato, 2000; Weiss, 1989). Of the 11 items that make up the lonely negativity factor on the PAST, only 2 items refer to social activities, and these two items had relatively low factor loadings. Lonely negativity more accurately reflected the factor extracted from the measure. While increasing social activities was represented in this factor, the majority of high factor loading items, referred to either loneliness or negative emotionality.

The current study suggests that the PAST has promise as a measure of separation adjustment. There is one major limitation to the current study. The current study consisted of separated people volunteering to participate in research, and often volunteers differ from the total population. For example, those who participate in studies of stress often report more distress than those who do not volunteer (Rosenthal & Rosenow, 1975). This sampling bias might skew the mean scores obtained but would seem unlikely to distort the factor structure of the PAST. In addition, the current sample had a low proportion of people separating from de facto relationships. The generalisability of the structure from a sample of predominantly formerly married people to people separating from de facto relationships needs to be assessed.
Table 4.8. Item Statistics for the Different Scales of the PAST

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale mean if item deleted</th>
<th>Scale variance if item deleted</th>
<th>Corrected item-total correlation</th>
<th>Alpha if item deleted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lonely negativity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find it hard to do things without a partner</td>
<td>28.25</td>
<td>83.93</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel isolated</td>
<td>27.78</td>
<td>79.10</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find it difficult to enjoy myself</td>
<td>28.21</td>
<td>80.07</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t have much time to see my friends</td>
<td>28.39</td>
<td>90.15</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel like I’m on a constant emotional roller-coaster ride</td>
<td>27.53</td>
<td>81.42</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get angry more than I used to</td>
<td>28.35</td>
<td>84.63</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel desperately lonely</td>
<td>28.14</td>
<td>79.50</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel like my life has less purpose in it now</td>
<td>28.22</td>
<td>78.08</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I sometimes have difficulty controlling my emotions</td>
<td>27.58</td>
<td>83.82</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little things seem to upset me now</td>
<td>28.12</td>
<td>81.94</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I make an effort to organize social activities</td>
<td>28.21</td>
<td>89.99</td>
<td>.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scale mean if item deleted</td>
<td>Scale variance if item deleted</td>
<td>Corrected item-total correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connection</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I constantly think about my former partner</td>
<td>20.47</td>
<td>52.50</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Days that have special meaning for my former partner and I</td>
<td>20.29</td>
<td>52.71</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are really difficult</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I miss my former partner a lot</td>
<td>20.58</td>
<td>49.33</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wish my former partner and I could try to make the relationship work</td>
<td>20.84</td>
<td>50.43</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t really know why my former partner and I separated</td>
<td>21.34</td>
<td>58.54</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is hard looking at photos and other things that remind me of my former partner</td>
<td>20.41</td>
<td>55.57</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel rejected by my former partner</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>54.09</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am used to not seeing my former partner anymore</td>
<td>20.92</td>
<td>56.82</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Parenting Negotiation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Scale mean if item deleted</th>
<th>Scale variance if item deleted</th>
<th>Corrected item-total correlation</th>
<th>Alpha if item deleted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My former partner and I avoid speaking to one another</td>
<td>17.95</td>
<td>36.57</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I speak to my former partner we usually fight over the children</td>
<td>18.77</td>
<td>37.19</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I fight with my former partner over the well-being of the children</td>
<td>18.54</td>
<td>38.17</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My former partner and I agree on the child custody arrangements</td>
<td>18.57</td>
<td>35.99</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I agree with my former partner on the discipline of my children</td>
<td>17.93</td>
<td>39.18</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My former partner and I arrange child visitation well</td>
<td>18.28</td>
<td>34.17</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Despite everything, my children appear to be doing well</td>
<td>18.69</td>
<td>39.71</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My former partner and I can talk in front of the children without fighting</td>
<td>18.28</td>
<td>36.84</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parent-Child Relationship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Scale mean if item deleted</th>
<th>Scale variance if item deleted</th>
<th>Corrected item-total correlation</th>
<th>Alpha if item deleted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel like a stranger to my children</td>
<td>9.74</td>
<td>15.99</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have met my children’s friends</td>
<td>9.56</td>
<td>15.39</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have contact with my children’s teacher</td>
<td>9.06</td>
<td>14.56</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I help my children with their homework</td>
<td>9.14</td>
<td>17.03</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know all the names of my children’s friends</td>
<td>9.31</td>
<td>16.23</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Study 2: Replication of Structure of the PAST

It is important to demonstrate stability of the factor structure across different samples. No existing measure of separation adjustment has demonstrated this. The current study assessed the factor structure of the PAST with a different sample of separated adults that included a higher proportion of people from de facto relationships than in Study 1. The current study also measured temporal stability. It was expected that test outcomes should vary little as a group, as a result of administering the test again within a short period of time. Finally in this study, normative data for the PAST is presented. Given the PAST does not assess the separation adjustment domain of general psychological adjustment, descriptive data on general psychological distress and traumatic stress was collected as well.

Method

Participants

Two-hundred and nine participants were recruited to participate in a study of separation adjustment. Of the 209 participants recruited, 174 (83.3%) participants returned the questionnaire. Of the 174 participants, 92 participants were recruited from newspaper advertisements, 24 from radio interviews, 24 from information sent to them from the Child Support Agency, and 7 others were obtained through brochures from local libraries, and word of mouth from other participants. A small number of psychology undergraduate students (n=34) were also recruited, and they participated in return for course credit.

The demographics of the current sample is reported in Table 4.9. The samples from Study 1 and this study were similar, in that the current sample was predominantly in their late thirties, and their relationships were long-term.
Participants in the current study reported slightly lower incomes, and were more likely to be separating from a de facto relationship, than participants in Study 1. Women were also less likely to have children than in the first study. Participants in the current study were not as likely as participants in Study 1 to complete a university degree. In this sample, 5% completed less than 10 years education, 32% completed either Grade 10 or 11, 31% completed Grade 12, and 32% completed a university degree. The current sample was similar in age and duration of relationship to the population of Australians divorcing. As noted earlier in study 1, the mean age of divorcing men is 41 years, and of divorcing women is 39 years (ABS, 2000). The mean duration of marriage before divorce is 12 years (ABS, 2000).

Table 4.9 Sample Characteristics of Study 2 Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean age in years</td>
<td>39 (8)</td>
<td>36 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean salary per annum</td>
<td>38 235 (21 647)</td>
<td>24 737 (14 495)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean months since separation</td>
<td>10 (5)</td>
<td>10 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean years of relationship</td>
<td>10 (7)</td>
<td>11 (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Married</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Who have children under 18</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Means and standard deviations in parentheses for interval level data; percentages for categorical data

Procedure

Recruitment procedures were the same as those used in Study 1, and the same participant inclusion criteria were applied. In this sample additional specific recruitment through a newspaper advertisement for separated men
was required to ensure there were approximately equal numbers of men and women.

Participants in the current study were informed that the researcher would collect information at two times points: now, and six months later. They were also informed that in addition to completing questionnaires they would also be required to participate in a short telephone interview (details on this will be provided in Chapter 6). They were also asked to nominate a friend or a family member that they had spoken to about the separation in order for them to complete an adapted version of the PAST (details on this will be provided in Study 3 of this chapter). Finally, the first 30 men and the first 30 women to participate in the current study were administered the PAST a second time, seven days after the first administration. Two participants did not return the questionnaire. The sub-sample of 58 was very similar to the total sample as per Table 4.9.

An initial telephone screening form guide and checklist was developed to ensure the researcher provided the potential participant with all the relevant information. The current study only utilised information from the PAST, IES and the DASS-21 from intake. Procedures for the six-month follow up assessment are provided in Chapters 5 and 6.

Materials

The questionnaire package contained the PAST (Appendix 1) and the DASS-21 which were described in Study 1. The IES (Horowitz et al, 1979) is a 15-item self-report measure of avoidance and intrusion of negative thoughts related to stressful life events. The IES has high split-half reliability ($r = .86$), and internal consistency (intrusion $x = .78$; avoidance $x = .82$). It has a test-retest reliability of $r = .89$ for the intrusion scale and $r = .79$ for the avoidance
scale. The IES is also sensitive to changes in traumatic symptoms, and discriminates between normal and patient populations on the intrusion and avoidance scales (Sundin & Horowitz, 2002).

The package also included a number of measures, which were utilised in a later study to predict separation adjustment. The additional measures were as follows. The Dysfunctional Attitudes Scale (DAS; Weissman & Beck, 1978) is a 40-item scale assessing attitudes believed to predispose depression. Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert scale from “disagree totally” to “agree totally”. Example items include, “People will think less of me if I make a mistake”, “I can enjoy myself even when others do not like me” and “I can reach important goals without slave-driving myself”. Alternate form reliability between two sets of undergraduate students was .81, and convergent validity against the BDI was .65 (Weissman & Beck, 1978).

The Experiences in Close Relationships Inventory (ECL; Brennan et al, 1998) is a 36-item measure of adult attachment derived from a factor analysis of most of the existing self-report measures of adult romantic attachment. The measure is rated on a 7-point Likert scale from “disagree strongly” to “agree strongly”, and has two primary dimensions (18 items each); avoidance (e.g., discomfort with closeness, or depending on others), and anxiety (e.g., fear of abandonment). An example of an avoidance item is “I try to avoid getting close to my partner”. An example of an anxiety item is, “My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away”. The two factors have high internal consistency (x = .94 and .91 respectively).

The Cognitive Appraisal of Separation Test (CAST) (Birnbaum et al, 1997) is a 12-item measure assessing cognitive appraisals of divorce. The CAST is a modified Hebrew language version of Folkman and Lazarus’ (1985)
appraisal scale, which is intended to assess cognitive appraisals of divorce. The Hebrew measure was translated into English for the current research by the first author of the CAST, Gurit Birnbaum. A translator who was educated in Israel and fluent in Hebrew, but who lived in Australia also independently translated the measure. The two translations were almost identical. As the current sample contained participants who were only recently separated, the measure was modified by replacing the word “divorce” for “separation” or “relationship breakdown” to make it more relevant to separated people.

Birnbaum et al (1997) conducted a factor analysis of the CAST and reported three factors accounting for 38% of the variance. Factor 1 (20% of variance) included 5 items which reflected appraisals of coping. Factor 2 (12% of variance) included four items that reflected appraisals of threat. Factor 3 (6% of variance) included three items that reflected appraisals of challenge. Threat appraisals correlated at a low level with measures of well-being and distress, while coping appraisals correlated at a moderate level with well-being and distress.

To evaluate the factor structure of the English language adaptation, a Principal axis factor analysis with obliminal rotation was conducted. A KMO of .89, suggested that factor analysis was appropriate. Two factors with eigenvalues greater than one, accounted for 60.5% of the variance. The first factor is a combination of the second and third factors Birnbaum referred to as threatening and challenging appraisals. This factor accounted for 47.8% of the variance and was called threat appraisal. The second factor accounted for 12.7% of the variance and was similar to the first factor in the factor structure presented by Birnbaum et al (1997). This factor however was renamed Coping Self-Efficacy, in contrast to the label “Coping” because the items relate to how
the person thinks they are coping. The factor structure is presented in Table 4.10, and it can be seen that one item while predominately loading on self-efficacy coping did cross load on the threatening / challenging factor as well. The two factors correlated moderately ($r = .41$). Internal consistency for each of the scales was high (coping self-efficacy $\alpha = .88$, and threatening / challenging $\alpha = .90$). For the current research the 2-factor solution was utilised given this is the first factor analysis since the translation, and it was the first time English speaking subjects completed it, and the percentage variance explained was higher than in the analysis presented by Birnbaum et al (1997).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item summary</th>
<th>Factor loadings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Threat appraisal</td>
<td>Coping self-efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The separation seems to be especially difficult for me</td>
<td>-.844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The relationship breakdown is threatening to me</td>
<td>-.831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping with separation is a challenge for me</td>
<td>-.788</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The separation puts me under lots of pressure</td>
<td>-.771</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The relationship breakdown is extremely harmful to me</td>
<td>-.746</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can cope positively with the separation</td>
<td>.753</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have the capabilities to cope with the separation</td>
<td>.723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can get much benefit from coping with the relationship breakdown</td>
<td>.693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping with the separation give me an opportunity to show or prove my worth</td>
<td>.650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can reduce the amount of stress associated with separation</td>
<td>.640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Despite the crisis of relationship breakdown, my general functioning is good</td>
<td>.606</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can relieve the pain associated with separation</td>
<td>.368  .530</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Replication of Factor Structure

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed on the separation-specific adjustment items using Amos 4.01 (Arbuckle, 1999). The numbers \( n = 111 \) of participants completing the parenting adjustment scales was too small to attempt a CFA for parenting adjustment (cf. Chou & Bentler, 1995; MacCallum, Browne & Sugawara, 1996). As in Study 1, an EFA was conducted for the parenting adjustment items, with principal-axis extraction and obliminal rotation using SPSS (Norusis, 1993).

Maximum likelihood estimation was employed to estimate all models in the CFA for the separation-specific items. A model testing the hypothesis that all variables were uncorrelated, except for the two latent variables, which were expected to covary \( \chi^2 (151, N=174) = 336.75, p<.01 \) was rejected due to a low comparative fit index (CFI) of .90. The model was revised on the basis of modification indices showing that eight intra-factor paths covaried at \( p<.001 \).

On inspection (see Figure 4.1, and refer back to Table 4.6 for item labels), the items that were covariates were meaningfully similar. For instance one of the suggested pathways was between “I get angry more than I used to” (Item 13) and “Little things seem to upset me more now” (Item 19). A chi square difference test indicated a significant improvement in fit \( p<.001 \) between the initial model and the revised model. The chi square test however for the revised model remained significant \( \chi^2 (143, N=174) = 208.26, p<.01 \).

Tabachnick and Fidell (2001) cite numerous problems with using chi-square to determine a good fitting model. They report that a good fitting model may be indicated when the ratio of the \( \chi^2 \) to the degrees of freedom is less than 2, which clearly is the case in the chi square of the revised model. In addition,
because of the problems associated with using $\chi^2$ as a goodness of fit index, numerous measures of model fits have been proposed. In the amended model, goodness of fit indices of GFI = .89, CFI=.96, TLI=.96, and RMESA of .05 were produced. These figures suggest that the model is an acceptable to good fit to the data. The final model, including significant coefficients in standardised form is illustrated in Figure 4.1.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 4.1.** Revised CFA model for separation-specific items on the PAST with coefficients presented in standardised form.
One hundred and eleven participants had children, and completed the parenting adjustment section of the PAST. The EFA produced a KMO of .77, indicating factor analysis was appropriate. A two-factor model was specified, and these two factors, which had eigenvalues greater than one, together accounted for 50% of the variance. The first factor accounted for 33% of variance. The highest loading items were: “When I speak to my former partner we usually fight over the child/children”, and “My former partner and I can talk in front of the child/children without fighting”. The items in this factor relate to parenting negotiation. The second factor accounted for 17% of the variance. The highest loading items were: “I have contact with my child’s/children’s teacher”, and “I have met my child’s/children’s friends”. The items in this factor are all related to being child centred, and the parent-child relationship.

The factor structure of the parenting adjustment items in the current sample, and the sample from Study 1 were almost identical. As is evident from Table 4.11, no cross-loadings were detected, however one item that loaded on parenting negotiation in Study 1, loaded on the parent-child relationship factor in the current study (indicated by asterix in Table). Given that the factor loading was highest for this item on parenting negotiation in study 1, it will remain an item of parenting negotiation.

Table 4.11 Obliminal Rotated Factor Loadings for Parenting Adjustment – Replication Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item summary</th>
<th>Factor loadings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parenting</td>
<td>Parent-child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiation</td>
<td>Relationship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When I speak to my former partner we usually fight over the child/children .816
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item summary</th>
<th>Factor loadings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My former partner and I can talk in front of the child/children without fighting</td>
<td>-.777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I fight with my former partner over the well-being of the child/children</td>
<td>.682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My former partner and I avoid speaking to one another</td>
<td>.647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My former partner and I arrange child visits well</td>
<td>-.640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My former partner and I agree on the child custody arrangements</td>
<td>-.611</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I agree with my former partner on discipline of my child/children</td>
<td>-.602</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have contact with my child's/children’s teacher</td>
<td>-.809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have met my child’s/children's friends</td>
<td>-.759</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know all the names of my child’s/children's friends</td>
<td>-.754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I help my child/children with their homework</td>
<td>-.753</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel like a stranger to my child/children</td>
<td>.604</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Despite everything, my child/children appear to be doing ok</td>
<td>-.446*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* in sample 1 this item loaded on the Parenting Negotiation factor
Finally, Table 4.12 presents the correlations between the scores on the different domains of the PAST. The highest relationship exists between connection and lonely negativity. All the other correlations are low, indicating that parenting negotiation and the parent-child relationship are relatively independent of each other and independent of separation-specific adjustment. The pattern of correlations between the domains of the PAST for the current study and Study 1 were similar.

