Men's perceptions of the impact of coping strategies activated or taught during workshops on their psychological well-being

Erasmus Mundus Master's Programme in Social Work with Families and Children

MEMMAS Dissertation

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University of Stavanger, spring 2015

Abstract

Title: Men's Perceptions of the impact of Coping Strategies activated or taught during workshops on their psychological well-being

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This study aimed at investigating men's perceptions of the impact of coping strategies activated or taught during the workshops on their psychological well-being. This project took into account workshops for divorcees and for relationship enhancement. The Norwegian government is investing large sums of money on relationship education workshops such as the ones considered in this study. Nevertheless, little information exists on the specific coping strategies taught or being activated during the workshops. The value of this study lies among others in giving the chance to men to talk about their experience of coping during the workshops. This project focused on men's perceptions since men tend to be more vulnerable in the face of divorce and separation than women are. The methods used are semi-structured interviews and the findings indicated that the coping strategies prevalent in the workshops are active coping, focus on and venting of emotions, seeking social support, and positive reinterpretation and growth. The analysis showed that seeking social support and positive reinterpretation and growth are associated with an increase in psychological well-being of the men. On the other hand, active coping and focus on and venting of emotions are beneficial in some situations but not in others.

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Acknowledgments

1 Introduction

Marital disruption or separation from a partner is a challenging change within the life course of an individual. People are rarely prepared to face the feelings that emerge during such a crisis. Emotions such as anxiety, fear, abandonment, rejection, and helplessness overwhelm and lead to personal devastation. Luckily, in Norway, Workshops for divorcees are available as well as workshops for relationship enhancement. There are two workshops that are taken into consideration in this study which are: workshop for divorcees called Fortsatt Folerdre which is translated as "Continued Parenting" and workshop for relationship enhancement called Imago which is the Latin word for "Image".

Fortsatt Folerdre is offered at Familievernkontor (Family counseling center) to individuals who are separated or divorced from their partners. The aim of the workshop is to facilitate the creation of parental cooperation with the ex-partner for the best interest of the children. The themes discussed are five and include the separation process, communication, children's living situation, parental cooperation, and the road ahead.

Imago is a couples' weekend workshop which helps partners to understand each other and to develop a better insight when it comes to childhood hurtful memories. Indeed, Imago uses Imago Relationship Therapy (IRT) which is based on understanding one's early childhood experiences and how these experiences are connected to adult relationships.

Fortsatt Folerdre and Imago, as well as other relationship education programs, are financed by the Norwegian government. A total of 3,342 heterosexual Norwegian couples had attended various workshops by the end of 2003 (Thuen and Lærum, 2005). The idea is to provide couples with coping strategies as well as communication and conflict-management skills to overcome their struggles and difficulties (Thuen and Lærum, 2005). The Norwegian government, more specifically the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs (2003), cares about preventing family breakdown to protect children and increase their well-being.

In this study, I will focus on men and on their perceptions of the impact of coping strategies taught or activated during the workshops on their psychological well-being. The reason why I decided to focus on men rather than women in my study is because the reality of divorce for men can be harsher than for women. Indeed, previous research indicated that men tend to deal with this transitional crisis relatively less efficiently than women (Bruce and Kim, 1992; Gove, 1973; Hughes, 1989; Thuen, 2001; Umberson, 1987). For example, there are some studies indicating that divorced men have higher rates of mortality and mental illness than divorced women (Gove, 1973). Furthermore, a study that examined the relationship between marital disruption and major depressive episodes found that divorce is associated with higher rates of major depression in both men and women; however, men have a greater risk of a first onset major depression (Bruce and Kim, 1992).

Furthermore, the identity of a man is defined by different roles and two of these roles are being a father and a husband. After getting divorced or separated, many men feel that they lose their roles as husbands and fathers which are tightly connected to their identity (Umberson, 1987). One study conducted by Hugues (1989) found out that

divorced men who have children who do not live with them have lower mental health status than divorced men without children or married men with or without children. Consequently, divorced men who are not living with their children find it harder to adapt to divorce.

Additionally, a strong relationship has been established between the quality of the co-parenting relationship and the nature of parent-child interactions (Feinberg, 2002; Linville et al., 2010). Furthermore, the co-parenting relationship is a very strong predictor of how much a father will be involved in his child's life (Coley and Hernandez, 2006). Therefore, workshops for divorcees and for relationship enhancement are important to the parenting of children and to the children's well-being. Divorced men struggle to adapt to divorce and their psychological well-being is significant to their ability to parent their children. Group intervention programs tailor different aspects of the participants' lives from adjustment to divorce to learning coping skills. This study is relevant since it allows to hear from the men about how well they are doing as an impact of the workshops.

Moreover, previous literature has extensively advocated for the importance of group intervention programs on post-divorce adjustment. The benefits of group intervention programs were found to be vicarious learning, social support network, adjustment to divorce, improving communication skills, and learning coping skills (Lee and Hett, 1990; Salts, 1983; Thiessen et al., 1981). The importance of this study is in the descriptions provided by the men on the impact of the coping strategies taught or activated during the workshops on their psychological well-being.