Table 4.12 Correlations Between the PAST Domains

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lonely negativity</th>
<th>Connection</th>
<th>Parenting Negotiation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>.648**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting</td>
<td>.247**</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting</td>
<td>.247**</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-Child Relationship</td>
<td>.342**</td>
<td>.263**</td>
<td>.309**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p<.01

Test-Retest Reliability

The stability of the PAST was assessed over time by computing intra-class coefficients (ICC) for each of the domains. For the connection and the lonely negativity scale the ICC = .93 and .85, respectively. For the parenting negotiation and the parent-child relationship scale the ICC = .89 and .90, respectively. These results demonstrate that the PAST scales have high test-retest reliability.

Descriptive Analyses of the PAST, IES and DASS-21

The means and standard deviations of the PAST, IES and DASS-21 are presented in Table 4.13. Independent samples t-tests were conducted to assess if there were any statistically reliable differences between men and
women on any of the variables. Males reported more problems with parent-child relationships than women $t(1,109) = 5.87, p < .01$, which had a very large effect size $d = 1.16$. There was also a trend for men to report more adjustment problems than women on connection $t(1, 172) = 1.82, p = .07$, and intrusive symptoms $t(1,169) = 1.91, p = .06$.

Table 4.13 Descriptive Analyses for Separation Adjustment Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjustment Variable</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DASS-21</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>18.67 (13.84)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IES intrusion</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>16.98 (10.64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IES avoidance</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>14.83 (10.37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loneliness/negative emotionality</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>31.00 (10.76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>23.53 (8.84)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting negotiation</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>22.13 (7.41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>14.49 (5.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A community population reported a mean total score of $11.6$ $(SD = 7.9)$ on the DASS-21 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1996). In comparison, the current sample was almost a standard deviation higher on psychological distress. There was also marked elevations on traumatic symptoms when compared to a normative sample. A normative sample had mean scores on intrusion for men of $M = 2.5$ $(SD = 3.0)$ and for women of $M = 6.1$ $(SD = 5.3)$ and on
avoidance for men of $M = 6.9$ (SD = 6.8) and for women $M = 12.7$ (SD = 10.8) (Horowitz et al, 1979). The separated men in the current sample were more than two standard deviations higher on intrusion, and just over one standard deviation higher for avoidance when compared to the normative sample. The separated women in the current sample were one standard deviation higher on intrusion and almost a half a standard deviation higher on avoidance. Given the sample showed elevated scores on the DASS-21 and the IES, the normative data of the PAST probably reflects mean levels for a distressed sample.

Connection and lonely negativity showed a moderate correlation with both the IES scales ($r$ between .44 and .66), while the parenting adjustment scales showed only a low correlation with the IES scales ($r$ between .23 and .33). There was also a moderate relationship between the DASS-21 and the IES scales $r = .54$ (avoidance), and .63 (intrusion). Associations between psychological distress and the PAST are explored in Study 3 of this Chapter.

**Discussion**

The current study replicated the factor structure of the PAST across independent samples. The sample in the current study had somewhat different characteristics to the sample in Study 1. Specifically, more participants in the current sample had separated from a de facto relationship, were more likely to have lower incomes, and women were less likely to have children than in the Study 1 sample. The current study establishes the PAST as the first measure of separation adjustment to have a replicated factor structure, plus showing good test-retest reliability.

The current study provides normative data on the PAST. The current work replicates the finding by Amato and Booth (1996) and Coiro and Emery.
(1998) by showing that men report more problems in their parent-child relationships than women. On measures of trauma symptoms and general psychological distress, the current sample evidenced significant distress.

As with Study 1, the current sample consisted mainly of people volunteering to participate for research through media advertisements. Media advertisements seem to recruit individuals with more distress. Karney, Davila, Gohan, Sullivan, Johnson and Bradbury (1995) found that participants recruited through newspaper advertisements were at higher risk of distress than participants recruited through public records. If media recruitment skews the sample to more distress, the current sample might be more distressed than a more representative sample of separated individuals.

Men were harder to recruit in the current study, and extra outreach was needed to recruit sufficient men into the study. The gender difference found on parent-child relationship problems could be a sampling artefact due to differential gender recruitment. However, previous research with national representative samples (Amato & Booth, 1996; Emery, 1998) has consistently shown that men have more parent-child relationship problems than women. The very large effect size of gender in the current study is likely to be a real gender difference.

Study 3: Discriminant and Convergent Validity

This study is an assessment of the discriminant and convergent validity of the different domains of the PAST. As specified in Table 4.2, it was predicted that certain domains of the PAST would correlate at least moderately ($r > .04$) with other measures that assess similar constructs as the domains of the PAST. It was also expected that some of the domains of the PAST would
correlate at low levels ($r < .04$) with variables that do not measure adjustment to relationship separation.

More specifically, it was predicted that there would be moderate to high correlations ($r$ between .4 and .7) between the parenting adjustment domains of the PAST and the two parenting adjustment scales developed by Ahron’s (1993) (Hypothesis 1). A moderate to high association ($r$ between .4 and .7) was expected between the PAST and the PAST-Confidante (described below) on all domains (Hypothesis 2). Moderate to high convergence ($r$ between .4 and .7) was expected between psychological distress and lonely negativity, and moderate (.4 < $r$ < .6) convergence was expected between psychological distress and the other three PAST domains (Hypothesis 3). A moderate relationship (.4 < $r$ < .6) was expected between lonely negativity and neuroticism and a small relationship ($r < .4$) was expected between the other domains of the PAST and neuroticism (Hypothesis 4). Finally, a small relationship ($r < .4$) was expected between all the subscales of the PAST and social desirability (Hypothesis 5).

**Method**

**Participants and Procedure**

Participants from Study 1 and 2 completed all the questionnaires that are described in the preceding measures section. The only exception is that participants from Study 2 nominated a confidante to complete the PAST Confidante (PAST-Co; described below). The participant provided the name, address and phone number of the confidante to the researcher. The researcher posted a package containing information regarding the research, and the PAST-Co to the confidante. Seventy-five percent of participants identified a confidante. Of those participants who identified a confidante, 45%
were male. Seventy-one percent of confidantes \((n=92)\) returned the questionnaire. Confidantes were mostly women \((79\%)\), and the average age was 41 \((SD=12)\). Friends were the most likely confidante \((58\%)\), followed by family members \((31\%)\), and other \((11\%)\). The participants had known the confidantes on average for 12 years, and had either seen them, or spoke to them on the telephone on average 12 times during the past month.

**Materials**

The DASS-21 \((Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995)\), EPQ-r \((Eysenck et al, 1985)\), and the Co-parental conflict scale and the Parent-child involvement scale \((Ahrons, 1981)\) was described in Study 1. The Problems in Adjustment after Separation Test–Confidante \((PAST-Co)\) includes the same items as the PAST, but is reworded to report on the participant. For example, a question in the PAST is “I find it hard to do things without a partner”. In the PAST-Co, it reads, “He/she finds it hard to do things without a partner”.

**Results**

Pearson’s correlation was used to assess discriminant and convergent validity of the PAST. As indicated in Table 4.14, the PAST parenting adjustment scales showed moderate to high convergence with the corresponding Ahron’s scales \((1981)\) of parenting adjustment. The reports of the participants converged with the reports from the confidantes on each of the domains of the PAST.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAST Scale</th>
<th>Connection</th>
<th>Lonely negativity</th>
<th>Parenting negotiation</th>
<th>Parent-child Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lie</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>-.030</td>
<td>.126</td>
<td>-.078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>.319**</td>
<td>.582**</td>
<td>.106</td>
<td>.047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DASS-21</td>
<td>.453**</td>
<td>.720**</td>
<td>.269**</td>
<td>.410**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahrons measure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict with ex partner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.687**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.727**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAST-Co</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>.634**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lonely negativity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.558**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting negotiation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.570**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-child relationship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.690**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**sig >.01; *sig > .05

All the subscales of the PAST correlated significantly with the DASS-21. Of note, the separation-specific subscales of the PAST were more closely associated with general distress than the PAST parenting adjustment scales. As predicted, lonely negativity was highly correlated with the DASS-21, while connection and the parent-child relationship had a moderate relationship with general distress, and parenting negotiation had a low relationship with general distress. The lonely negativity factor was moderately correlated with neuroticism, but the correlations with the other PAST factors were low. Finally, the PAST showed no significant relationship to the Lie scale on the EPQ.
Discussion

Overall, the pattern of correlations supports the convergent and divergent validity of the PAST. Hypothesis 1 was supported in that the parenting adjustment domains of the PAST were associated with the parenting items on the Ahron’s measure. Hypothesis 2 was supported in that a moderate association was found between the reports by the participant and the confidante. The moderate association is likely representative of confidantes only sampling a selection of feelings and behaviours of the participant. Hypothesis 3 was supported in that psychological distress was highly associated with lonely negativity, and connection and parent-child relationship was moderately associated with psychological distress. Parenting negotiation on the other hand, had little association with psychological distress. Hypothesis 4 was supported in that lonely negativity was moderately associated with neuroticism, and the other domains of the PAST showed only a small association. Finally, Hypothesis 5 was supported in that none of the subscales of the PAST were related to social desirability.

The association between psychological distress and the different domains of the PAST were of interest given the different associations between the DASS-21 and each of the PAST dimensions. This study replicated the finding (Berman, 1988; Brown et al, 1980) that connection and general psychological distress are associated, in that the more connection felt towards the former partner the more likely they were to feel psychological distress.

The current research also replicated the findings of Stewart et al (1986) suggesting that poor parent-child relationships were associated with moderate psychological distress. However, previous research has not always found an association between parent-child relations and adult general distress. For
instance, Rettig et al (1999) found that involvement with children was not a significant predictor of family and life satisfaction in a sample of non-custodial fathers three years following divorce. It is likely that the difference between the current findings and the findings by Rettig et al (1999) is due to the different time since separation. Participants in Rettig’s et al (1999) study had been separated for much longer, and it has been suggested that over a period of time after separation, non-custodial parents find alternate fulfilling relationships with a new partner, and possibly with new children that contributes to life satisfaction and well-being (Marsiglio, 1995; Rettig et al, 1999).

This study also replicated the findings by Barron (2001) showing a low association between general psychological distress and parenting negotiation. The finding that general psychological distress has a moderate relationship with parent-child relationships, but only a low association with parenting negotiation may suggest that it is more distressing for separated people to not be involved with their children than it is to have problems with negotiating with their former partner. However, this is a correlation and causal direction cannot be implied.

The observed moderate to high relationship between lonely negativity and general psychological distress warrants further discussion. Previous researchers have hypothesised that depression and loneliness are similar constructs that may correlate highly, though still remain quite distinct. For instance, Shaver and Brennan (1991) suggested that loneliness is a subtype of depression associated with a deficiency in interpersonal relationships. Consistent with this proposition, Anderson and Riger (1991), showed that loneliness was more strongly associated with interpersonal problem situations.
than was general depression. In the current research, connection to the former partner, which is interpersonal, was more closely related to lonely negativity than to general psychological distress, which is consistent with the proposition that loneliness is related to interpersonal problems.

Depression and loneliness have differential trajectories over time. For example, Jessen, Cardiello and Baun (1996) showed that elderly people living in a nursing home who got a budgerigar showed significant decreases in depression, but not in loneliness. Additionally, incontinence that inhibits social interaction is associated with loneliness, but not with depression (Fultz & Herzog, 2001). Depression is consistently found not to relate strongly to self-reported loneliness for either young or older adults (Vandeputte, Kemper, Hummert, Kemtes, Shaner & Segrin, 1999). All these findings converge on the point that loneliness seems to be related but distinct from depression, which is likely to be true for the constructs of lonely negativity and psychological distress measured in the current study.

General Discussion

This chapter described the development of a new measure of separation adjustment entitled the PAST. Four factors were identified; lonely negativity, connection to former partner, parenting negotiation and parent-child relationship. These concepts are closely related to the concepts that were hypothesised in Chapter 2 to represent separation adjustment. The factor structure of the PAST was replicated in a second sample, and in a follow-up reassessment of the first sample. Internal consistency, and test-retest reliability for all factors were high. The various factors converged with other measures of separation adjustment, and discriminated from other non-
adjustment measures. The sample overall evidenced distress, and showed elevated traumatic stress-related symptoms relative to a non-clinical, community sample.

**Contribution to the Literature**

The PAST is the first multidimensional separation adjustment measure that has been subject to thorough psychometric analysis. Some of the previous measures reviewed in Chapter 2 assessed some elements of separation adjustment, such as connection to the former partner (e.g., Brown & Reimer, 1984; Gray & Shields, 1992; Kitson, 1982; Masheter, 1997) or parenting adjustment (e.g., Ahrons, 1981). The PAST is the first measure to assess across each of the domains representing separation adjustment, and to show good psychometric properties in each of the indices of separation adjustment.

**The PAST Domains**

The connection factor measured the extent of ongoing emotional attachment to the former partner, which has been shown to be a common adjustment problem after separation (Amato, 2000; Brown & Reimer, 1984; Gray & Shields, 1992; Kitson, 1982; Masheter, 1997). Furthermore, the parenting scales measured parenting negotiation and parent-child relationship as hypothesised, which has also been shown to be a common problem after separation (Ahrons, 1981; Amato, 2000; Buchanan & Heiges, 2001; Coiro & Emery, 1998; King & Heard, 1999). The current measure also assessed lonely negativity, which as described in Study 1 of this chapter, is a little different to the rebuilding domain initially hypothesised, in that sociability is not represented in the domain as much as feelings of loneliness and negative emotion.
Relationships between domains of the PAST were as expected. The current research replicated previous research (Amato & Rezac, 1994; Loewen, 1988) finding a small to moderate association between parenting negotiation and parent-child relationship. While causality cannot be determined, the relationship may suggest that having a positive parent-child relationship provides more opportunities for conflict between the former partners, as they try to communicate and make decisions about their children.

There was a low association between connection and the parenting adjustment domains, suggesting that ongoing feelings for the former partner, are unlikely to impact the parent-child relationship, or parenting negotiations with the former partner. Although due to the correlational nature of this data, causality is speculative. This is an encouraging finding because it could suggest that even very recently separated people can focus on their children, despite how they might feel towards their former partner. Additionally, lonely negativity had a low to moderate association with parent-child relationship, and only a low relationship with parenting negotiation. Like, connection, it is encouraging that even though the recently separated person experiences loneliness or negative affect, it may not affect their parenting adjustment.

Lonely negativity had only a moderate relationship with connection. It is possible that the two domains may be associated with somewhat different behaviours after separation. For instance stalking behaviour maybe more associated with continued connection than high levels of lonely negativity. The overall pattern of relationships between the domains, make it important to assess each of the domains.

The results of the current research do not clarify whether the domains assessed in the PAST represent state-like or trait-like variables. Nor do the
current results show whether people generally improve on each of the domains simultaneously, or whether some domains show more rapid improvement compared to the other domains. The change over time of the PAST domains is investigated in the next Chapter.

**The PAST and General Psychological Distress and Traumatic Symptoms**

In Chapter 2 it was argued there are special challenges in adjusting to separation, and that the conceptualisation and assessment of separation adjustment needed to reflect those specific challenges. More general measures of psychological adjustment, such as psychological distress on the DASS-21, and traumatic symptoms on the IES are relevant to assessing separation adjustment. However, it was predicted that separation-specific indices and post separation parenting adjustment indices would be at least somewhat independent of general psychological distress. The pattern of correlations was consistent with these predictions.

Trauma symptoms were found to be moderately related to separation-specific adjustment and relatively independent of parenting adjustment domains. Traumatic stress symptoms are elevated in people undergoing other stressful life events, such as coping with infidelity (Gordon & Baucom, 1999), and workplace harassment or bullying (Lewis, Coursol & Herting, 2002; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002). In the current study recently separated individuals reported elevated trauma symptoms, such as experiencing intrusive imagery of the separation experience, and avoiding reminders of the separation. However participants would not be diagnosed as experiencing the related disorder of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). A diagnosis of PTSD is only warranted if the person “experienced, witnessed, or was
confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others” (DSM-IV, 1994, p 427). Clearly, like infidelity, workplace harassment, and other stressful life events, relationship separation does not meet this criteria, but nonetheless separated individuals in the current study displayed trauma-related symptoms.

**Implications for Treatment**

There was relative independence of the different domains of the PAST, and in particular there was a low association between the parenting adjustment scales and the other domains of separation adjustment. This suggests that individuals can have quite different profiles of adjustment problems after separation. For example, one person may suffer greatly from lonely negativity, but not on other domains, while someone else predominantly might have parent-child relationship problems. If interventions to assist separated adults are useful, then they most likely will need to be tailored to the particular problems of the individual.

**Limitations of the PAST and Future Research**

The PAST was designed for only recently separated adults. The utility of the PAST for those who have been separated for a longer period of time is unknown. Additionally, the sample consisted of reasonably well-educated Australians. Cross-cultural evaluations, and the inclusion of less educated participants is required to obtain further evidence of the utility of the PAST. The utility of the PAST for gay and lesbian people who have separated from their partner needs to be assessed. Furthermore, the factor structure of the parenting adjustment domains of the PAST requires further assessment using CFA.
The sample for the current research consisted of people volunteering to participate in research. Study 1 and Study 2 discussed the problems inherent in such a sample. Karney et al (1995) suggests employing sampling techniques that allow estimates of the degree of sampling bias present in the sample by comparing them to public records. Unfortunately, there is no public record stating who has separated. Divorce records may be a solution for research that is investigating longer-term separation adjustment, but divorce records are not a useful comparison for very recently separated adults.

In summary, the series of studies presented, provides a multi-dimensional, and reliable and valid measure of separation adjustment. In comparison to the measures reviewed in Chapter 2, the PAST is superior in that it represents a range of domains associated with separation adjustment, and displays good psychometric properties.
CHAPTER 5 - STUDY 4: SEPARATION ADJUSTMENT OVER TIME

This chapter is focused on how separation adjustment changes over time. There is a general finding that separation adjustment improves over time (Amato & Booth, 1994; Davies et al, 1997; Hetherington et al, 1993; Kiecolt-Glaser et al, 1987; Kincaid & Caldwell, 1995; Kitson, 1992; Melichar & Chiriboga, 1988;), but this conclusion has two major caveats. First, the data collected to date predominantly has been cross-sectional. Second, not all the dimensions of separation adjustment have been tested over time. It is also possible that improvement, or change over time may be different for different groups of people. For instance, men and women could show differential improvement over time on the same separation adjustment domain. The current study assessed change over time separately for men and women, on the different domains of separation adjustment.

Conducting longitudinal research with separated adults can be challenging. There are practical difficulties of cost and time, which are particularly pertinent when conducting PhD research. The mobility of separated people makes tracking them across extended follow-up assessments difficult, and conducting multiple assessments on individuals can lead to drop out. The current study used a cohort sequential design (Nesselroade & Baltes, 1979) to try and address these problems. This design approximates longitudinal data analysis by combining information from a longitudinal study of different cohorts, using the overlap in follow up assessments to form a single trajectory. The sample in the current study consisted of three cohorts: those separated for up to six months, those separated between 6 and 12 months, and those separated between 12 and 18
months. Participants’ separation adjustment was assessed twice, six months apart, for each cohort.

Previous research has demonstrated that several aspects of separation adjustment improve over time. As discussed in Chapter 3, Waggener and Gallasi (1993) found in a cross-sectional study that participants more recently separated (less than 6 months) had more connection difficulties than those separated a little longer (7 to 14 months). In a longitudinal study, Lorenz et al (1997) found that women’s depressive symptoms abated over a period of three years post separation. Similarly, Booth and Amato (1991) found that self-reported levels of unhappiness and psychological distress decreased over the years following the initial separation. Mastekaasa (1994) found that psychological distress peaks in the first year, and reduces considerably over the following years. The effect of time since separation on lonely negativity is still to be explored.

In contrast to the pattern of improvement on connection and psychological distress, post separation parenting adjustment might not improve with time. Cross-sectional and longitudinal research has consistently found that the amount of contact, and the quality of the relationship, between the non-resident parent and children decreases over time (Amato & Booth, 1996; Furstenbberg & Cherlin, 1991; Shapiro & Lambert, 1999). In a review investigating parenting after separation, Coiro and Emery (1998) found that the role of fathering is more consistently altered by separation than the role of mothering. Fathers are most often the non-resident parent, and Shapiro and Lambert (1999) found that the difference in the quality of the relationship is moderated by the children’s residence. Specifically, the ongoing parenting problems are evident primarily in the non-resident parents’ relationship with
their children. However, lower quality post separation relationships between fathers and children are often preceded by a poor quality relationship prior to the separation (Block et al, 1988).

After separation, there often is substantial conflict over parenting between the former partners (Cummings & Davies, 1994), with two thirds of separating couples reporting high conflict initially after the separation (Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991). Over the first two years after separation, conflict tends to decrease, possibly because the former partners disengage emotionally from each other (Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992). However, up to 25% of couples continue to experience moderate to high conflict, with the conflict usually involving child-related matters (Buchanan & Heiges, 2001). Parenting negotiation is somewhat different to conflict in that Maccoby and Mnookin (1992) found that parental co-operation and communication is stable.

Separation Adjustment by Gender

As reviewed in Chapter 3, research on gender differences in separation-specific and general adjustment is inconsistent. Some researchers have shown that men report more connection problems (Waggener & Gallassi, 1993) and psychological distress (e.g., Diedrick, 1991; Helgeson, 1994; Hemstrom, 1996; Kincaid & Caldwell, 1995; Pledge, 1992; Wallerstein, 1986) than women. Other studies report that females demonstrate more psychological distress than men (e.g., Aseltine & Kessler, 1993; Clarke-Stewart & Bailey, 1990; Simon & Marcussen, 1999), while other studies report no gender difference in depression and psychological distress after separation (e.g., Booth & Amato, 1991; Gove & Shin, 1989; Mastekaasa, 1994). The different results in the above studies may be due to the samples having
differing time since separation, and methods for testing separation adjustment. None of the studies assessed if separation adjustment changed differentially for men and women. It is possible that in those studies in which men reported worse adjustment over time than women, that those men may show more rapid improvement and finish with similar separation adjustment as women. A longitudinal study of adjustment is needed to evaluate gender differences in separation adjustment. No studies have assessed gender differences on lonely negativity over time.

As described above, the relationship between children and the non-resident parent, who is most often the father, is much poorer than the relationship between children and the resident parent, who is most often the mother. Furthermore, the relationship between children and the non-resident parent often deteriorates over time (Amato & Booth, 1996; Furstenbberg & Cherlin, 1991; Shapiro & Lambert, 1999). No studies have assessed gender differences in parenting negotiation.

Change over time in separation adjustment by gender is of primary interest in this study, but there are a number of other variables that might affect separation adjustment. In Australia, of marriages that end in divorce, 51% (ABS, 2002) involved children. People who separate and who do not have children have shorter relationships and are generally younger than people who separate with children (De Vaus, 2003). Research is mixed on what effects having children of the relationship has on separation adjustment. Some studies found that having children can be very demanding after a separation, and can increase separation adjustment problems, such as connection, life dissatisfaction and depression (Tschann et al, 1989; Umberson & Williams, 1993; Wang & Amato, 2000; Weston & Funder, 1993), while other studies
show that having children from the relationship can have positive effects and buffer separation adjustment problems, such as psychological distress (Amato et al, 1995; Plummer & Koch-Hattem, 1986). For those separating adults who have children the research suggests that spending time with children, particularly for those recently separated, can be protective against separation adjustment problems, such as depression and suicide (Cantor & Slator, 1995; Kelly, 2000). Hence, it is likely that having children and time spent with children influences separation adjustment.

No research has previously compared separation adjustment for formally married and de facto couples. As discussed in Chapter 3, recent research has highlighted the heterogeneity of de facto couples (Kline et al, 2004; Manning, 2002), with different couples choosing to cohabit for different reasons. However, there are some overall similarities and differences between people in de facto relationships and marriages. For instance, people who cohabit tend to have less education and income than those in marriages (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Thornton, Axinn & Teachman, 1995), and have a much higher rate of separation than marriages (Smock & Gupta, 2002). In regards to similarities, over three quarters of cohabitating couples plan to marry their partner and those couples report similar levels of relationship quality to their married counterparts (Brown & Booth, 1996; Cannon, 1999). Despite the similarities and differences of married and de facto couples, it is unclear if separation adjustment would be similar for de facto versus married couples. The current study assessed if the married versus de facto distinction influenced separation adjustment after the effects of gender, time since separation, and presence and time spent with children are taken into account.
Hypotheses

As is evident from the research reviewed in the current Chapter, connection and general adjustment after separation tend to improve over time. The first year or two after separation often is associated with substantial improvement in separation adjustment. Presumably the rate of improvement declines after most people adapt and have less adjustment problems. Based on this pattern, it was predicted that connection problems, lonely negativity and psychological distress would decrease over time (Hypothesis 1), and that rates of decrease of adjustment problems would slow as adjustment progresses towards normal long-term functioning (Hypothesis 2).

Given that mothers are usually the resident parent, it was predicted that the mother’s relationship with their children would be better than the fathers. Furthermore, it was predicted that women’s relationships with their children would either be stable or improve over time, but men’s relationship with their children would deteriorate, (Hypothesis 3). Greater time with children was hypothesised to predict better parent-child relationships for men and women (Hypothesis 4). Parenting negotiation was not expected to change significantly for participants given that previous research has shown that during this time separating couples tend to remain in high conflict, and communication is stable (Hypothesis 5).

Method

Participants

As described in Study 1, 130 participants were sent a 6-month follow up questionnaire, containing the PAST and the DASS-21. All participants from Study 2 (174) were sent 6-month follow-up questionnaires. In total, 263 (87%
of those approached) completed the 6-month follow up administration of the PAST and DASS-21.

There were 134 men, of whom 96 reported having children under the age of 18, and 170 women, of whom 79 reported having children less than 18 years of age. A chi square analysis showed a significant difference for gender by presence of children $\chi^2 = 19.43, p < .01$. More women (91/170; 54%) than men (38/134; 28%) reported not having children. A series of independent sample t-tests for gender showed no significant difference between males and females for education or length of relationship ($M = 10.8$ yr, $SD = 8.7$), but women were significantly younger ($M = 36.7$, $SD = 9.7$) than men ($M = 40.7$, $SD = 9.2$), $t(303) = 3.54$, $p<.001$, and women had less income ($M = 26,266$, $SD = 15,245$) than men ($M = 37,846$, $SD = 21,691$), $t(303) = 5.46$, $p<.001$.

Two hundred and nineteen participants had been married, and 85 had been in de facto relationships. A chi-square analysis showed a significant difference for relationship status by gender $\chi^2 = 4.75, p < .05$. More women (56/170; 33%) than men (29/134; 22%) had been in a de facto relationship. Table 5.1 shows the number of men and women with and without children by relationship status. A series of independent sample t-tests showed that people separating from a marriage reported significantly higher income ($M = 33,891$, $SD = 20,094$) than those who had been in a de facto relationship ($M = 27,095$, $SD = 16,337$), $t(304) = 2.37$, $p<.05$. People separating from a marriage also were significantly older ($M = 40.84$, $SD = 8.9$) than people separating from a de facto relationship ($M = 32.48$, $SD = 9.28$), $t(304) = 7.27$, $p<.001$. Finally, people separating from a marriage reported a longer duration of relationship ($M = 13.4$, $SD = 8.8$) than people separating from de facto relationships ($M = 4.1$, $SD = 3.2$) $t(304) = 13.51$, $p<.001$. 

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Table 5.1 Frequency of Men and Women With and Without Children by Married versus De facto

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>De facto</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With children</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without children</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With children</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without children</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Time since separation ranged from two weeks to 18 months ($M = 10$ months, $SD = 5.5$ months). The sample was stratified into three cohorts, those separated for less than 6 months ($n = 92$), those separated between 6 and 12 months ($n = 106$) and those separated between 12 and 18 months ($n = 105$). One-way ANOVA’s for the different cohorts showed no significant differences for age, length of relationship or income. A chi-square analysis showed there was no significant difference in the cohorts between the proportion of men and women $\chi^2 = .927, p = .63$, or the proportion of participants that had children $\chi^2 = 2.45, p = .29$.

Procedure

The procedure for recruitment, and the first wave of data collection was described in Chapter 4. The follow-up data was obtained by telephoning the participant six months after the first assessment, and obtaining consent to send out the follow-up questionnaire. As with the initial data collection, two follow-up telephone calls were made to prompt completion of unreturned questionnaires.
Materials

The self-report questionnaires given to the participants at the initial data collection were reported in Study 1 and 2 in Chapter 4. At follow-up participants from Study 1 were readministered the PAST and DASS-21. Participants from Study 2 were administered the same self-report questionnaires as they completed at intake. As reported in Study 2, participants from that study also competed a brief telephone interview at intake and follow-up (more details will be provided on the telephone interview procedure in Chapter 6). For the current study, data was only used for the PAST and the DASS-21 at intake and follow-up. Independent sample t-tests showed there was not a significant difference at intake on any of the separation adjustment domains between participants from Study 1 or Study 2.

Results

First, a series of ANOVA’s and MANOVA’s assessing the effects of gender on separation adjustment are presented. Second, regression analyses assessing effects of married versus de facto status and children on separation adjustment are described. Third, indices of clinical and reliable change of separation adjustment are presented. Finally, the effects of attrition from follow-up assessments on the results are presented.

Effects of Gender on the time course of Separation Adjustment

The effect of gender and time on separation-specific adjustment (connection and lonely negativity) and general psychological adjustment was assessed in a three-way MANOVA of Gender by Time (initial assessment versus follow up assessment) by recency of separation Cohort at initial assessment (up to 6 months, 6 up to 12 months, 12 to 18 months), with repeated measures on the time factor. The dependent variables in the
MANOVA analysis were PAST scores on lonely negativity, and connection with the former partner, and psychological distress on the DASS-21.

Given the low association between parenting negotiation and parent-child relationship ($r = .31$), the effects of gender on the time course of each parenting adjustment variable was assessed in separate three-way ANOVA’s of Gender by Time (initial assessment versus follow-up assessment) by Cohort (up to 6 months, 6 up to 12 months, 12 to 18 months), with repeated measures on the time factor.

Table 5.2 presents the means and standard deviations of the separation adjustment variables by gender, cohort and time. There were multivariate main effects for cohort $F(3, 256)=7.7$, $p<.001$, $n^2=.08$, and time $F(3, 255)=42.44$, $p<.001$, $n^2=.33$, and a trend for a main effect of gender $F(3, 255)=2.39$, $p=.071$, $n^2=.03$. There was a trend for an interaction effect between gender and cohort $F(6, 253) = 2.00$, $p = .07$, $n^2 = .02$. 
Table 5.2  Means and Standard Deviations (in parentheses) of Separation Adjustment Variables for Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjustment</th>
<th>Gender*</th>
<th>Up to 6 mths post separation</th>
<th>6 up to 12 mths post separation</th>
<th>12 to 18 mths post separation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Intake</td>
<td>Follow up</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>26.94 (8.25)</td>
<td>22.31 (7.80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>23.36 (8.33)</td>
<td>18.70 (7.41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lonely negativity</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>33.06 (10.46)</td>
<td>29.09 (9.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>31.75 (10.37)</td>
<td>26.91 (9.88)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DASS-21</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>18.81 (11.47)</td>
<td>12.13 (11.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>17.70 (15.05)</td>
<td>13.86 (13.81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting negotiation</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19.95 (5.53)</td>
<td>21.19 (5.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22.56 (6.07)</td>
<td>21.89 (5.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-child relationship</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14.33 (4.20)</td>
<td>14.95 (3.83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9.67 (3.90)</td>
<td>11.28 (4.35)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*M = Male; F = Female
Univariate analyses to assess the source of significant multivariate effects showed that over time adjustment problems decreased significantly on connection $F(1,257)=103.31$ $p<.001$, $d=.50$, $P=.99$, lonely negativity $F(1,257)=72.46$, $p<.001$, $d=.44$, $P=.99$, and psychological distress $F(1,257)=24.55$ $p<.001$, $d=.29$, $P=.99$. There was a recency effect, in that relative to participants separated for more time, participants separated for less time had more problems on connection $F(2,256)=10.17$ $p<.001$, $P=.99$, and lonely negativity $F(2,256)=3.03$ $p=.05$, $P=.99$, but there was no difference on psychological distress. Tukey Post hoc comparison analyses revealed that the recency effect for connection was present between cohort 1 (up to six months) and 3 (12 to 18 months), and cohort 2 (6 up to 12 months) and 3, but not for cohort 1 and 2. In addition, post hoc analyses showed that the recency effect for lonely negativity was evident only between cohorts 1 and 3. Men showed more adjustment problems than women on connection $F(1,257)=6.22$ $p<.025$, $d=.26$, $P=.70$, but men and women did not differ significantly on lonely negativity or psychological distress.

Figure 5.1 shows how men have more connection problems than women, and how the more recent separated cohorts have more connection problems than those separated for longer. The vertical axis starts at 8 and finishes at 40 (reflecting the possible range obtainable on the connection scale) and each increment reflects one standard deviation. Figures 5.2 and 5.3 shows that over time people reduce lonely negativity and psychological distress. Gender is not shown separately because there were no main or interaction effects for gender. Like the vertical axis for connection, Figure 5.2 reflects the total possible range of scores for lonely negativity, and each increment reflects one standard deviation. Each increment on Figure 5.3
reflects ½ a standard deviation, and increments only go up to 28 which does not reflect the total range of scores achievable on the DASS-21, which is 63.