Previous studies state that coping skills are being taught during the group intervention programs. However, there is scarce literature examining the specific coping skills being educated or activated during the workshops. Furthermore, the coping strategies are many but not all of them are beneficial and functional. Some coping strategies are considered dysfunctional such as self-blame, wishful thinking, escapism, overt efforts to deny the stressor's reality, self-distraction or mental disengagement, behavioral disengagement, and giving up on goals with which the stressor in interfering (Carver and Scheier, 1994). The relevance of this study lies in its aim to depict the perceptions of men of the coping strategies that are activated or taught during the workshops.

Statement of the Problem
The Norwegian government is spending huge amounts of money on relationship education programs (40 million NOK from 1994 to 2005 (Thuen and Lærum, 2005)). The aim is to promote a healthy society and prevent behavioral and social problems for parents and by consequence their children. Previous studies examined in general the outcomes of these programs and found them to be positive (Lee and Hett, 1990; Salts, 1983; Thiessen et al., 1981). Little information exists on the specific coping strategies taught or being activated during group intervention programs. It is important to pinpoint the coping styles that are at work during these workshops in order to avoid or to eliminate the ones that are dysfunctional or unbeneficial. Furthermore, since men experience divorce with greater difficulties than women; therefore, they would be the ones in greater need of coping strategies. It is essential to give men the chance to talk about their experience of coping during the workshops. For this reason, the methods used in this study are semi-structured interviews with men.

Scope of the Study

In this study, I only investigated the perceptions of men on the impact of the coping skills taught or activated during the workshops on their psychological well-being. I did not use surveys like the COPE inventory to examine coping skills.

Research Question

This study examined men's perceptions of the impact of the coping skills taught or activated during the workshops on their psychological well-being. This was guided by the main question: How do men perceive the impact of the coping skills taught or activated during the workshops on their psychological well-being?

Definition of psychological well-being

Bradburn is recognized to be the first to have established a precise definition of psychological well-being (Bradburn, 1976). Bradburn specified that internal feelings such as feelings of competence, self-esteem, affectional relationships, optimism, and happiness are key dimensions to psychological well-being. Psychological well-being is the result of the prevalence of positive affect over negative affect according to Bradburn. Additionally, Bryant and Veroff defined psychological well-being through self-perception, general well-being, symptoms of unhappiness, adaptation to marriage, to parenthood, and to working life (Bryant and Veroff, 1982). At about the same time frame, Andrews and McKennell suggested that one should distinguish between feelings and cognition to define psychological well-being (Andrews and McKennell, 1982). According to them, cognition has a role that is as important as affect in the evaluation of the concept. Indeed, they state that the cognitive evaluation that a person holds of his/her life goals is critical in determining his/her psychological well-being. Moreover, Kahn attracted the researchers' attention on the importance of social support (R L Kahn, 1980). He considers that a social network is essential to the psychological well-being of individuals. What's more, Reich and Zautra proposed that the notion of control over one's life is a significant variable of one's psychological well-being (Zautra and Reich, 1981). Likewise, Rousseau and Dubé (Rousseau and Dube, 1993) underlined four dimensions to explain psychological well-being. The first dimension is related to personal characteristics such as age, civil status, mode of residence, etc. The second dimension observes personal stress and environment (perception of residence status, income, health). The third dimension is the cognitive factor which resonates in the belief system. The last dimension is about relationship variables such as emotional support, social network, frequency of encounters, satisfaction with the available social support, etc. therefore, according to Rousseau and Dubé (1993), these four dimensions represent the essence of psychological well-being. Finally, Ryff and Keyes offer six dimensions of wellness in their theoretical model of psychological well-being (Ryff and Keyes, 1995). These six dimensions are: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. A person who answers positively to the six dimensions has a high psychological well-being and vice versa. Usually, the definitions for psychological well-being include at least one negative variable for example anxiety, depression, frustration, or agitation. However, there is one exception which is Ryff's model (Ryff and Keyes, 1995). It is now recognized that scales used to evaluate psychological well-being should be based on positive dimensions (Ryff and Keyes, 1995).

Definition of perception

Perception is the way one identifies, organizes, and interprets information with the aim to understand one's surroundings and environment (Strack and Förster, 2009). Perceptions allow the integration of the outer and inner worlds (ibid). Social psychologists highlighted that different expectancies, backgrounds, experiences, motivations, attitudes, or emotional states lead to different perceptions of the world by the perceivers (Bruner, 1992). Research has been conducted on the impact of expectancies on perceptions and the results were that expectancies create biases in the perceptions (Brown, 1996). However, perceivers remain unaware of their subjective interpretations and experience their perceptions as objective which is called naïve realism (ibid). Therefore, this study is providing a description of the way men subjectively interpret the coping strategies activated or taught during the workshops according to their expectancies, previous experiences, emotional states, and motivations. Nevertheless, these subjective descriptions are important because the aim of the study is to hear from the men and to learn something from them about the workshops.

Definition of coping skills

Coping skills result from any effort that aims at managing stress and at regaining emotional equilibrium after facing a situation that is seen as challenging, threatening, or harming (Carver et al., 1989). The COPE inventory was developed to assess a number of coping skills which are the following: positive reinterpretation and growth, mental disengagement, focus on and venting of emotions, use of instrumental social support, active coping, denial, religious coping, humor, behavioral disengagement, restraint, use of emotional social support, substance use, acceptance, suppression of competing activities, and planning (ibid).

Definition of impact

According to the oxford dictionaries, an impact on is when someone or something has a strong effect on someone else or something else.

Importance of the Study

One major aspect of this study is the perceptions of men in relation to the workshops which are central to my study. Indeed, I believe that it is not enough to have general evaluations of these programs and it is necessary to look closely at the coping strategies that are involved. It is important to find out what kind of coping strategies the men perceive to be at work. The descriptions provided by the participants can be used to say something about whether the workshops are beneficial and whether they are reaching the desired greater psychological well-being for the participants. Large sums of money are being invested in relationship education programs and the financing is defended as being necessary for the best interest of the child. A good quality of the co-parenting relationship leads to better parenting and higher well-being for the children (Feinberg, 2002; Halford et al., 2008). My contribution is to look at the group intervention programs from the participant's perceptions and to try to understand how the men are coping with their crisis following the workshops. For this reason, this study is interested in listening to the men's perceptions on the impact of the coping strategies involved in the workshops on their psychological well-being.

2 Literature Review

This study examines men's perceptions of the impact of coping strategies that are activated or taught during workshops on their psychological well-being. In this chapter, I will expose the knowledge basis of my study and I will explain how I looked for literature. I will describe literature about psychological well-being and coping, the reality of divorce/separation for men, and family policies in Norway.

Literature search: databases and digital resources

The search process has been described through a metaphor which compares it to a field. During our journey in the field, we can discover so many different things depending on which route we take and the outcome can rarely be predictable. Looking through databases involves both active and passive actions ranging from dynamically browsing the digital resources to scanning them to determine which results are relevant to the research question. The search process started by determining a clear and focused research question which is: How do men perceive the impact of the coping skills taught or activated during the workshops on their psychological well-being?

This research question meant that I needed to search for information regarding workshops, coping skills, and their impact on the men's psychological well-being. Consequently, my search terms were: coping skills, coping strategies, psychological well-being, men and divorce, family policies in Norway. The first step of my search process was to go on super search on the university's library website and put one of the search terms that I decided on. I ended up with 40, 328 results. I tried to narrow the results by specifying that the publication date should be from 2006 until the present day. The results shrank from 40, 328 till 18,015.

As I was going through the results, three attracted my attention: a book, an article in a journal, and an article in a newspaper. I was comparing the three findings, and I was thinking that the journal article has more value than the book since articles tend to hold more recent information than books. Even if a book and a journal article have been published in the same year; a book takes much longer than an article to get published which means that the information in the book is older than the information in the journal article. The newspaper article has the least value since it is written by journalists and not academic scholars. One should also acknowledge, that some journals and some articles might be bad and in this case the book will have more value.

To identify the worth of a journal article, one can check if the article is peer reviewed and how many times did other scholars cited this article. Nevertheless, we should be careful when basing our evaluation on the number of citations since a really bad article can be cited many times by scholars criticizing it. Therefore, I moved on to the databases where I can check the peer reviewed articles and the number of citations. I went on Scopus and I looked for the article and I found out that the article has never been cited before. That could be because it is a very recent publication. I tried to research the authors of the book on Scopus but could not find any outputs.

After that, I decided to go on annual reviews to see if I could find any articles related to my research question which are only peer reviewed articles. I typed in my keywords and I got 725 results. I chose to narrow it down by choosing only articles published between 2006 and 2014 and the new results are 199. Reviewed articles have broad

perspectives so I started from the beginning by using advanced search and a few keywords.

Next, I went to DOAJ and I put the keywords. It yielded no results. Eventually, I was able to obtain 8 results after putting "workshops for divorcees". I found one article to be relevant to my research question which title is "Attending relationship education programmes in Romania. The case of the Holt Romania Iai programme" by Daniela Cojocaru (2011). The article has been cited by 12 other articles and the author has an h-index of 9 according to Scopus. She also has 154 citations by 89 documents.

Using the h-index, the number of citations, and checking if the article is peer reviewed are all good and valid ways to evaluate search results. However, these options are not enough. Eventually, I had to rely on personal knowledge and instincts to decide what sources are the best and which ones to choose.

Afterward, I went on the database social services abstracts because I wanted to find more articles that have a social work focus. From the search results that are yielded in social services abstracts, and after narrowing them to only peer reviewed articles, I selected the following:

Halford, W.K., Markman, H.J., Stanley, S., 2008. Strengthening couples' relationships with education: social policy and public health perspectives. J. Fam. Psychol. JFP J. Div. Fam. Psychol. Am. Psychol. Assoc. Div. 43 22, 497–505. doi:10.1037/a0012789

Family policies in Norway

In this section of the literature review, I will describe literature about the political context that led to the financing of the workshops by the Norwegian government. I will present literature discussing the different arguments used in the debate as well as the different events that took place.