In relation to parent-child relationships, there was a significant main effect for gender $F(1,158)=50.91 \ p<.001, \ d=1.08, \ P=.99$, with females showing greater parent-child relationships than males, and a trend for relationships with children becoming poorer over time $F(1,158) = 3.64, \ p=.06$. In relation to parenting negotiation there was a significant main effect for cohort $F(1, 158) = 3.71, \ p < .05, \ P=.67$. Tukey post hoc comparisons showed that participants in the 12 to 18 month cohort had greater parenting negotiation problems than participants separated between 6 to 12 months. Figure 5.4 illustrates men having more difficult relationships with their children than women. Figure 5.5 illustrates that participants separated between 12 to 18 months have more difficulties with parenting negotiation than participants in the 6 to 12 month cohort. For both Figures 5.4 and 5.5, the vertical axis reflects the total range of scores obtainable on the parent-child relationship and the parenting negotiation scale, and each increment reflects one standard deviation.

For figures 5.1 to 5.4, 95% confidence intervals have been plotted. The confidence intervals show there was not a significant difference between the follow-up scores for one cohort and the intake scores for the next cohort on the separation adjustment variables. This supports being able to extrapolate to a longitudinal process over two years that combines the observed changes of the three cohorts.
Figure 5.1. Time since separation, gender and connection problems.

Figure 5.2. Time since separation and lonely negativity.
Figure 5.3. Time since separation and psychological distress.

Figure 5.4. Time since separation, gender and parent-child relationship problems
To test for the effects of children and married / de facto status on separation adjustment, a series of hierarchical multiple regressions were performed. In the first set of regressions, the dependent variables were initial scores on connection, lonely negativity and psychological distress. For each analysis, independent variables of gender and time since separation were entered first, followed by presence of children and married / de facto status. In a second set of regressions, the dependent variables were the intake scores on parenting negotiation and parent-child relationship. The independent variables of gender and time since separation were entered first, followed by time with children and married / de facto status.

The results of the regression analyses are presented in Table 5.3. Participants who had children from the relationship had significantly less
connection problems, although it only accounted for an additional 3% of the variance after gender and time since separation were entered. More time spent with children predicted significantly fewer parent-child relationship problems, and fewer parenting negotiation problems. Time with children accounted for an extra 25% of the variance for parent-child relationship problems, and an extra 7% for parenting negotiation problems.

Participants separating from a marriage experienced less difficulties across a number of the separation adjustment domains than participants separating from a de facto relationship. However, the additional variance explained above gender, time since separation and having children or time spent with children was relatively small. For instance married / de facto status accounted for an additional 2% for lonely negativity, 4% for psychological distress, and 5% for parent-child relations.

Table 5.3 Hierarchal Regression for Additional Effects of Children and Pre-separation relationship status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Separation Adjustment</th>
<th>Predictor Variables</th>
<th>R2 change</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connection Problems</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>1, 301</td>
<td>5.17***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time since separation</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.31</td>
<td>2, 300</td>
<td>34.73***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Having children</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>3, 299</td>
<td>8.90**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Married / De facto</td>
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<td>-.02</td>
<td>4, 298</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lonely negativity</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>1, 301</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time since separation</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>2, 300</td>
<td>14.79***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Having children</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>3, 299</td>
<td>2.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Married / De facto</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>4, 298</td>
<td>4.71*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation</td>
<td>Predictor Variables</td>
<td>R2 change</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>df</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Psychological distress</td>
<td>Gender^</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>1, 301</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time since separation</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>2, 300</td>
<td>7.46**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Having children</td>
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<td>-.00</td>
<td>3, 299</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Married / De facto^^</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td>4, 298</td>
<td>13.16***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-child relationship</td>
<td>Gender^</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>1, 189</td>
<td>49.30***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time since separation</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>2, 188</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time with children</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>-.63</td>
<td>3, 187</td>
<td>88.18***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Married / De facto^^</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>4, 186</td>
<td>18.14***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting negotiation</td>
<td>Gender^</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.24</td>
<td>1, 189</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time since separation</td>
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<td>.14</td>
<td>2, 188</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Time with children</td>
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<td>-.32</td>
<td>3, 187</td>
<td>13.58***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Married / De facto^^</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>4, 186</td>
<td>3.47#</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** p<.001; **p<.01, *p<.05, #p<.10

^ Gender was dummy coded with 1 representing men

^^ Married / De facto status was dummy coded with 1 representing married

**Reliable and Clinical Change**

In addition to assessing mean changes in adjustment, an aim of the current research was to describe the individual variability of change (reliable change), and the potential clinical significance of change (clinical change). Reliable and clinical change was only computed for lonely negativity, connection and psychological distress, given the previous analyses showed that these were the separation adjustment domains that changed significantly.
over time. Reliable and clinical change was also assessed separately for participants separated for up to 6 months, 6 up to 12 months and 12 to 18 months, given that the previous analyses in this chapter showed that separation adjustment differs based on time since separation.

Reliable change for both the DASS-21 and the PAST was computed using the method suggested by Jacobson and Truax (1991), with the computer program, the Reliable Change Generator (Devilly, 2003). The method defines reliable change as when change exceeds 1.96 standard errors of the difference between the two test administrations, which corresponds to the 95% confidence interval for no change. For connection, lonely negativity and psychological distress, change of 7, 12 and 15 points respectively between intake and follow-up assessment represented reliable change.

Clinical change is defined as occurring when reliable change has occurred, and when that change results in a participant moving across a criteria that is seen as defining clinical distress (e.g., no longer meets criteria for a DSM-IV diagnosis; Jacobson & Truax, 1991). The criterion for defining clinical distress of existing measures with established normative data is most often defined as the point of intersection of the distributions of clinical and non-clinical groups (Jacobson & Truax, 1991). In the case of the DASS-21, cut-off to define clinical distress was based on the normative data provided by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995). A score of 29 was the clinical cut-off for the DASS-21. According to Lovibond and Lovibond’s (1995) severity ratings this score represents severe distress. As illustrated in Table 5.4, approximately 18% of the sample who had been separated less than 6 months were clinically distressed on the DASS-21 at the time of initial assessment.
The PAST does not have established normative data for clinically distressed and non-distressed separated individuals. However, we know that rates of poor separation adjustment are highest in the first six months, and severe psychological distress affects almost 20% of those separated less than 6 months. Therefore clinical distress for connection problems and lonely negativity was determined by identifying the score for participants separated for up six months, at which scores above that accounted for 20% of participants. For connection problems the clinical cut-off score was 34, and for lonely negativity the clinical cut-off score was 42. Based on this criterion, the proportion clinically distressed in the most recently separated cohort on connection and lonely negativity on the PAST was approximately equal to the proportion clinically distressed on the DASS-21.

Table 5.4 illustrates the reliable and clinical change for separation-specific and general adjustment. For each of the cohorts, reliable improvement occurred most for connection problems and psychological distress, and least for lonely negativity. On each measure, reliable improvement occurred more often in the most recently separated cohort. For each cohort, more people reliably deteriorated on psychological distress than connection or lonely negativity. Approximately half of participants in each cohort displayed reliable and clinically significant change on connection problems and psychological distress. However only about a third of participants separated up to 12 months showed clinical change on lonely negativity, and only 20% separated between 12 and 18 months showed clinical change on lonely negativity. Thus, the greatest changes occurred soon after separation, but there was a significant minority of participants who evidenced clinical levels of distress for up to two years after separation. For example, 8%
of participants in the 12 to 18 month cohort were reporting clinical levels of lonely negativity, and 4% of those in the same cohort were reporting clinical levels of connection problems and psychological distress.

Finally, the correlations between the initial assessment of adjustment and the six-month follow-up assessment were calculated. The correlations were moderate to high, connection problems \( r = .73 \); lonely negativity \( r = .73 \); and psychological distress \( r = .67 \).

**PAST Scoring and Severity Ratings**

Based on the results from the current study it is possible to provide severity ratings for the PAST. These ratings are not meant to be diagnostic on their own, but rather assist in an overall assessment process. To develop criteria for the severity ratings for connection and lonely negativity, the cut-off used to determine clinical change was used to represent “clinical/severe”. A moderate rating for connection and lonely negativity was determined by reducing the clinical/severe rating by 1 standard deviation, and a normal rating was determined by reducing the moderate rating by 1 standard deviation. A clinical severe rating was determined on the parent-child relationship scale and the parenting negotiation scale by calculating 2 standard deviations above the mean for people separated up to 6 months. A moderate rating was thought to be a score between 1 and 2 standard deviations above the mean, and a normal rating was a score below 1 standard deviation above the mean for people separated up to 6 months. Scores that define these criteria are presented in Table 5.5.
Table 5.4 Percentage and number (in parentheses) who Reliably Changed and Who Did Not Clinically Improve in Separation Adjustment Based on Time Since Separation at Intake

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Reliable Change</th>
<th>Clinical Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total N^</td>
<td>% Reliably</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Improved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 6 months</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>42 (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lonely negativity</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>18 (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Distress DASS-21</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>33 (26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 12 months</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>26 (24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lonely negativity</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>14 (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological distress: DASS-21</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>20 (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure</td>
<td>Reliable Change</td>
<td>Clinical Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total N^</td>
<td>% Reliably</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Improved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 to 18 months</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>23 (22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lonely negativity</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>15 (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological distress</td>
<td>DASS-21</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^represents participants who completed intake and follow-up; ^^ based only on participants who completed both intake and follow-up; ^^^ Percentage of participants who were above critical at intake.

Table 5.5 Severity Ratings of the PAST

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Connection</th>
<th>Lonely / Negativity</th>
<th>Parent/child Relationship</th>
<th>Parenting Negotiation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Up to 25</td>
<td>Up to 31</td>
<td>Up to 16</td>
<td>Up to 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>26 –33</td>
<td>32 - 41</td>
<td>17 - 20</td>
<td>27 – 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe/Clinical</td>
<td>Above 34</td>
<td>Above 42</td>
<td>Above 21</td>
<td>Above 33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Attrition Analyses

Thirty-nine participants did not complete follow-up assessment; 30 of the 130 participants from Study 1 and nine of the 174 participants from Study 2. The difference in participation rate between the two studies is most likely because participants from Study 1 were unaware at intake that they would be receiving a follow up questionnaire in six months time. To test for possible differences between responders and non-responders to the follow-up assessment, independent-sample t-tests were conducted on the four domains of the PAST, DASS-21, time since separation, duration of the relationship, age, and income. Chi Squares were conducted on the dichotomous variables, gender, married versus de facto status and having children of the relationship by responder / non-responder status.

The chi-square analyses showed no significant associations between dropping out of the study and gender, married versus de facto status and having children. However, as shown in Table 5.6 non-responding participants had been separated for less time, were younger, had shorter relationships, and less income than responding participants. In regards to separation adjustment, non-responders displayed more lonely negativity, and psychological distress at intake. The effect sizes for the differences between responders and non-responders were small to moderate. Essentially, participants who did not complete the follow up assessment, initially showed more problems, and had been separated for less time than follow-up responders.
### Table 5.6 Attrition Analyses (independent sample t-tests)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Complete Follow up</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Sig. (effect size)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time since separation (mths)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10 (5)</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>.015 (d = .44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>8 (4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>39 (10)</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>.021 (d = .42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>35 (9)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>32 147 (19 561)</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>.046 (d = .36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>25 519 (16 850)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of relationship (years)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11 (9)</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>.038 (d = .44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>8 (7)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lonely negativity</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>30.05 (10.25)</td>
<td>-2.49</td>
<td>.013 (d = .45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>34.36 (8.92)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>22.14 (8.35)</td>
<td>-1.66</td>
<td>.097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>24.54 (8.87)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DASS-21</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>16.43 (13.51)</td>
<td>-3.42</td>
<td>.005 (d = .47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>23.03 (14.77)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting negotiation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>21.70 (7.14)</td>
<td>-2.30</td>
<td>.128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>23.93 (7.11)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent –child relationship</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11.89 (5.20)</td>
<td>-1.25</td>
<td>.244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>13.14 (5.50)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

Summary of Findings

The current study investigated how separation adjustment changes over time. Connection, lonely negativity, and distress all decreased over time, supporting the first hypothesis. There was some support for hypothesis two in that across cohorts, participants separated for less time had more connection and lonely negativity problems, but not more psychological distress than participants separated for longer times. Participants separated less than 6 months when initially assessed were more likely to show reliable improvement than for participants separated for longer time. Women reported better relationships with their children than men, which is consistent with Hypothesis 3. However, inconsistent with Hypothesis 3 was the finding that women’s relationships with their children did not improve, nor did men’s relationship with their children deteriorate over time. As predicted in Hypothesis 4, there was an association between more time with children and better parent-child relationships. Men also showed more adjustment problems on connection. Contrary to Hypothesis 5, participants separated for the longest time (12 to 18 months) showed more difficulties with parenting negotiation than participants separated for less time.

Does Time Heal All Wounds?

For the most part, connection problems, lonely negativity, and psychological distress decrease, with connection showing the largest improvement. The current results replicate previous research showing that connection (Waggener & Gallasi, 1993), and general distress (Booth & Amato, 1991; Davies et al, 1997; Hetherington et al, 1993) improve over time. The current research extends previous findings by showing lonely negativity also
decreases with time. However, the conclusion that lonely negativity and psychological distress decrease over time has a caveat. The participants who dropped out of the study initially were more psychologically distressed and had greater lonely negativity at intake than those who completed the follow-up assessment. It is possible that the most distressed participants who dropped out did not improve over time, and the true rate of improvement maybe less than that calculated from the data in this study.

Lonely negativity and psychological distress showed less improvement over time than connection problems with the former partner. This may reflect that when adjusting to separation, emotional disconnection occurs first, which is followed by developing new relationships and patterns of living that relieve lonely negativity and psychological distress. Brown et al (1980) found that more contact with the former partner was associated with high connection. It is likely that recently separated individuals have more contact with their former partner than people separated for longer, as recently separated individuals negotiate finances, division of household goods, etc. Once this regular contact reduces, connection problems may reduce, but the lingering feelings of loneliness and distress may persist. Berman (1988) hypothesised that emotional distress, compared with connection is determined by many more factors. He suggested that environmental and social factors as well as personality influence emotional distress. In this way, the person may be able to detach from the former partner, but not be able to adjust quite so easily to their decreased finances, and new dwellings, which may be in a poorer neighbourhood away from their social supports, which is more likely to lead to distress and lonely negativity. In future research it would be useful to assess connection, lonely negativity and psychological distress more frequently across
time and test the proposition that emotional disconnection typically is the first phase of enhanced separation adjustment.

There was high individual variability in the trajectory of connection problems, lonely negativity and psychological distress. While many people with high initial problems reduced their problems, others did not, and a nontrivial minority reported exacerbation of their problems over time. This highlights the limitation of a single assessment as a means of identifying people with severe adjustment difficulties.

In the current study parenting negotiation problems were worse for people who had been separated the longest, and there was no evidence that parenting negotiation problems decreased with time for any of the cohorts. Similarly, Maccoby, Depner and Mnookin (1990) found that high hostility toward the former partner, and high levels of conflict between the parents 6 months post separation, predicted poor co-parenting 18 months after separation. On a further follow-up (3 years post separation) they found that the nature of co-parenting relationships did not change (Maccoby, Buchanan, Mnookin & Dornbusch, 1993). The current study and the findings of Maccoby and Mnookin (1992) suggest that after separation parenting negotiation problems persist. Interestingly, Maccoby and Mnookin (1992) reported that hostility towards the former partner reduced over time. Hence, while hostility may reduce, parenting negotiation problems remain, suggesting that the two constructs need to be treated as distinct.

In the current study, it is possible that sampling bias was responsible for an over-representation of parenting negotiation problems in the 12 to 18 month cohort, as these participants displayed more problems than participants separated for less time. However, the pattern indicating no change over time
for parenting negotiation remained, despite any possible sampling bias. 
Persisting parenting negotiation problems are particularly concerning, because 
previous research has been consistent in showing that how parents 
communicate, manage conflict and co-parent after separation, affects their 
children’s adjustment (Cummings & Davies, 1994; Grych & Fincham, 2001; 

In the current study, parent-child relationship problems did not change 
over six months. Previous research has shown that over time men’s 
relationship with their children can deteriorate over a period of years (ABS, 
1997; Amato & Booth, 1996; Kelly, 2000; Madden-Derdich and Leonard, 
2000). The current study did not detect deterioration possibly because the 
initial two years after separation was not enough time to show significant 
deterioration. Although, the current study is consistent with previous work 
(Coiro & Emery, 1998; Shapiro & Lambert, 1999), showing that chronic parent-
child relationship problems exist for many people after separation.

An important contribution of the current work is the finding that the 
different aspects of separation adjustment have quite different time courses. 
Connection problems, lonely negativity, and psychological distress all showed improvement over time, though at somewhat different rates. In contrast, 
parenting negotiation and parent-child relationship problems did not improve. 
The different patterns of change over time for the different domains of 
separation adjustment suggest that different processes are influencing the 
various aspects of separation adjustment.