In 1994, the Norwegian Ministry of Children and Family Affairs decided to provide relationship education programs to the Norwegian citizens to respond to the changing family forms in Norway (Thuen and Lærum, 2005). Relationship education programs are meant to teach couples to work through the rough patches and improve their liaison. This initiative mirrored once again the extent of the interference of national authorities within the family.

In the early 1990s, a parliamentary debate took place about couples' workshops being financed by the government. Many were not certain about how far should the government go in carrying the responsibility for family life (Danielsen et al., 2012). The right-wing representatives were arguing that state intervention should be limited because family life has a private character that should be taken into account. The workshops ended up being financed by the government when the focus shifted to the child. The argument that won the debate was that the child is the responsibility of the government and should be the central aspect of discussions about family policies. The ministry of Children and Family Affairs (2003) believes that such workshops will prevent family break down and thus protect children while increasing their well-being. The idea is to provide couples with coping strategies as well as communication and conflict-management skills to overcome their struggles and difficulties (Thuen and Lærum, 2005). The proponents for the governmentally financed couples' workshops

were making their case by stressing the importance of the child's upbringing in a secure environment with parents who have a healthy and stable relationship (Danielsen et al., 2012). Indeed, Norway signed the UNCRC (United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child) which has articles stipulating that the best interest of the child should be looked after and that the perspective of the child should be taken into consideration. The Ministry of Children and Family Affairs used these articles in the UNCRC to justify the relationship education programs (Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, 2003). The national authorities in Norway had to cooperate with private institutions to be able to develop and apply the relationship education programs widely across the country. Private institutions can apply for funding from the ministry and the number of applications has been increasing steadily since 1994 and since that date until 2005 the government has allocated 40 million NOK for these programs (Thuen and Lærum, 2005). The workshops offered promote gender equality and gender neutrality while barely addressing gender power struggles and conflicts it could generate (Danielsen et al., 2012). Inequalities and power differences are real and ignoring them can be counterproductive when it comes to meeting the aim of couples' workshops.

The workshops and the best interest of the child

In this section of the literature review, I will present previous studies that show the relevance of these workshops in regard to the UNCRC and the best interest of the child.

A study examined the determinants of parenting: parenting stress and positive/negative aspects of marital relationship. Then, the researchers investigated how these different support or stressors influence parenting (Ponnet et al., 2013). The results show that high marital relationship quality is associated with high parent-child relationship quality.

Therefore, a strong relationship has been established between the quality of the co-parenting relationship and the nature of parent-child interactions (Feinberg, 2002; Linville et al., 2010). Indeed, the spillover hypothesis indicates that the interactions that take place between the parents, whether positive or negative, "spillover" into their interactions with their children (Buehler and Gerard, 2002). This means that the affect, mood, and behavior will be transferred from one setting to the other. Moreover, the co-parenting relationship is a very strong predictor of how much a father will be involved in his child's life (Coley and Hernandez, 2006).

The previous research mentioned above draw a clear picture of how important the couples' relationship is to the parenting of their children and therefore to the children's well-being. This is the reason why relationship enhancement workshops are so important in preventing behavioral and social problems (Feinberg, 2002). Relationship workshops have been proven to be useful in improving the satisfaction with the relationship and reducing conflicts (Halford et al., 2008). It has also been proven to be helpful with reducing adjustment problems that are related to the birth of a child (Halford et al., 2010). A study examined dyadic satisfaction and parenting attitudes of 69 couples before and after they took the relationship enhancement workshop (Clark et al., 2013). The results showed that the couples' relationship quality significantly increased after having completed the workshop and the parents' at-risk parenting attitudes decreased. The researchers deducted from the findings that the skills taught during the relationship enhancement workshop; such as learning to express affection, reaching consensus, and interpersonal communication; can affect couples and enrich their possibilities to be positive parents.

Moreover, it is important to look at the ways men influence their children's development in a specific context which is the marital relationship. Indeed, within the framework of marriage, children are affected by their fathers through three different pathways which are the following: father-child relationship, the children witnessing their fathers' marital conflict, and the fathers' psychological well-being (Cummings et al., 2003; Mark et al., 2004). However, one should keep in mind that the personal characteristics of the father and child can alter the effects of the pathways described above. Still, these three pathways do matter when it comes to the children's coping processes and how well they adjust to different changes (Cummings and Davies, 2002).

Further and above, a study that examined the different predictors of paternal involvement for resident and non-resident low-income fathers found that there is a strong negative association between father involvement and marital conflict (Coley and Hernandez, 2006). However, a father who is considered psychosocially healthy tends to be more involved with his children's lives than a father who does not have human and social capital. The researchers concluded that it is very important for policy makers to target their efforts on enhancing the psychological well-being of the fathers to facilitate their active and responsible parenting behaviors. They also suggested that increasing the fathers' social and human capital is one way to enhance their psychological well-being.

The reality of divorce/separation for men

This study focused on men and in this section of the literature review I will describe studies to justify the solely male participants.