Separation-specific (connection problems and lonely negativity) and 
general psychological adjustment each reflect a transient crisis model. As 
reviewed in Chapter 1, and supported in the current research, separation-
specific and general psychological adjustment is viewed as a crisis process, but over time most people improve. This is consistent with previous research showing separation adjustment improves (e.g., Booth & Amato, 1994; Waggener & Gallasi, 1993). This also is consistent with a general pattern of findings that individuals who have experienced severe stressful life events often recover over time. For instance Norris (2001) reviewed the literature on disaster victims and found that generally victims improve over time.

The time course for parenting adjustment does not fit a crisis model, but rather suggest a chronic persisting problem. This chronic problem may be caused by the intrinsic difficulties of parenting after separation. For example, negotiating when and how children are exchanged between parents is often a source of conflict between former partners (Kelly, 2000). On the other hand, some parenting difficulties may predate separation. Research by Amato and Booth (1996) and Block et al (1988) found that the erosion in parent-child relationships occur long before the decision to separate is made, and that high conflict in separated couples is usually preceded by high conflict during the relationship (Ayoub et al, 1999). It is likely that parenting adjustment fits both a chronic stress and social selection model. Many separating parents have argued a lot prior to the separation and this is exacerbated by the ongoing stress of co-parenting.

In sum, time does appear to heal many wounds for a majority of separated people in regards to connection, lonely negativity, and distress. Clinically significant adjustment problems do persist for some people, especially for psychological distress and lonely negativity. However, parenting adjustment is a persisting problem for many separated people.
Does Gender Make a Difference?

Men reported having more problems with connection than women, however the size of this effect was small. This result is consistent with some previous studies that showed a gender difference on connection (Brown et al, 1980; Masheter, 1991; Waggener & Gallasi, 1993), and inconsistent with other studies that showed no gender difference on connection (e.g., Serovich, Price, Chapman & Wright, 1992). These inconsistencies may reflect modest power in designs only picking up a small effect in some studies. Alternatively, the previous inconsistent findings may be due to the timing of assessment. For instance there was a trend in the current study for men to improve over time to be equivalent with women. Hence, studies that assess people separated for longer periods (about two years or more) may not find a gender difference on connection. The difference in trajectories may be due to women initiating the separation more often than men and as a result experiencing more disconnection from their former partner prior to the separation occurring (Jordan, 1996; Kiecolt-Glaser et al, 1988; Kincaid & Caldwell, 1995). On the other hand, men begin the task of disconnecting from their former partner at the time of separation.

Women had better parent-child relationships than men, and this was a large effect size. This is a common finding in the literature (Kelly, 2000) and may be due to a number of possibilities. After separation children most likely live with their mother, and only see their father every second week-end, resulting in better parent-child relations with the mother (Dion et al, 1997; Furstenberg et al, 1987; Hetherington et al, 1982). However, prior to separation women generally spend more time with children (Lowery, 1986), so the nature of the parent-child relationship post separation may be a
continuation of the parent-child relationship experienced prior to the separation. Block et al (1988) found that divorced fathers who had poor relationships with their children post separation were less involved with their children prior to the separation. Amato and Booth (1996) suggest that poor parent-child relationships which exist prior to the separation, can be exacerbated during the separation process.

As noted in the previous chapter, any gender differences may be due to sampling bias, given the greater reluctance of men than women to volunteer to participate in the study. Alternatively, some of the differences may represent real gender differences evident in the population. For example, the gender discrepancy between incomes in the current sample reflects the general pattern for men to earn more than women. Other gender differences in the current research, such as women being more likely than men not to have children clearly is not a real difference evident across the population.

Effects of Children and Married/De facto Status

In the current sample, having children was associated with decreased connection problems, which contrasts with the findings of Wang and Amato (2000) who found that having children was not associated with connection problems. In the current sample participants had been separated for less time than participants in the Wang and Amato (2000) study, and this might account for the different findings. Alternatively, the connection measure used in the two studies differed, which might explain the different results. Wang and Amato (2000) measured connection using four items, two of which cross-loaded onto a second factor assessing general adjustment. It is possible that the association between having children and decreased connection problems found in the current research may reflect that people with children are willing to
stay in an unsatisfying relationship for longer, ‘for the sake of the children’, regardless of the level of discontent or conflict between the parents than people without children (Hetherington, 1999). By the time people with children eventually separate they most likely have detached emotionally from their former partner.

The current study replicated previous findings (Cantor & Slator, 1995; Kelly, 2000;) that the more time spent with children the better the parenting adjustment, though the causal connection underpinning this association is unclear. Participants spending more time with their children might cause better parent-child relationships or vice versa. Non-resident parents were more likely to report problems in parenting adjustment. For non-resident parents the combination of losing the intimate relationship with their former partner plus reduced contact with their children may be responsible for more parenting difficulties. Non-resident parents often report upset at seeing their children infrequently, and feel they have less input into parenting decisions than the resident parent (Coiro & Emery, 1998), which in turn may affect parenting adjustment. Though, limited time spent with children, poor parent-child relationships and parenting negotiation problems may be a continuation of patterns predating separation (Block et al, 1988).

People separating from a de facto relationship reported more problems on lonely negativity, psychological distress and parent-child relationships than formally married participants, though the differences were small. The characteristics of de facto versus married participants were different; de facto participants were younger, had lower incomes and shorter duration relationships than married participants. These differences in age, income and
relationship duration reflect the actual differences in the general population of de facto versus married couples (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Thornton et al, 1995).

The different income, ages and relationship duration of married and de facto participants may account for the small differences between the two groups in separation adjustment. Marks and Lambert (1998) found that separating men and women over 40 had higher psychological well-being, than those who separated, and were under the age of 40. It has been suggested that those who are older may have developed a certain degree of expertise, or wisdom in handling life stressors (e.g., Baltes & Staudinger, 1993; Brim, 1992; Marks & Lambert, 1998). Whether or not these demographic differences explain the adjustment differences between de facto and married couples, the most striking finding was the similarity of patterns of adjustment between de facto and married couples.

**When Is Intervention Necessary?**

Given the high prevalence of separation it is perhaps surprising that there is not more research investigating whether psychological intervention can improve separation adjustment. It has been noted by many authors (e.g., Emery, 1998; Emery, Kitzmann & Waldron, 1999; Grych & Fincham, 1992; Lee, Picard & Blain, 1994) that there are few published empirical reports of interventions, with very few randomised trials. Intervention for connection, lonely negativity and distress appears unnecessary in the majority of separated individuals as most people improve on their own. However, intervention may be necessary for participants who report continuing severe separation-specific adjustment problems.

There have been a number of previous intervention studies (e.g., Lee & Hett, 1990; Salts & Zonger, 1983; Woody, Colley, Schlegelmilch & Maginin,
aimed at improving separation-specific and general psychological adjustment post separation. Issues addressed in the treatment studies include communication skills, financial planning, social support and dating (e.g., Bloom, William, Hodges, Kern & McFaddin, 1985; Lee & Hett, 1990; Lee et al, 1994; Malouff, Lanyon & Schutte, 1988; Salts & Zonger, 1983; Woody et al, 1985). Mostly, treatment was offered in a group format, and inclusion criteria into the groups were broad. To date, no studies have targeted highly distressed participants exclusively. The length of treatment varied from a week-end workshop of less than 10 hours (Woody et al, 1983) to approximately 24 hours (Lee & Hett, 1990). Treatment helped to reduce depressive symptoms in a number of the studies, but treatment did not affect social support, nor influence attitudes towards the former partner or improve communication with the former partner.

Intervention for parents with significant parenting adjustment difficulties is very important. The current study and others find no improvement in parenting adjustment over time, and low parental involvement with children is closely associated with poorer outcomes for children (Amato & Rezac, 1994). In the United States there are over 1500 separated parent education programs (Arbuthnot & Gordon, 2000; Emery, 2001; Geasler & Blaisure, 1998), which are mostly delivered in a group format. Many of the people attending the programs are mandated by courts (Johnston, 1998). The programs vary substantially on the nature of the content. Some programs aim to only provide education, while others do provide skills training and therapy (Blaisure & Geasler, 2000). The programs also differ on the time period of the course. Some programs focus solely on improving parenting adjustment, while other programs also incorporate modules that relate to separation-specific and
general adjustment. Little is known about the effectiveness of these programs (Emery, 2001) because adequate design and assessment are lacking. Some initial evaluations of the programs suggest that they reduce re-litigation rates, reduce conflict between the former partners, and decrease the exposure of conflict to children (Geelhoed, Blaisure & Geasler, 2001; Kramer, Arbuthnot, Gordon, Rousis & Hoza, 1998; Toews & McKenrey, 2001).

A promising model of intervention has been described and assessed by Wolchik, et al (2000) where mothers and children are provided a separate but concurrent 11-week group intervention. To evaluate the efficacy of the program, a self-study program was used as a control. The group program showed favourable effects for mother-child relationship quality, discipline, the child's relationship with the father, and reductions in externalising behaviour for children. Given the results of the current study suggesting that fathers have much poorer parent-child relationships than mothers, a trial of the Wolchik et al (2000) intervention for fathers and children would be very beneficial.

Revisiting Lonely Negativity

In Chapter 4 it was argued that lonely negativity was a different construct to psychological distress. Chapter 4 reviewed research that demonstrated the similarities and differences between loneliness and depression. The current study replicates and extends the previous research by demonstrating that the constructs lonely negativity and psychological distress are distinct, but also share similarities.

It has been suggested that loneliness is a more sensitive response to interpersonal loss than depression (e.g., Anderson & Riger, 1991; Fultz & Herzog, 2001; Shaver & Brennan, 1991; Weisfeld & Wendorf, 2000). The current study replicated this finding by showing that lonely negativity had a
greater effect size for improvement, than psychological distress. In addition people who had been separated for less time had more lonely negativity problems, but no more psychological distress than people who had been separated for longer. Thus, lonely negativity and psychological distress appear to be distinct.

On the other hand, loneliness has been conceptualised as a sub-category of depression (Shaver & Brennan, 1991), and the current study supports this by finding similarities between lonely negativity and psychological distress. For instance, men showed more connection problems than women, but men and women did not differ on psychological distress and lonely negativity. In addition, formerly de facto participants showed greater psychological distress and lonely negativity than married participants, but did not differ on connection. Hence, lonely negativity and psychological distress share similarities. Given the similarities and differences between lonely negativity and psychological distress, it is important to measure both these separation adjustment domains.

Limitations and Future Research

A limitation of the current study is that some of the most distressed participants did not participate in the follow-up assessment. However, even if it was assumed that all participants who dropped out deteriorated from the initial assessment to follow-up, the pattern would still be for overall improvement across the cohorts on connection, lonely negativity and psychological distress. It is possible that the selective attrition rates by more distressed people overestimate the rate or extent of improvement.

Another limitation of the current study is that follow-up was limited to 6 months after the initial assessment. Six months may not be long enough to
detect improvement or deterioration in parenting adjustment. Additionally, two waves of data may not provide complete or accurate descriptions of change. Karney and Bradbury (1995) advocate using multi-wave longitudinal data, and employing growth curve analysis, to better describe longitudinal change. Given the restrictions on the current research, conducting multi-wave data was not possible, but multiple assessments are desirable in future research. The next chapter aims to assess cognitive predictors of change in connection, lonely negativity and psychological distress.
CHAPTER 6 - STUDY 5: COGNITIVE PREDICTORS OF SEPARATION ADJUSTMENT CHANGE

The purpose of the current study was to test whether certain cognitions predict aspects of separation adjustment. The results of the previous chapter showed that over a 6-month period separation adjustment improved on connection, lonely negativity, and psychological distress, but did not change for parenting negotiation and parent-child relationships. The focus of the current chapter was to test whether cognitions predict change in connection problems, lonely negativity, and general psychological adjustment.

In Chapter 3 empirical evidence was reviewed showing that negative cognition plays a central role in the poor emotional adjustment to many different types of stress (e.g., Beck, 1963; Barlow, 1993; Baucom & Epstein, 1990; Dobson, 1989; Dattilio & Padesky, 1990; Lazarus, 1966). The general assumption in cognitive theories is that cognitive appraisals of events mediate emotional and behavioural response to those events. For example, distressed couples have more negative relationship beliefs and partner-blaming attributions than satisfied couples, and this is argued to mediate their distress in response to negative relationship events (Noller, Beach & Osgarby, 1997). In a similar manner, cognitions are likely to mediate emotional and behavioural responses to relationship separation.

There is extensive research showing that altering negative cognition reduces psychological symptomatology such as depression (Shapiro, Barkham, Rees, Hardy, Reynolds & Startup, 1994), anxiety (Wells, 1992), post-traumatic stress (Devilly & Spence, 1999) stress (Michenbaum, 1977), and relationship distress (Jacobson & Addis, 1993). If cognitions do predict
separation adjustment, modifying negative cognitions might improve separation adjustment.

The cognitive processes of interest in this research include dysfunctional attitudes, attachment style, attributions, coping self-efficacy and threat appraisals. In Chapter 3 evidence was reviewed showing that people with insecure attachment styles, particularly anxious attachment, report more distress after a separation than people with secure attachment styles (Birnbaum et al, 1997; Feeney & Noller, 1992). However, rather than assess various domains of separation adjustment, these two studies only assessed the association with general adjustment. Additionally, the Birnbaum et al (1997) study was cross-sectional, while Feeney and Noller (1992) used a young student population with follow up limited to 10 weeks.

Based on the previous research (Birnbaum et al, 1997; Feeney & Noller, 1992), in the current research it was predicted that both anxious attachment and avoidant attachment would predict poor adjustment after separation. More specifically, given the previous association with general adjustment (Birnbaum et al, 1997; Feeney & Noller, 1992), insecure attachment styles were expected to predict psychological distress. Given that connection is related to feelings and thoughts about the former partner, anxious attachment and avoidant attachment was expected to predict connection problems. In particular, anxious attachment was expected to relate to connection because of the person’s fear of abandonment from the partner. Finally, avoidance attachment was expected to predict trauma related avoidance given that both constructs involve avoiding certain stimuli.

In Chapter 3 evidence was reviewed showing that dysfunctional attitudes are activated during times of stress and predict onset of depression.
(Oliver & Baumgart, 1985; Whisman & McGarvey, 1995) and other psychopathology (Hollon, Kendall & Lumry, 1986). Dysfunctional attitudes are beliefs that screen and process information in an unrealistically negative manner, thus producing negative expectancies about the cognitive triad; self, environment and future (Norman, Miller & Dow, 1988). This in turn, reduces the person’s capacity to adjust to stressful situations. Psychological therapy can reduce dysfunctional attitudes that in turn, are associated with reduction in depression (Dohr, Rush & Bernstein, 1989; Otto, Fava, Penava, Bless, Muller & Rosenbaum, 1997).

The effects of dysfunctional attitudes on the various domains of separation adjustment have not been previously assessed. Given the previous association between psychological distress and dysfunctional attitudes (Oliver & Baumgart, 1985), and psychopathology and dysfunctional attitudes (Hollon et al 1986), it was expected that after separation dysfunctional attitudes would predict psychological distress, and trauma-related intrusion and avoidance. It was also expected that dysfunctional attitudes would predict lonely negativity, in that dysfunctional attitudes would generate feelings of loneliness and negative emotion after a separation.

As noted in Chapter 3, a common finding in the marital literature is that blaming negative events in the relationship on their spouse is associated with relationship distress (e.g., Baucom, Epstein, Sayers & Sher, 1989; Fincham & Bradbury, 1987; Howe, 1987; Karney & Bradbury, 1995). It was also discussed in Chapter 3 that the data is inconsistent in regards to the relationship between separation adjustment and causal attributions, most likely because the characteristics of the participants, and the measures of attributions and separation adjustment were different across studies (Fletcher,
1983; Lussier & Alain, 1986; Lloyd & Cate, 1985; Newman & Langer, 1981; Stephen, 1987). All but one of the studies, investigating causal attributions and separation adjustment were cross-sectional. In the current study, four types of causal attributions were assessed: attributing the relationship breakdown to the self, partner, relationship between the partners and external events or people. These categories were described in Chapter 3.

Given that partner-blaming is associated with marital distress, which predicts relationship breakdown, it was expected that separated people would generally make more partner-blaming attributions compared to the other types of causal attributions. In relation to predicting separation adjustment, it was expected that excessive partner-blaming would be indicative of continuing connection with the former partner, as the person continues to focus on their former partner. Excessive partner and external-blame was expected to predict trauma related avoidance, as the person externalises the blame away from themselves.

As reviewed in Chapter 3, appraisals are the individual's evaluation of the significance of the event (Folkman & Greer, 2000; Lazarus, 1966), and how threatening the relationship separation is to them. Coping self-efficacy is the belief that one is able to do certain things to engender a desired consequence (Bandura, 1977). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) categorise these two processes into primary appraisal (evaluating how threatening a situation is) and secondary appraisal (evaluating available coping abilities, which includes self-efficacy). Poor coping self-efficacy, and seeing the separation as a threat or a challenge has been found to mediate poor mental health (Birnbaum et al, 1997). However, the study by Birnbaum et al (1997) was cross-sectional, and did not assess the effects of appraisals and self-efficacy on separation-specific
adjustment. For the current study it was predicted that less threat appraisals and high levels of self-efficacy would predict better separation adjustment across the various domains. In summary, the following hypotheses were tested.