Marital disruption or separation from a partner is a challenging change within the life course of an individual. Previous research indicated that men tend to deal with this transitional crisis relatively less efficiently than women. Indeed, there are some studies that indicate that divorced fathers have higher rates of mortality and mental illness (Gove, 1973). Furthermore, a study that examined the relationship between marital disruption and major depressive episodes found that divorce is associated with higher rates of major depression in both men and women; however, men have a greater risk of a first onset major depression (Bruce and Kim, 1992). Another study which inspected the psychiatric symptoms and perceived need for psychiatric care among recently divorced males and females did not observe any gender differences (Thuen, 2001). The level of psychiatric symptoms of recently divorced individuals was compared with the general Norwegian population and the results indicated that people who just got divorced had higher levels of psychiatric symptoms than the general population. Nevertheless, researchers have wondered if being a father and getting divorced changes the adaptation process to a certain extent. Indeed, Hugues found out that divorced men who have children who do not live with them have lower mental health status than divorced men without children or married men with or without children (Hughes, 1989). This indicates that divorced men who have children who do not live with them get more affected by divorce and find it harder to adapt to it. Furthermore, men who are not living with their children are more at risk of engaging in risky behaviors than fathers who live with their children or any other group of parents (Umberson, 1987). For example, divorced men are more prone to engage in drinking and driving compared to men with other marital statuses. This tendency of divorced men to take more health risks is explained by the loss of their role as husbands but it could also be attributed to the loss of their role as fathers. Umberson and Williams wanted to learn more parental role strain experienced by divorced fathers and the psychological distress it generates;

therefore, they conducted a study with missed methods (Umberson and Williams, 1993). They conducted qualitative in-depth interviews with divorced men and they examined quantitative data from the 1986 national survey. The results from the quantitative data confirm the hypothesis that divorced men are more distressed in regard to their role as fathers than married men. Additionally, the more time passes after the divorce, the higher the parental role strain experienced by the divorced men. Moreover, parental role strain is partly related to higher alcohol consumption and psychological distress. The qualitative data from the interviews allowed the participants to express their point of view and their perspective while using their own words to explain the reasons why marital disruption is so challenging for them and the ways they use to cope with the stress. The men explained that the sources of strain can be one or many of the following areas: visitation and child support arrangements, relationship with the ex-wife, and social and personal identity issues. They also described the different strategies they use to cope with distress which are: alcohol, drugs, violent acts, and avoiding and repressing their emotions and feelings (Umberson and Williams, 1993).

All of this to say that divorced men go through a lot and it might prevent them from providing the parenting they want to provide to their children. For example, a study examined the different parenting styles used by divorced fathers and their impact on children's well-being (Bastaits et al., 2014). The authors compared the parenting styles of residential, co-parenting, and nonresidential fathers which are the 3 types of arrangements for divorced fathers. They measured the self-esteem and the life satisfaction of the children as well as the custodial arrangements and the parenting style of the parent. The findings show that the self-esteem of the children is enhanced by authoritative fathers and their life satisfaction is enhanced by the involvement of their fathers in their upbringing. The results also point out that there is no relationship between custodial arrangements and the parenting styles the fathers use.

Being a part of the children's lives is not only important for the fathers' well-being but also for the children's well-being (Bastaits et al., 2014). Facilitating such arrangements to allow divorced men to spend time with their children can only be a win-win situation. Residency plays an important role in how much access does the father has to the child and vice versa. A study that compared the relationships that adult children have with three different types of parents (biological parents who remained married, stepparents, and biological parents who divorced) found out that shared residency is somehow more important than biological bonds (Kalmijn, 2013). Indeed, the adult children had better relationships with their stepfathers with whom they lived during childhood compared to their relationships with their biological fathers who moved out when they were young. The more time parents and children spend together during childhood, the better their relationship when the children become adults.

Psychological well-being and coping

This study examines men's perceptions of the coping strategies that are activated or taught during the workshops. For this reason, I dedicate this section of the literature review to presenting literature on the relationship between psychological well-being and coping.

After a marriage is ended, one has to deal with emotional turmoil and personal devastation but it does not end there. One has to manage the legal system and the custody arrangements as well as other financial settlements (Graham B. Spanier, 1979). The feelings associated with separation are often the following: anxiety, fear, depression, hostility, rejection, helplessness, and abandonment (Lee and Hett, 1990).

Previous literature has extensively advocated for the importance of group intervention programs on post-divorce adjustment. For example, Welsh and Granvald (1977) discussed the benefits of being part of a group and they pointed them out as being vicarious learning, offering and receiving support and understanding, finding the motivation to constructively move forward, and finding a social support network. Moreover, Salts (1983) talked about an increase of the divorced person's adjustment after attending the group interventions and going through the stages of uncoupling. Additionally, Thiessen, Avery, and Joanning (1981) suggested that improving the already existing communication skills and learning new ones during the workshops enhance the possibilities for the divorcees to develop and maintain a social support network. Furthermore, a study conducted by Lee and Hett (1990) examined the effects of a group intervention program which teaches coping skills on divorcees and separated adults. 24 adults participated in the study of which 12 were part of the control group and 12 took part in the intervention group. The participants in the intervention group attended 8 sessions which covered the following topics: communication skills, stages of uncoupling, managing stress, relationship with ex-spouse, social network, legal issues, children, loneliness and depression, dating and sexuality. Depression and anxiety were measured using the Beck Depression Inventory and the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory. The findings indicated that the intervention program reduced depression and anxiety in the participants. At the same time, the participants in the intervention group showed a greater capacity to be independent and live in the present while being spontaneous and forming meaningful relationships.

From the previously described studies, we understand that group interventions for divorcees teach coping skills and that the outcome is positive since the psychological well-being of the participants is increased.

The coping process is a complicated process and not all coping strategies are functional. Personal factors interfere with the coping process and determine what emotions are displayed in reaction to a stressor and what coping strategies are selected. Moreover, coping strategies interfere with each other: emotion-focused coping can make it easier for problem-focused coping to take place by eliminating the negative emotions and vice versa (Mattlin et al., 1990). For example, a study conducted by Carver and Scheier (1994) suggested that confidence plays an important role in determining the emotions experienced when faced with the stressor. Furthermore, the findings indicated that feelings of threat were associated with the use of social support and to problem-focused coping strategies. Coping is far more responsive to feelings of threat than feelings of challenge which are seen as positive. Additionally, positive reframing proved to be an effective and beneficial coping strategy (ibid).

Previous literature showed that an active coping approach to life promotes well-being (Aldwin and Revenson, 1987; Aspinwall and Taylor, 1992; Glyshaw et al., 1989). Some other studies pointed out that when dealing with a central stressor active coping can be counterproductive by creating higher distress and higher anxiety (Bolger, 1990; Mattlin et al., 1990).

Moreover, the context is an essential element to consider when examining coping strategies. To deal with some specific stressor, it could be more constructive to accept the situation instead of trying to actively cope with it. For instance, Carver et al. (1993) examined coping and distress in breast cancer patients. In this specific case, acceptance played an important role in minimizing the distress of the participants.

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Some coping strategies are considered dysfunctional such as self-blame, wishful thinking, escapism, overt efforts to deny the stressor's reality, self-distraction or mental disengagement, behavioral disengagement, and giving up on goals with which the stressor is interfering (Carver and Scheier, 1994). Therefore, it is important to find out which coping strategies are being activated or taught to the participants during the group interventions.

3 Theoretical Framework

This study aims at examining men's perceptions of the impact of coping strategies that are activated or taught during the workshops on their psychological well-being. In this chapter, I will discuss the theories that are relevant to this study and these are three: the coping theory, the social microcosm theory, and the life course theory.

Coping Theory

According to Lazarus, psychological stress results from a transaction between the individual and the situation which is seen as threatening, damaging, or challenging by this individual (Richard S. Lazarus, 1998). Indeed, the emotions and thoughts that a person experiences are the result of an interaction between that person and his/her surroundings. Lazarus emphasizes the bidirectional relationship between the environment and the person, the same way that the environment can affect the person, the person can also affect the environment. Lazarus likes to use the word transaction to refer to this bidirectional relationship. The outcome of the transaction is different from the initial variables (emotions or situation). Looking at stress and coping under a transactional light, Lazarus underlines the process that takes place (Richard S. Lazarus, 1998). The first element is the first encounter between the situation and the individual. Follows the second element which is a continuous flow of events leading to transformation. In fact, during stressful encounters, emotions are not static and the environment is not stable either; things are moving and changing constantly. Lazarus states that the personal meaning attached to the way one perceives events and situations defines the emotions and behaviors that follow. For example, one of the participants perceived that his ex-wife wanted to keep him away from his children and that perception led him to file for divorce while asking for a custody agreement from the court.

"Emotions are outcomes of or reactions to cognitively mediated transactions with the environment, actual. Imagined, or anticipated." (Richard S. Lazarus, 1998, p. 197). Folkman and Lazarus suggest that the relationship between emotion and coping is bidirectional (Folkman and Lazarus, 1988). The entangled interaction between emotion and coping start with a stressful encounter that is assessed as being threatening, challenging, harmful or beneficial. Once this assessment is made, some emotions are naturally generated such as fear if the encounter is appraised as being threatening.

Primary appraisal is when one evaluates a transaction and what it implies for this person's well-being. This transaction would be judged as irrelevant, benign-positive, or stressful. A stressful transaction can be either diagnosed as harmful or threatening or challenging. When a stressful situation is seen as harmful it means that the damage has already been done and some kind of loss has occurred whether physical or psychological. Moreover, when a stressful transaction is seen as threatening it means that the person is anticipating damage. Finally, when a stressful encounter is perceived as challenging it means that the individual sees an opportunity to gain something and to grow out of this encounter. A challenging situation is seen as difficult but not impossible.

An individual will experience psychological stress when he/she perceives that the demands related to a specific situation surpass what resources are available to that individual (Richard S. Lazarus, 1998). The emotions that could be generated from such a situation are fear, guilt, envy, disgust, etc. For example, a divorce or a separation from

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a partner generate feelings such as anxiety, fear, abandonment, rejection, and helplessness which overwhelm and lead to personal devastation.