Hypotheses

1. High levels of anxious attachment, partner blame and threat appraisals, and low scores on self-efficacy would predict more connection problems cross-sectionally, and less reduction in connection problems over time.

2. High levels of dysfunctional attitudes and threat appraisals and low levels of self-efficacy would predict high levels of lonely negativity cross-sectionally, and less reduction in lonely negativity over time.

3. High levels of anxious and avoidant attachment, dysfunctional attitudes and threat appraisals and low scores on self-efficacy would predict high psychological distress cross-sectionally, and less reduction in psychological distress over time.

4. High dysfunctional attitudes and threat appraisal, and low scores on self-efficacy, would predict more trauma-related intrusion cross-sectionally, and less reduction in trauma-related intrusion over time.

5. High avoidance attachment, dysfunctional attitudes, partner and external blame and threat appraisals, and low self-efficacy would predict high trauma-related avoidance cross-sectionally and less reduction in trauma-related avoidance over time.

Method

Participants

Participants from Study 2 in Chapter 4 were included in this study.
Materials

The PAST, DASS-21, IES, DAS, ECL, and CAST were all described in Chapters 4 and 5. Causal attributions for the separation were assessed during the telephone interview. Participants were asked to talk for three minutes in response to the question, “Tell me about the problems you had in your relationship, and what led to the separation”. Each 3-minute tape was transcribed and the statements were divided into semantic units. Each unit was classified as one of the four attributions. The coding manual in appendix 2 provides details on the coding procedures. Coding was conducted by three postgraduate psychology students who were blind as to the separation adjustment of the participants they were coding. Training consisted of four hours of memorising definitions of codes, and coding example tapes. During the coding process, the coders met a total of 4 times for approximately 1 hour to discuss issues regarding the coding. Table 6.1 describes the codes and provides examples of each code.

Table 6.1 Definitions and Examples of Causal Attribution Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definitions</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any statement that makes reference to the participant being the cause of the separation.</td>
<td>“I fell out of love”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I stopped loving her”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“If I was not working I was doing chores around the house”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I was a lousy husband”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I just couldn’t fit into that way of living”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Former Partner</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any statement that makes reference to the former partner as the cause of the separation.</td>
<td>“He was a terrible father”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“She was a good person when she was not mad”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“She was running around with my best mate”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“He would never come home on time”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|                      | “He wanted to be with his mates more than his family” }
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definitions</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship</strong></td>
<td>“She always wanted me to buy her things”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“She blamed me for everything”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The relationship lacked trust”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any statement that makes reference to the relationship or both partners as the cause of the separation.</td>
<td>“There was just no communication between us anymore”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“We just couldn’t seem to relate anymore”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“We never had time to talk”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Bill and I never really got to know each other”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“We just grew apart”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“We just realised we weren’t meant to be”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External</strong></td>
<td>“Her lover interfered with the running of the business”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any statement that makes reference to other people, other than the partners, or events as the cause of the separation.</td>
<td>“Her family never liked me”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“We were too young to get married”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“We both worked too hard”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Financially we could never get it together”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The house was too small for us all to live there”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“His work got in the way of our relationship”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Derived scores were the percentage of each category of the total attributions that participant made. For example, if a participant made 20 attributions and six were self-blaming, the self-blame score was 30. Reliability was assessed using Intra-class correlations (ICC) with double coding of a random sample of 25% of all tapes. The ICC’s were self (.85), partner (.87), relationship (.89), and external (.81), which indicate high reliability.

**Procedure**

The procedure was described in Chapter 4 and 5. In summary, participants were sent a questionnaire package (as per Study 2, Chapter 4). Once the questionnaire package was returned, the researcher telephoned the
participant, and conducted a short telephone interview, either during that telephone call, or arranged an appropriate time to do so. The interview was tape-recorded with the participant’s prior written consent. Participants were contacted 6 months later (as per Procedure section in Chapter 5) and asked to complete another questionnaire and participate in another telephone interview.

Results

The results are presented in two stages. First, cross-sectional analyses present the associations between cognitive predictor variables and separation adjustment variables at the initial assessment. Second, longitudinal analyses are presented to predict change over time from cognitive predictors. There has been considerable debate over the most appropriate way to assess change over time (Gottman & Rushe, 1993; Woody & Costanzo, 1990). A common method is to use difference scores, which is the difference between scores at different times. Difference scores have been criticised for being unreliable, as the error of estimating both the initial and subsequent scores are compounded in the difference scores (Rogosa, 1995). Furthermore, it has been argued that extreme scores often reflect measurement error and there is regression to the mean over time, which also exacerbates the unreliability of the difference scores (Rogosa, 1995). However, there is little data to support either the contention that change scores are unreliable or that there is regression to the mean (Speer, 1999). Given that difference scores do reflect the intuitive meaning of change, difference scores were used for the dependent variable in the current study. Initial scores were entered into analyses first to control for any artefactual association of initial and final scores.
Prior to conducting the analyses, correlations between the independent variables to check for multicollinearity was examined. The highest correlation was between coping self-efficacy and threat appraisals \((r = .52)\). This correlation was not large enough to suggest that multicollinearity was a problem (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

**Cross-Sectional Analyses**

Multiple hierarchal regressions were conducted to determine if addition of information regarding attributions, and then self-efficacy coping and threat appraisal improved prediction of the different domains of separation adjustment beyond that afforded by the differences in dysfunctional attitudes and attachment style. Analyses were performed using SPSS. Anxious and avoidant attachment, and dysfunctional attitudes were entered into the multiple regression first, then self, partner and relationship causal attributions were entered next. There was a fourth attribution code external, but because the four codes were mutually exclusive and exhaustive, the forth code was redundant. Finally, coping self-efficacy and appraisals of threat were entered. No outliers were found. Table 6.2 to 6.6 displays the correlations, standardised regression coefficients (Beta), semi squared partial correlation \((Sr^2)\) and \(F\) change. This was done for each of the dependent variables (connection problems, lonely negativity, psychological distress, and trauma-related intrusion and avoidance).

Table 6.2 displays the cross-sectional regression between cognitions and connection problems. The first block of variables entered accounted for significant variance in connection problems. Entering the second block of variables did not add significantly to the variance accounted for, and entering the third block added significantly to the variance accounted for. Four of the
independent variables contributed significantly to the prediction of connection problems. High anxious attachment, low avoidance attachment, low coping self-efficacy and high threat appraisal each were associated with greater connection problems with the former partner. Altogether the regression equation accounted for $R^2 = 52\%$ of the variance in connection problems.

Table 6.3 displays the cross-sectional regression between cognitions and lonely negativity. The first and final block of variables entered accounted for significant variance in lonely negativity, but the second block did not. Four of the independent variables contributed significantly to the prediction of lonely negativity. Dysfunctional attitudes, anxious attachment, poor coping self-efficacy, and appraisals of threat each were associated with greater lonely negativity. Altogether, the regression equation accounted for $R^2 = 62\%$ of the variance.

Table 6.4 displays the cross-sectional regression between cognitions and psychological distress. The first block and the final block of variables entered accounted for significant variance in psychological distress, but the second block did not. Three of the independent variables contributed significantly to the prediction of psychological distress. Dysfunctional attitudes, anxious attachment, and appraisals of threat each were associated with greater psychological distress. Altogether, the regression equation accounted for $R^2 = 55\%$ of the variance in psychological distress.
Table 6.2 Hierarchal Multiple Regression of Cognitive Variables on Connection Problems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Sr²</th>
<th>F Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DV</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Dysfunctional attitudes</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Avoidance attachment</td>
<td>- .02</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Anxious attachment</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Self attribution</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.44</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Partner attribution</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.53</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Relationship attribution</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Self-efficacy coping</td>
<td>-.51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Threat appraisal</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** p<.001; **p<.01, *p<.05
Table 6.3 Hierarchal Multiple Regression of Cognitive Variables in Lonely Negativity Problems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Sr²</th>
<th>F Change</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DV</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Dysfunctional attitudes</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Avoidance attachment</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Anxious attachment</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Self attribution</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.44</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Partner attribution</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-.53</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Relationship attribution</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Self-efficacy coping</td>
<td>-.58</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Threat appraisal</td>
<td>.70</td>
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<td></td>
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*** p<.001; **p<.01
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Variables</th>
<th>Correlations</th>
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<th>Sr²</th>
<th>F Change</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Dysfunctional attitudes</td>
<td>.56</td>
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<td>.51</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Avoidance attachment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Anxious attachment</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Self attribution</td>
<td>.02</td>
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<td>-.44</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Partner attribution</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.53</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Relationship attribution</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Self-efficacy coping</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Threat appraisal</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** p<.001; **p<.01, *p<.05
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>$\text{Sr}^2$</th>
<th>F Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td></td>
<td>DV</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
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<td>.51</td>
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<td>3. Anxious attachment</td>
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<td>-.06</td>
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<td>4. Self attribution</td>
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<td>.44</td>
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<td>5. Partner attribution</td>
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<td>-.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Relationship attribution</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>8. Threat appraisal</td>
<td>.66</td>
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</table>

*** p<.001
Table 6.6 Hierarchal Multiple Regression of Cognitive Variables in Trauma-Related Avoidance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Sr²</th>
<th>F Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Dysfunctional attitudes</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Avoidance attachment</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Anxious attachment</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Self attribution</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.44</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Partner attribution</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.53</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Relationship attribution</td>
<td>-.10</td>
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<td>.01</td>
<td>-.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Self-efficacy coping</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-.52</td>
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<td>8. Threat appraisal</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** p<.001; **p<.01, # <.10
Table 6.5 displays the cross-sectional regression between cognitions and trauma-related intrusion. The first block and the final block of variables entered accounted for significant variance in trauma related intrusion, but the second block did not. Appraisal of threat was the only significant independent variable to contribute significantly to trauma-related intrusive symptoms. Altogether, the regression equation accounted for $R^2 = 47\%$ of the variance.

Table 6.6 displays the cross-sectional regression between cognitions and trauma-related avoidance. The first and final block of variables entered accounted for significant variance in trauma-related avoidance, while the second block almost reached significance. Anxious attachment and appraisals of threat each significantly contributed to avoidance symptoms. There was a trend for making more self and relationship attributions to predict less trauma-related avoidance. Altogether, the regression equation accounted for $R^2 = 33\%$ of the variance.

**Longitudinal Analyses**

Before the longitudinal analyses are presented, the stability of the cognitive variables are displayed in Table 6.7. Mostly, the correlations between the two assessment times were moderate to high, and few cognitive variables changed significantly. For those cognitive variables that do change, they mostly show only low to moderate effect sizes. The largest change was for threat appraisals to decrease and coping self-efficacy to increase.
Table 6.7 Means of Independent Variables Over Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Effect size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attachment Anxiety time 1</td>
<td>69.44 (22.50)</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>3.93***</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment Anxiety time 2</td>
<td>64.24 (22.81)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment Avoidance time 1</td>
<td>58.01 (18.04)</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment Avoidance time 2</td>
<td>57.59 (17.11)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dysfunctional attitudes time 1</td>
<td>122.39 (33.04)</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>2.31*</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dysfunctional attitudes time 2</td>
<td>118.13 (31.55)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appraisal threat time 1</td>
<td>11.21 (5.06)</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>-5.67***</td>
<td>.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appraisal threat time 2</td>
<td>9.30 (4.56)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping self-efficacy time 1</td>
<td>23.79 (6.43)</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>4.68***</td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping self-efficacy time 2</td>
<td>26.07 (6.01)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribution Self time 1</td>
<td>24.81 (15.81)</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>-.70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribution Self time 2</td>
<td>25.71 (17.38)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribution Partner time 1</td>
<td>46.89 (23.62)</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribution Partner time 2</td>
<td>43.52 (22.44)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribution Relationship time 1</td>
<td>12.09 (15.96)</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>-2.88**</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribution Relationship time 2</td>
<td>15.56 (17.40)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribution External time 1</td>
<td>16.14 (17.09)</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribution External time 2</td>
<td>15.23 (14.64)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Correlation is between time 1 and time 2 scores

Partner-blaming attributions were the most frequent explanation offered for the separation, followed by self-blame. External and relationship-blaming attributions were reported least. People made fewer relationship-blaming attributions over time, although the effect size was small. Compared to mean scores of a normal population on the DAS ($M = 108.3$, $SD = 19.7$; Hollon et al,

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1986), participants in the current study were elevated (1/2 standard deviation) on dysfunctional attitudes at intake.

The same hierarchical regression procedures that were used for the cross-sectional data were applied to the longitudinal data, except that separation adjustment at intake was entered first. Thus, the dependent variable is really the change score after initial adjustment is partialed out. The predictors were then entered in three separate blocks: (a) dysfunctional attitudes, avoidance attachment and anxious attachment, (b) self-attribution, partner-attribution and relationship-attribution, (c) coping self-efficacy and threat appraisal. The dependent variables were the change in the separation adjustment domains of connection problems with the former partner, lonely negativity, psychological distress and trauma related intrusion and avoidance. No outliers among the cases were found. Table 6.8 to 6.12 displays the correlations, standardised regression coefficients (Beta), semi squared partial correlations (Sr²) and F change.

Table 6.8 shows the regression of cognitions to change in connection problems. Only the first block of variables entered accounted for significant variance in change in connection problems. The final block almost reached significance. High initial connection problems and low appraisals of threat predicted larger reductions in connection problems. Altogether, the regression equation accounted for $R^2 = 21\%$ of the variance in change in connection problems.
Table 6.8  Hierarchal Multiple Regression of Cognitive Variables on Change in Connection Problems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Sr²</th>
<th>F Change</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DV</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Connection at intake</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Dysfunctional attitudes</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Avoidance attachment</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.38</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Anxious attachment</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Self attribution</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Partner attribution</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Relationship attribution</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Self-efficacy coping</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: DV = Change score for connection problems; *** p<.001; **p<.01, * p<.01# <.10
Table 6.9  Hierarchal Multiple Regression of Cognitive Variables on Change in Lonely Negativity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Sr²</th>
<th>F Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DV</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Lonely negativity at</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intake</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Dysfunctional attitudes</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Avoidance attachment</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Anxious attachment</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Self attribution</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Partner attribution</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Relationship attribution</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Self-efficacy coping</td>
<td>-.24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Threat appraisal</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: DV = Change score for lonely negativity; *** p<.001; **p<.01
Table 6.10  Hierarchal Multiple Regression of Cognitive Variables on Change in Psychological Distress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Sr²</th>
<th>F Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DV</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Psychological distress at intake</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Dysfunctional attitudes</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Avoidance attachment</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Anxious attachment</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Self attribution</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Partner attribution</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>-.53</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Relationship attribution</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Self-efficacy coping</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>-.53</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Threat appraisal</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: DV = Change score for psychological distress; *** p<.001, * p<.01
Table 6.11  Hierarchal Multiple Regression of Cognitive Variables on Change in Trauma-Related Intrusion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Sr²</th>
<th>F Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DV 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 df F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Intrusion at intake</td>
<td>.44 .36 -.01 .52 -.05 -.07 -.01 -.52 .60 .61*** .20 1, 162 39.16***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Dysfunctional attitudes</td>
<td>.04 .33 .52 -.01 -.02 -.01 -.49 .43 -.06 .01 3, 159 .75</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Avoidance attachment</td>
<td>.03 .18 .03 -.02 .01 -.11 .12 .03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Anxious attachment</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.03 -.04 .06 -.38 .41 .05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Self attribution</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.44 -.10 -.04 .01 .06 .01 3, 156 .36</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Partner attribution</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.53 .11 -.05 -.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Relationship attribution</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.00 -.06 -.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Self-efficacy coping</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.53 .09 .03 2, 154 2.93#</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Threat appraisal</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>-.20#</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: DV = Change score for trauma-related intrusion; *** p<.001; # p <.10
### Table 6.12 Hierarchical Multiple Regression of Cognitive Variables on Change in Trauma-Related Avoidance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Sr&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>F Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DV</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Avoidance at intake</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Dysfunctional attitudes</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Avoidance attachment</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Anxious attachment</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Self attribution</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Partner attribution</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Relationship attribution</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Self-efficacy coping</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Threat appraisal</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** DV = Change score for trauma-related avoidance; *** p<.001; ** p<.01
Table 6.9 presents the regression of cognitions to change in lonely negativity. Only the first block significantly predicted change in lonely negativity. High initial lonely negativity significantly predicted larger reductions in lonely negativity six months later. Altogether, the regression equation accounted for $R^2 = 20\%$ of the variance in change in lonely negativity.

Table 6.10 presents the regression of cognitions to change in psychological distress. Only the first block significantly predicted variance in change in psychological distress. High initial psychological distress predicted larger reductions in psychological distress. Altogether, the regression equation accounted for $R^2 = 28\%$ of the variance in change in psychological distress.

Table 6.11 displays the regression of cognitions to change in trauma-related intrusion. The first block significantly predicted variance in change in trauma-related intrusion. There was a trend for the final block to predict change in trauma-related intrusion. High initial trauma-related intrusion predicted larger reductions in intrusion six months later. There was also a trend for low threat appraisal to predict more change in intrusion. Altogether, the regression equation accounted for $R^2 = 24\%$ of the variance.

Table 6.12 presents the regression of cognitions to change in trauma-related avoidance. The first block and the final block of variables significantly predicted variance in change in avoidance. High initial trauma-related avoidance and low appraisals of threat significantly predicted larger reductions in avoidance. Altogether, the regression equation accounted for $R^2 = 24\%$ of the variance.

Given there was a substantial association between initial separation adjustment and separation adjustment six months later, the available variance to demonstrate associations between the cognitive predictors and later
adjustment is reduced. Longitudinal regression analyses were repeated without entering separation adjustment scores at intake. The overall pattern of results were very similar to that reported above where initial separation adjustment was included. There were however two differences. First, without entering initial connection problems, high anxious attachment predicted significantly larger reductions in connection problems six months later \( F(3,160) = 4.74, p<.01. \) Second, without entering initial psychological distress, more partner attributions predicted less change in psychological distress \( F(3,157) = 3.46, p<.05. \) Given the number of analyses and variables, these significant effects might be type 1 errors. At most, the effects are confounded with initial adjustment scores, and may be an artefact of that association.

**Discussion**

**Summary of Results**

The current study aimed to assess the predictive ability of cognitive variables on separation specific adjustment, and general psychological adjustment. Hypotheses 1 to 5 gained partial support in that mostly the cognitive predictors predicted connection, lonely negativity, psychological distress and trauma-related avoidance and intrusion cross-sectionally. However, apart from a few significant predictions, which could be argued to be type 1 errors, cognitive variables did not predict separation adjustment longitudinally. Given that the longitudinal methodology is a more adequate, and rigorous test of the cognitive model, the results of this study provide no support for the inclusion of cognitive processes in a predictive model of separation adjustment.

For the most part, separation adjustment measured at intake was the major contributor to the variance of change in separation adjustment. In other
words, the best predictor of improvement in separation adjustment was high initial separation adjustment problems. This finding is in contrast with Weston and Funder (1993), who reported that the major predictor of future morale in separated people was current level of morale. The different outcome measures used in each study is likely to be responsible for the different results. Additionally, the sample in the Weston and Funder (1993) study had been long term separated, as compared to the sample in the current research who were only recently separated. In essence, cognitions are correlated with initial separation adjustment problems but are not the determinants of change. It is possible that cognitions may simply be representing distress. However, this is unlikely to be the case because separation adjustment was much more changeable than cognitions.

It is possible that cognitions could have an indirect relationship with separation adjustment by moderating the relationship between other non-cognitive predictor variables and future separation adjustment. For instance, people with insecure attachment are less likely to seek social support (Fraley & Shaver, 1998), which could in turn influence separation adjustment. Alternatively, other non-cognitive variables could influence cognitions at a later time point, which in turn could affect separation adjustment. For instance, Kirkpatrick and Hazen (1994) found that beginning a new relationship leads to attachment style change for avoidant individuals.

It is also possible that cognitions are reactive rather than predictive of separation adjustment. Consistent with previous research investigating depression recovery (Otto et al, 1997), the current research showed some change (albeit a small effect) in dysfunctional attitudes in people after separation. Like depression recovery, as people improve on separation
adjustment they generally make fewer dysfunctional attitudes. Additionally, similar to the findings by Stephen (1987), the current study found that over time separated people tended to make more relationship attributions. This may indicate as people improve in their separation adjustment over time they may feel less compelled to blame someone or something for their separation. Finally, the current study replicated the previous finding (Fuller & Fincham, 1995; Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994) that over time people report less anxious attachment after separation. In this way, working models of attachment may be reactive to separation, as opposed to being predictive of separation adjustment. Change however was not evident on avoidant attachment, which is consistent with the findings by Scharfe and Bartholomew (1994), and inconsistent with the findings by Fuller and Fincham (1995) and Kirkpatrick and Hazen (1994). Timing of follow up may be responsible for the different results. For instance the current study used a six-month follow-up period and Scharfe and Bartholomew (1994) used an eight-month follow up period. In contrast, Fuller and Fincham (1995) employed a two-year follow up and Kirkpatrick and Hazen (1994) used a four-year follow up period. It is likely that over time after a separation, anxious attachment reduces more quickly than avoidance attachment. This might be due to the fact that people high on avoidance attachment hold more negative expectations about relationship partners (Ognibene & Collins, 1998), or that avoidance attachment only reduces when the person meets a new partner (Hazen & Shaver, 1994).

As discussed, the stability of attachment and dysfunctional attitudes are moderate across separation. There was only a small mean decrease in anxiety attachment and dysfunctional attitudes over time and no mean change in avoidant attachment. However the correlations for attachment style and
dysfunctional attitudes (between .66 and .73) show there was substantial individual change in these cognitive variables. This is hardly surprising, because relationship separation is likely to alter your internal working model of relationships and attitudes to life in general. However, the nature of that change might reflect the nature of the separation experience for that individual. For instance, the attachment consequences for two different couples, one where there was a gradual decline in their relationship leading to a mutual decision to separate, versus a couple where the separation was as a result of an extramarital affair could be quite different. Hence, cognitions might change as a result of the separation, and the elements of that separation.

The current study replicated previous research (Fletcher, 1983; Lussier & Alain, 1986; Newman & Langer, 1981) in finding that separated people make almost double the amount of partner-attributions than self-attributions. Grych and Fincham (1992) suggest that partner-blaming maybe prevalent in people trying to protect their self-esteem, which is likely to occur after separation. However, given that so many people after separation make partner-blaming attributions, it is not surprising that partner-blaming attributions were not predictive of change in separation adjustment.

What Else Might Predict Separation Adjustment?

Given most people improve on separation adjustment, and cognitions as measured in the current study did not predict change, it is likely that some other common elements might account for improvement in separation adjustment. For instance, different cognitive variables to the ones measured in the current study, or other non-cognitive variables, such as those reviewed in Chapter 3 might account for more of the variance of separation adjustment change.
The attribution literature refers to a number of types of attributions, whereas in the current study only causal attributions of the separation were assessed. The hopelessness theory of depression (Abramson, Metalsky & Alloy, 1989) proposed two other types of cognitive attributions that affect emotional adjustment; exaggerating the negative consequences of the separation, and inferences about the self based on the separation. For example, the separated person may believe that they will never be happy again, and that they have lost everything, and will not be able to cope. The person may see themselves as a total failure and worthless as a result of the separation. Therefore, rather than asking questions related to causal attributions, other questions including, “What do you think will happen in the future as a result of the separation”, or “How do you feel about yourself now you have separated” could be asked. These two attributions, which focus on the present and future may be more important in predicting future separation adjustment compared with causal attributions, which focus on the past.

Chapter 3 reviewed numerous other variables that could predict changes in separation adjustment. Of particular interest is personality, which has been shown to identify people at risk of divorce (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Kelly & Conley, 1987). It is possible that those same personality variables that put people at risk for separation such as psychoticism, as measured by the EPQ, may influence separation adjustment. Poor pre-morbid functioning might also be predictive of less separation adjustment change. There has been some investigation into pre-morbid functioning and separation adjustment (Tschann et al, 1989), but retrospective, clinical ratings makes the reliability of Tschann’s et al (1989) findings questionable. However, Booth and Amato (1992) found in longitudinal study that certain pre-divorce factors
influence separation stress post separation. More specifically, they found that below median family income, people reporting fewer relationship problems and a belief in the immortality of marriage had heightened stress post separation.

Chapter 3 also discussed the importance of social support as a predictor of separation adjustment. Cross-sectional studies using self-report measures have found that the number of social supports (Kunz & Kunz, 1995; Thabes, 1997; Tschann et al, 1989), and the subjective experience of social support (Sanson & Famill, 1997), is associated with better outcomes after separation. To overcome the problems of common method variance between social support and psychological distress, it is recommended that direct observation of social support, as advocated by Cutrona (1996) for the assessment of social support in couples, be undertaken when predicting separation adjustment.

It is also likely that people improve on separation adjustment through information and emotional processing (Lang, 1977; Rachman, 1980). It is proposed that the individuals’ sense of themselves and their future is altered by the experience of separation. Over time however people incorporate new cognitive and affective information in regards to the separation experience. This new information may take the form of starting a new relationship or spending more time with their children. The new information changes the emotion attached to the event and associated stimuli or triggers. Extinction of affect (Bouton, 1994) or habituation to the distress (Jaycox, Foa & Morral, 1998) or to probes (Rachman, 1980) such as anniversaries, or looking at photos may also occur whereby the person eventually stops feeling distressed when they realise the partner is not returning. This process has been used to describe the process of grief, whereby the person recalls having no more tears
to shed (Callahan, 1995). In addition, behavioural processes (Skinner, 1953) such as competing demands or the involvement in other activities like work or other pleasant events (Lewinsohn & Libet, 1972), or parenting might act to distract the person from their personal troubles and account for the change in separation adjustment.

Limitations and Future Research

The current study emphasises the importance of conducting longitudinal research, which has been somewhat lacking in the study of adult separation adjustment. Cross-sectionally, the cognitive variables were associated with separation but not longitudinally. The value of longitudinal analysis would be further enhanced with the use of more than two data points. Three or more data collection times can assess variability in change over time, and growth curve analysis (Karney & Bradbury, 1995) would provide a much more sophisticated examination of the trajectory of separation adjustment. Only two data points were used for the current research because of the restrictions on time, and transcribing and coding over 300 3-minute verbal tasks was very time consuming.

In future research it would be beneficial to assess separation adjustment change with more independent variables that were identified in Chapter 3 such as social support and personality. However, much time and resources would be necessary to conduct a study with the appropriate number of participants to ensure acceptable power.

In sum, this research has demonstrated no support for the cognitive prediction of separation adjustment. An improvement in methodology, and assessment of different variables would clarify other important predictor variables of separation adjustment change. The next chapter aims to
summarise the current program of research, highlight implications for theory and practice, and make recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 7- GENERAL DISCUSSION
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This thesis is a program of research investigating separation adjustment in recently separated adults. Five studies were conducted with three main aims: (1) to develop a multidimensional, psychometrically sound measure of separation adjustment; (2) to assess the trajectory of separation adjustment over time; and (3) to test the hypothesis that certain cognitive variables predict the trajectory of adjustment.

The first three studies in the current thesis were focused on the development of the Problems After Separation Test (PAST), which assesses four dimensions of separation adjustment; connection problems with the former partner, lonely negativity, parent-child relationship, and parenting negotiation. The PAST was found to exhibit good psychometric properties, with a reliable factor structure, adequate internal consistency and test-retest reliability, and sound convergent and divergent validity. The PAST provides a psychometrically sound, multidimensional self-report measure of separation adjustment.

Study 4 used the PAST plus other instruments to assess the trajectory of the different dimensions of separation adjustment over the first two years post-separation using a multiple cohort sequential design. Separated individuals improved on connection problems, lonely negativity and general psychological adjustment, but problems in the parent-child relationship and parenting negotiation did not improve. Men had much poorer relationships with their children than women, possibly reflecting that they were most often the non-resident parent. People separating from a de facto relationship were
slightly more poorly adjusted than people separating from a marital relationship.

Study 5 focused on the prediction of separation adjustment by cognitive variables. Several of the cognitive variables showed cross-sectional associations with adjustment problems, but cognitive variables did not predict the trajectory of adjustment over time.

Assessment of Separation Adjustment

The cumulative findings from the current thesis highlight the importance of assessing separation adjustment as a multi-dimensional construct. Studies 1 through 3 showed that the different dimensions of separation adjustment assessed by the PAST were distinct from each other, and Study 4 showed these different dimensions have quite different trajectories over time. The PAST provides an important step toward a more sophisticated, multidimensional view of separation adjustment.

A potentially important element of the assessment of separation adjustment is being able to identify individuals who are showing severe adjustment problems that might warrant intervention. The current thesis results show that defining poor separation adjustment is dependant on the particular dimension of adjustment that is being assessed. In Chapter 5 proposed cut offs that might be used to define normal, moderate and severe adjustment problems on each of the four dimensions of the PAST were provided. However, these suggested cut-offs need to be interpreted taking into account the most common trajectories of the respective dimensions. Connection problems or lonely negativity tend to decrease with time, and high initial distress on these dimensions were associated with large decreases in
problems over time. In contrast, moderate or severe parenting adjustment problems tend to persist over time. Thus, intervention for severe connection problems or lonely negativity would only seem warranted if the level of distress is very high and poses an immediate threat to the person’s well being. On the other hand, parenting adjustment problems are unlikely to improve and probably do warrant intervention.

A limitation of the PAST is that it focuses exclusively on adjustment problems. While this was the intended focus of the measure, previous research has shown that separation outcomes can be both positive and negative (Cohen et al, 2004; Spanier & Castro, 1979). The PAST may be improved by the addition of items that reflect enhanced adjustment or subjective well being after separation. Diener, Suh, Lucas and Smith (1999) discuss the importance of assessing life satisfaction, and items could be included in the PAST that assess life satisfaction post separation. For instance, additional PAST items might include: “I feel like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders”, “I feel a sense of relief now we are apart”, “I enjoy not being with my partner anymore”, and “I feel much happier now we are not together”. The parenting scales of the PAST do not have as marked an emphasis on problems as the connection problems and lonely negativity scales. The parenting scales do have items representing satisfaction with the separation process e.g., “I agree with my former partner on discipline of my child” and “Despite everything, my child appears to be doing OK”. However, the parenting scales still do not have items that assess potential positive outcomes from separation. For example, “I find it easier to look after my Child/children now I am separated”, and “My former partner and I communicate better about the children now we are not living together”.
Is Separation Hard To Adjust To?

In Chapter 1, the debate was introduced concerning those who argue that couple relationship separation is a major stress that is highly disruptive and a source of significant personal and social problems (e.g., Amato, 2000), versus those who argue that separation is a normal social process that most people adjust to without major negative consequences (Pinsof, 2002). The cumulative results of the current thesis provide some support for both sides of this debate. On the one hand, the current results show separation is associated with chronic problems in parenting. The current results replicate previous research showing that parenting negotiation problems (Maccoby et al., 1993), and poor parent-child relationships (Coiro & Emery, 1998; Shapiro & Lambert, 1999) persist.

On the other hand, connection problems, lonely negativity, and general psychological adjustment do seem to be largely transient problems for most separating adults – at least those in the current sample. Though a non-trivial minority of adults showed severe adjustment problems on these dimensions up to 2 years after separation. These findings are consistent with, Lucas, Clark, Yannis and Diener (2003) who examined the effects of marital separation on life satisfaction in a 15-year longitudinal study of over 24,000 individuals. They found that, on average, individuals showed a transient negative reaction to separation and then adapted back toward their previous baseline levels of life satisfaction. This pattern of most people showing transient adjustment problems is common to the response that occurs to many stressful life events such as bereavement (Byrne & Raphael, 1994) and natural disasters (Norris, 2001).
Predicting Separation Adjustment

Originally it was anticipated that the cognitive variables assessed in Study 5 might enable prediction of those individuals who would show deterioration or ongoing severe problems. However, while the cognitive variables showed cross-sectional association with separation adjustment, the cognitive variables largely did not predict adjustment trajectory. The cognitive variables themselves changed quite substantially in two ways over a six-month period. First, there were small to moderate mean changes in some cognition. For example, there was a small decrease in anxiety attachment, a moderate decrease in appraisal of threat, and a small increase in relationship attributions as the cause of the separation. Second, there was substantial change in cognition across individuals, as reflected in the moderate correlation between cognitions measured at intake and follow-up assessment.

Given the substantial cognitive change occurring across the post-separation period, it is not surprising that initial cognition failed to predict later adjustment. It might not seem unexpected that cognition would change with a major life event like separation. For example, as reported previously (Fuller & Fincham, 1995; Kirkpatrick & Hazen, 1994), one might expect that anxiety attachment might well be labile after a separation, and that post-separation events like re-partnering might well produce further change (Hazen & Shaver, 1994). However, traditional conceptions of constructs like attachment and dysfunctional attitudes do posit these as relatively stable individual characteristics (Beck et al, 1979; Bowlby, 1973). The current data are inconsistent with that premise and suggest people’s cognitions alter by the experiences associated with separation.
The stress-diathesis model presented in Chapter 1 provides some guidance for variables that might explain the variable trajectory of separation adjustment. Given the different trajectories of the parenting-related versus other dimensions of separation adjustment, it is likely that the variables that influence these dimensions differ. In addition to the variables presented in the stress diathesis model of Chapter 1, it also is necessary to consider the effect of changing life circumstances after separation on adjustment. For example, as was noted previously, developing a new romantic relationship often is associated with improvement on separation adjustment (Aseltine & Kessler, 1993; Spanier & Castro, 1979). The chance of this occurring in the future might be very difficult to predict at an initial assessment. There is always likely to be significant error in predicting future separation adjustment because of the effects of changing life circumstances.