Secondary appraisal happens after the person has made an assessment of the significance of the encounter during the primary appraisal and then he/she makes a decision whether consciously or unconsciously. One will evaluate coping options and examine what are the personal or social resources available to help him/her adapt to the stressful encounter.

Lazarus (1998) affirms that these emotions will have an impact on the coping processes which could be either problem-focused or emotion-focused. Problem-focused coping strategies will lead to changes in the person-environment relationship and emotion-focused coping strategies will work on changing the meaning of the stressful encounter for the person which will then alter the relationship of that person with his/her environment. Once the person-environment rapport is modified then the individual will reassess the situation and it will lead to the person experiencing different emotions whether in the quality or intensity. Therefore, Lazarus considers coping as a mediator of emotions. Lazarus emphasizes the difference between mediator and moderator. He explains that a moderator is a variable that is relatively stable and present before the stressful encounter takes place while a mediator is generated during the encounter and it affects the outcome of the interaction (Folkman and Lazarus, 1988).

Furthermore, Carver et al. (1989) proposed 13 dimensions of coping. These dimensions are important to my study since it aims at examining men's perceptions of the impact of coping strategies activated or taught during the workshops on their psychological well-being. Most of the dimensions are theoretically based on two main theories: the Lazarus model of stress and a model of behavioral self-regulation that they have been researching themselves (Carver and Scheier, 1981). Carver et al. (1989) placed 5 dimensions under problem-focused coping which are active coping, planning, suppression of competing activities, restraint coping, seeking of instrumental social support. Then, they placed 5 other dimensions under emotion-focused coping which are seeking of emotional social support, positive reinterpretation, acceptance, denial, turning to religion. After that, they added 3 dimensions that they consider as less useful and these are: Focus on and venting of emotions, behavioral disengagement, and mental disengagement.

This study identifies the coping strategies that are perceived by the men attending the workshops. Therefore, some of the 13 dimensions of coping mentioned above might be activated or taught during the workshops but might not be perceived by the men. In the following part of this section of the theoretical framework chapter, I will define four coping strategies that were perceived by the men to be activated or taught during the workshops.

Active coping is a problem-focused coping strategy which concentrates the person's efforts on doing something about the problem (Carver et al., 1989). It involves taking additional actions to try to get rid of the problem or to get around the problem. It is about doing what has to be done, one step at a time, with the hope of altering the person-environment relationship.

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Positive reinterpretation and growth means that the person is managing distress emotions while dealing with the stressful encounter and trying to fix it through problem-focused strategies (C. S. Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989).

Using social support can be either problem-focused (instrumental social support) or emotion-focused (emotional social support) coping. Instrumental social support includes getting advices about what to do, talking to someone to find out more about the situation, asking people who have had similar experiences about how they dealt with it, and talking to somebody who can do something concrete about the situation. In a different manner, emotional social support involves discussing one's feelings with someone, trying to get emotional support from friends and relatives, and getting sympathy and understanding from someone.

Focus on and venting of emotions is an emotion-focused coping strategy and it is about letting one's feelings out. It involves experiencing a lot of emotional distress and then finding oneself expressing those feelings a lot.

Social Microcosm Theory

The workshops for divorcees or for relationship enhancement can be seen as support groups or therapy groups which have been proven to involve different therapeutic factors. Yalom (1995) developed a theory of social microcosm in which he discusses universality, group cohesiveness, interpersonal learning, and catharsis as therapeutic factors. Universality refers to a situation which is shared by the other members of the support group (Øygard et al., 2000). The pain, dilemmas, and suffering one is going through are also experienced by the other members of the group. Furthermore, group cohesiveness relates to the feelings of belonging that participants in a support group experience (Øygard et al., 2000). Group cohesiveness is about feelings of warmth, of being valued and of being accepted and supported. Interpersonal learning is learning more about oneself and others and getting a better understanding of interpersonal procedures. Feedback from others is an essential part of this factor, it will allow group members to acknowledge the positives and the negatives about their behavior, their strengths and their weaknesses. Finally, catharsis is being able to open up and share one's feelings, to let go of the gate keeping to our emotions, and experience a freedom when facing our feelings. Since the workshops for divorcees and for relationship enhancement can be seen as support group or therapy group, then I am interested in examining which therapeutic factors are taking place during the workshops.

The life course as developmental theory

The men in my study are going through a life crisis which is divorce, se parathion, or strained relationship; for this reason, it is interesting to look at the life course theory. The life course theory states that the historical and geographical contexts in which an individual finds him/herself influence and shape this individual's life course trajectory (Elder, 1998). Furthermore, this theory also emphasizes that the effect of different transitions in a person's life on his/her life course depend on the timing of these transitions. For example, the transition to parenthood during adolescence can have a completely different effect on the life course than a transition to parenthood during adulthood. Moreover, and most importantly, the life course theory stresses the interrelated life workshops of family members. The historical context and personal experiences of one family member form the historical context and personal experiences of other family members. "The misfortune of one member is shared through

relationships." (Elder, 1998, p. 3). Indeed, the Oakland Growth Study (1930-1931) observed that the economic depression of the 1930s increased the irritability of fathers and therefore their explosiveness which in turn decreased the quality of their marriage and parenting. Consequently, "linked lives: lives are lived interdependently, and social and historical influences are expressed through this network of shared relationships." (Elder, 1998, p. 4). Finally, the life course theory says that an individual will take decisions and actions according to the opportunities and constraints present which are determined by the historical and social contexts.