The evidence reviewed in Chapter 1 shows that separation is associated with a range of negative health consequences for partners, and that most people desire their committed relationship to be life long (Glezer, 1997). Consequently, enhancing the chances of people sustaining mutually satisfying relationships seems a worthwhile goal. Skill-based couple relationship education at the time of entry to committed relationships shows substantial promise to strengthen relationships (Halford et al, 2003). The transition to parenthood is often associated with declines in couple relationship satisfaction, and intervention programs specifically targeted on the transition to parenthood also might enhance the maintenance of sustained relationship satisfaction and stability (Halford, in press).

It is unlikely that even the most effective dissemination of best practice relationship education would lead to all couples wanting to stay together for the
rest of their lives. Given the chronic problems of parenting adjustment evident in many separating couples, effective interventions are needed that enhance parenting after separation. This is particularly important given poor parenting adjustment impacts negatively on children’s adjustment (Amato & Rezac, 1994).

Chapter 5 reviewed the research on post-separation parenting programs, and controlled trials of these interventions are needed (cf Wolchik et al, 2000). Existing post separation parenting programs probably will need to be expanded in scope if they are to be effective. In particular, programs need to include information regarding repartnering, the impact of repartnering on children, and the challenges faced by stepfamilies. Many separated individuals repartner, and there are a high percentage of remarried couples that divorce within the first four years of remarriage (Booth & Edwards, 1992). The stepparent-stepchild relationship is often the most crucial factor in determining stepfamily outcomes (Brown, Green & Druckman, 1990). Guidelines have been established (Cissna, Cox & Bochner, 1990) to assist in strengthening stepfamilies. These guidelines which could be included in any post separation parenting program include; couples first needing to establish a strong couple relationship; introduction of the new partner to the children is done slowly and sensitively; and determining the level of discipline the step-parent will be afforded, and communicating that to the children.

Limitations and Future Research

The current program of research was based on samples recruited primarily through the mass media. While the demographics of the sample were broadly similar to the population of separating individuals in Australia,
there were biases toward better educated individuals and there was under-representation of minority ethnic groups. It seems unlikely that sampling bias would disrupt the dimensionality or other psychometric properties of separation adjustment if they were generalized to similar populations. However, the reliability and validity of the PAST with populations of less well educated and minority ethnic groups needs to be assessed.

As noted previously, recruiting samples through the mass media can result in more distressed samples than are obtained if a truly representative sample is recruited (Karney et al, 1995). The current samples of separated individuals were more distressed than normative community samples (based on DASS-21 and IES). While separated individuals do show elevations in distress relative to non-separated individuals, the extent to which the elevations of distress in the current studies was representative of the levels of distress across all separating individuals is unknown. Given the skewing of samples by media outreach, it is likely that the current samples had an over-representation of distressed individuals. Conducting a study of a national representative sample of recently separated individuals is necessary to establish reliable normative data.

Another limitation of the current research program was that separation adjustment was assessed on just two occasions for participants. The use of a multiple cohort sequential design allowed inferences to be drawn about the nature of change across the first two years after separation. For example, it seemed that improvement was most marked on connection problems and lonely negativity in the first 6 to 12 months after separation, with rates of improvement then slowing. However, a multiple cohort design does have the competing possibility that the cohorts are somehow different. Following a
single cohort of participants assessed on multiple occasions would give the opportunity to calculate the trajectory of adjustment more precisely.

Separation is not a unitary experience. The current research examined the effects on separation adjustment of legal status (married versus de facto) as well as gender, and presence of children. However, separations can vary in other important ways. For example, women separating from a violent relationship often report great relief and enhanced adjustment after separation (Gortner et al, 1997). Future research needs to examine the effects of different separation processes. For example, the presence of violence, affairs, and rapid versus gradual onset of relationship distress each might influence separation adjustment.

Finally, the current research relied almost exclusively on self-report assessment of adjustment, with the exception of the confidante report version of the past used in Study 3. The heavy reliance on self-report in the current program raises the possibility of common method variance problems. In future research it would be helpful to use multi-method assessment.

A recurrent dilemma in research assessing separation adjustment is the extent to which separation adjustment reflects separation per se, versus the individual’s adjustment before separation. Adjustment to a range of stressful events is known to reflect, to a substantial extent, adjustment before the stressful event (Norris & Murrell, 1988; Phifer, 1990). Furthermore it is well established that a range of individual characteristics of partners predicts those couples most likely to separate (Bradbury & Fincham, 1995; Holman, Birch & Carrol, 2001). It would be very informative to assess a large representative sample of couples across time on their relationship up to and beyond
separation. This would allow identification of the continuities and discontinuities in adjustment after separation.

Conclusion

In summary, this thesis has achieved a key aim of development of a psychometrically sound multi-dimensional measure of separation adjustment entitled the PAST. The PAST was used to assess the trajectory of change in adjustment, and showed there are critical differences in trajectory of the different adjustment dimensions. Almost all recently separated people are faced with a short (6 to 12 month) period marked with thinking about the former partner and the lost relationship, feeling lonely, emotional and distressed, but for most people these feelings pass. In contrast, many separated parents face ongoing difficulties in regards to co-parenting with their former partner and relating to their children. These important findings advance our understanding of how adults adjust to separation, and hopefully guide further research that will help to reduce the substantial personal and social costs of relationship breakdown.
REFERENCES


Devilly, G. J. (2003). The reliable change generator for windows : version 1.0 (computer program). The Centre for Neuropsychology, Swinburne University, Australia.


Riessman, C. K., & Gerstel, N. (1985). Marital dissolution and health: Do males or females have greater risk? *Social Science and Medicine, 20*, 627-635.


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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Problems After Separation Test

PART A.

Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements for the last two weeks.

Please circle only one number for each statement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
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IN THE LAST TWO WEEKS:

1. I find it hard to do things without a partner
   ![Rating Scale]
2. I constantly think about my former partner
   ![Rating Scale]
3. I feel isolated
   ![Rating Scale]
4. Days that have special meaning for my former partner and I are really difficult (e.g. birthdays, anniversaries)
   ![Rating Scale]
5. I miss my former partner a lot
   ![Rating Scale]
6. I am used to not seeing my former partner any more
   ![Rating Scale]
Please circle only one number for each statement

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<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Neither Agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
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</table>

Disagree | Nor Disagree | Agree

**IN THE LAST TWO WEEKS:**

7. I wish my former partner and I could try to make the relationship work............................................ 1 2 3 4 5

8. I don’t really know why my former partner and I separated...................................................................... 1 2 3 4 5

9. I find it difficult to enjoy myself....................................... 1 2 3 4 5

10. It is hard looking at photos and other things that remind me of my former partner ...................... 1 2 3 4 5

11. I don’t have much time to see my friends ...................... 1 2 3 4 5

12. I feel like I’m on a constant emotional roller-coaster ride .......................................................... 1 2 3 4 5

13. I get angry more than I used to ..................................... 1 2 3 4 5

14. I make an effort to organise social activities ................. 1 2 3 4 5

15. I feel desperately lonely ............................................... 1 2 3 4 5

16. I feel like my life has less purpose in it now................... 1 2 3 4 5

17. I sometimes have difficulty controlling my emotions ...... 1 2 3 4 5

18. I feel rejected by my former partner............................... 1 2 3 4 5

19. Little things seem to upset me now ............................... 1 2 3 4 5
PART B.

Complete this section only if you have children under 18 years old

How many children under 18 years of age do you have:_______

Please circle only one number for each statement

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<tr>
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<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
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</table>

IN THE LAST 4 WEEKS

1. My former partner and I agree on the child custody arrangements................................................... 1 2 3 4 5
2. I feel like a stranger to my child / children.............................. 1 2 3 4 5
3. I agree with my former partner on discipline of my child / children ......................................................... 1 2 3 4 5
4. I have met my child / children’s friends....................................... 1 2 3 4 5
5. My former partner and I avoid speaking to one another............................................................ 1 2 3 4 5
6. When I speak to my former partner we usually fight over the child / children................................. 1 2 3 4 5
7. I have contact with my child / children’s teacher...................... 1 2 3 4 5
8. My former partner and I arrange child visitation well................................................................. 1 2 3 4 5
9. Despite everything, my child / children appear to be doing ok .............................................................. 1 2 3 4 5
Please circle only one number for each statement

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IN THE LAST 4 WEEKS

10. I fight with my former partner over the well being of the child / children ..................................................... 1 2 3 4 5

11. My former partner and I can talk in front of the child / children without fighting ................................................. 1 2 3 4 5

12. I help my child / children with their homework ............... 1 2 3 4 5

13. I know all the names of my child / children’s friends ..... 1 2 3 4 5
Appendix 2

CODING ATTRIBUTIONS IN RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN

What are Attributions

An attribution is an explanation for an event. They are inferences that people draw about the causes of events, others’ behaviour and their own behaviour. Attributional patterns can be helpful or unhelpful. We study attributions because they may underlie the patterns of behaviour that differentiate between well and poorly adjusted individuals after a separation. It is hypothesised then, that a person’s attribution for their relationship breakdown will influence his or her subsequent behaviour or adjustment. We will therefore study the occurrence and nature of attributions in response to the breakdown. We also look at how they change by measuring the same person’s attributions at two different time points.

Mechanics of Coding

You will listen to the 3-minute answer the subject provides to the question “Tell me about the problems you had in your relationship and what lead to the separation”. Micro and macro coding will be conducted. Micro-coding is where a transcription is provided of the answer and you code each statement or semantic unit on the transcription. Macro-coding is where you are given a number of questions and you indicate your overall impression on a likert scale (precise instructions on how to do this is provided later in this manual). In the table below is a list of the codes to be recorded and examples of each.

Micro-coding

Listen to the 3-minute recording while reading the transcription. Using a red pen, indicate a code (S=Self, P=Partner, R=Relationship, E=External) above the referent in each semantic unit. A semantic unit is a string of words with one message or homogenous meaning. Normally, a sentence is a semantic unit however sometimes a sentence may contain 2 semantic units if there is more than one message contained within. Develop a summary score using the scoring instructions and complete the summary sheet provided.
## Definition of Codes and Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self</strong> <em>(micro and macro code)</em>&lt;br&gt;Any statements that make reference to the participant as the cause of the separation.</td>
<td>• I had an affair.&lt;br&gt;• I fell out of love.&lt;br&gt;• I stopped making him sandwiches&lt;br&gt;• If I was not working I mowed the lawn on the weekend.&lt;br&gt;• I was a lousy husband.&lt;br&gt;• When I was not upset I was a good person.&lt;br&gt;• I just had had enough.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Former Partner</strong> <em>(micro and macro code)</em>&lt;br&gt;Any statements that make reference to their former partner as the cause of the separation.</td>
<td>• He was a terrible father&lt;br&gt;• She was mad&lt;br&gt;• She was running around with my best mate&lt;br&gt;• He would never come home on time&lt;br&gt;• He wanted to be with his mates more than his family&lt;br&gt;• She always wanted me to buy her things&lt;br&gt;• She blamed me for everything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship</strong> <em>(micro and macro code)</em>&lt;br&gt;Any statements that make reference to the relationship or both partners in regards to the cause of the separation.</td>
<td>• The relationship lacked trust&lt;br&gt;• There was just no communication between us anymore&lt;br&gt;• We just couldn't seem to relate anymore&lt;br&gt;• We never had time to talk&lt;br&gt;• Bill and I never really got to know each other&lt;br&gt;• We fell out of love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Others or Events</strong> <em>(micro and macro code)</em>&lt;br&gt;Any statements that make reference to other people or events or situations in regards to the cause of the separation.</td>
<td>• Her lover interfered with the running of the business&lt;br&gt;• Her family never liked me&lt;br&gt;• We were too young to get married&lt;br&gt;• Financially we could never get it together&lt;br&gt;• The house was too small for us all to live there&lt;br&gt;• His work got in the way of our relationship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How to Micro-code and make Decision:

Many of the semantic units are easy to code.

She spent money faster than I could earn it (P)
She wouldn’t specifically discipline the kids (P)
We were always in financial difficulties (R).
I tried to give her love but it just wasn’t enough in the end (S)
Her mother couldn’t help but accuse me of being a rotten husband (E)
I feel out of love with him (S)
We both wanted different things out of life (R)
The communication had gone (R)

Use the following guidelines and examples as a guide for some of the more ambiguous codes.

1. For statements that contain more than one referent in the one semantic unit use the following guidelines

   a. Be guided by the context. Look for consistency of the referent in relation to content.

   When a target unit is ambiguous to code, look at the referent and the content of the semantic unit that preceeds it and follows it. Decide which of the semantic units is most closely related in content to the target semantic unit. Assume then that the referent in the ambiguous or target unit is the same.

   E.g., She would never find any time for us. It was always such a task to go out as a family. Her mother would interfere too in the raising of our son. (Whilst the middle semantic unit is ambiguous it is related more closely to the first semantic unit which is a Partner attribution than the semantic unit that follows it which is an External attribution).
E.g., I was tired of him always being at work. His work never seemed to give him any time off. (This would be coded as two external. Whilst the first semantic unit is ambiguous the semantic unit that proceeds it is clearly external)

E.g., I was tired of him always being at work. He never had anytime for us. He was just a workaholic. (coded as 3 partner attributions)

b. If there is more than one meaning in a semantic unit and there is a number of referents in the semantic unit then code multiple referents (the use of the word “and” often denotes slightly different themes)

She had an affair (P) and after that I could never trust her again (S). (If they had of said “We were never able to build up the trust again after her affair” this would be coded as Relationship).

Look, the debt collectors just kept on hounding us (E) and I got really depressed and couldn’t work anymore (S). So we just got in deeper and deeper into trouble (R)

2. Be careful when the participant starts a sentence using “I”, as it does not necessarily mean it is a self-attribution. They may just be stating what they believe or wish. Look for the context.

I truly believe if it wasn’t for his family we would be ok (E)
I wish his work was not so demanding (E)
I think if I he had not have been so stubborn (P)

3. Third person. Sometimes the person may talk in the third person but often it is very clear whom the person is referring to.

E.g., Sometimes relationships just breakdown, it is no one’s fault but the relationship running its course (R).
At other times it may not be so clear the referent of the third person. Use rule 1a (be guided by the most closely related content of the semantic unit that preceeds and follows the target unit).

E.g., Well you know working 60 hours per week doesn’t give a person much time to spend with their kids (S). I wanted to spend time with them but it was all too much (S).

She was bored I think with life and the family (P). Well when someone goes and has an affair it is pretty clear what is going to happen (P). I certainly wasn’t going to put up with it (S).

4. Ignore positive statements.

“I was a good dad. I did everything I could to help the kids. She just didn’t seem to think it was enough and went off with my best mate” The first 2 semantic units would not be coded. However the final semantic unit would be coded as a partner referent attribution.

5. When coding external attributions sometimes it may appear to be a partner or self.

E.g., His work demanded so much of him, it wasn’t funny (This statement is External because even though she starts by saying “His” it is related directly to an external event of his. The verb relates to external rather than partner. If they had of said “he was always at work” that would be a partner attribution).

If only his mother kept her nose out of it we could have worked it out (E).

6. If you are unclear use an unclear code (U)

There was an age difference (E). Differences in maturity (E) I never felt the support was there (U). If only things had of been different. Oh
well that is how it goes. *(Whilst the first two are coded the final one is not as it is difficult to know who they are referring to)*

**Scoring Micro-coding**

To obtain a total score for each attribution conduct the following steps using the summary table:

**Step 1:** Add the number of codes for each attribution and work out the percentage for each individual code. E.g., if 20 codes in total (10 self, 5 partner, 5 relationship, 0 external, 0 off task, 0 unclear).

- Self 10/20 = .5 x 100 = 50%
- Partner 5/20 = .25 x 100 = 25%
- Relationship = 5/20 = .25 x 100 = 25%
- External = 0
- Off-Task = 0

**Step 2:** Transfer scores to summary sheet

**Macro-coding**

Re-listen to the 3-minute recording and complete the record coding form provided below.
**Macro-Coding**

**Self**
To what extent does the participant see themselves as the cause of the relationship breakdown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>a little</th>
<th>moderately</th>
<th>very much</th>
<th>extremely</th>
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**Partner**
To what extent does the participant see their partner as the cause of the relationship breakdown

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
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<th>very much</th>
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**Relationship (Interpersonal)**
To what extent does the participant see relationship / interpersonal reasons as the cause of the relationship breakdown

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<th>moderately</th>
<th>very much</th>
<th>extremely</th>
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**External / Environmental**
To what extent does the participant see external / environmental reasons as the cause of the relationship breakdown

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>a little</th>
<th>moderately</th>
<th>very much</th>
<th>extremely</th>
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### Summary Table

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<td>Relationship</td>
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<td>External / Environmental</td>
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