In this study, the participants faced a transition in their life course trajectory which was divorce or crisis within their couple. I am interested in looking at how the coping dimensions that the workshops are activating are influencing the men and the overall family atmosphere.

4 Methodology

In this chapter, I will describe the workshops that are considered in this study, the study design, study area, data collection methods, the analysis process, as well as ethical issues related to this study.

The workshops

In this section of the literature review, I will describe in details the workshops that are taken into consideration in my study: Continued parenting workshop (Fortsatt Foreldre) and the couples' weekend workshop (Imago).

Fortsatt Foreldre/ Continued Parenting workshop

Continued parents workshop is offered at Familievernkontor (Family counseling center) to parents who are separated or divorced from their partners. The aim of the workshop is to facilitate the creation of parental cooperation with the ex-partner for the best interest of the children. The workshop is given over a total time scale of five weeks during which the divorced parents meet once a week for 2 and a half hours with other parents in the same situation and two workshop leaders. The group leaders realized through experience that it is best to have 10 people as a maximum in a group. Usually, the workshop leaders recommend that divorced parents attend different workshops in order not to increase the conflict and try to make the best out of this experience. Each week, a different theme is discussed; therefore, there are 5 themes in total:

1- Separation/divorce process
2- Communication, conflict, and interaction
3- Children's living situation and their perspectives
4- Parental cooperation
5- The road ahead

Divorced people go through a life crisis (Thuen, 2001) which affects their physical health but also their psychological and social well-being (Bruce and Kim, 1992; Garvin et al., 1993). People getting a divorce feel that they are alone in the world and that no one else in their surroundings understands what they are going through. They also feel marginalized and isolated from their community (Øygard et al., 2000). Therefore, they might seek an understanding and supportive environment in the midst of others who are going through the same crisis. Indeed, in such a setting divorcees might feel that they are fully accepted and that what they are going through has meaning to someone else as well.

Support groups can actually be a good place to talk freely about feelings of anger, frustration, and grief. Surrounded by other people who are going through the same situation, one would feel less lonely and less isolated (Lee and Hett, 1990). Furthermore, what is more central to support groups is the mutual help that members provide to each other (S. P. Llewelyn, 1986). The support group treatment experience should include educational components but also problem-solving alternatives and of course support. These different aspects of a support group has proven to lead to positive and productive outcomes (Charping et al., 1993).

A certain number of studies have been conducted to examine the effectiveness of support groups for people who are going through divorce or separation. In a study conducted by Vera (1993), all the participants in the intervention program were happy and grateful for the possibility to discuss their feelings with other people going through the same experiences (Vera, 1993). Moreover, another study examined the impact of

communication skills training on adaptation to divorce among women (Thiessen et al., 1981). The experimental group participants were 13 and they received 15 hours of training in communication skills. Women in the experimental group had higher adjustment and empathy compared to women in the control group. Nevertheless, there were no significant differences in self-disclosure skills and social support between the control and experimental group. What's more, a study with 101 participants in the experimental group and 52 participants in the control group resulted in the intervention group members having higher levels of adjustment to separation than the control group members (Bloom et al., 1985). Additionally, participants in the experimental group reported less frequently feelings of guilt and more often feelings of personal growth and self-knowledge than the participants in the control group. Furthermore, Lee and Hett (1990) studied the impact of interventions that teach coping skills to divorcees. The results showed that group intervention decreased the participants' depression and nervousness while increasing their independence and their ability to live in the present (Lee and Hett, 1990). Likewise, a study by LeCompte, Graff, and Whitehead (1986) showed that women in the experimental group who attended group counselling had higher self-esteem and lower depression levels than women in the control groups (Graff et al., 1986). Similarly, a study with 80 participants, 62 of which were in the intervention group and 18 of which in the control group, observed no differences in self-concept but significant changes in adjustment to divorce between the experimental and control group (Salts and Zongker, 1983). Those who attended the group counselling had great enhancements in adjusting to the divorce than those who were in the control group. Correspondingly, Øygard, Thuen, and Solvang performed an investigation using qualitative data to collect more knowledge about the effect of support groups after divorce (Øygard et al., 2000). 18 individuals participated in the study and they were divided into 3 groups. The participants attended 7 sessions of two hours of group counselling and they chose to meet every two weeks. The interviewers did not lead any of the groups. The results of the study demonstrated that support groups positively affect people's adjustment to divorce. The researchers based their analysis on Yalom's theory of social microcosm which states that different types of therapeutic factors occur in therapy groups. Øygard, Thuen, and Solvang (2000) focused on 4 factors in their study which are universality, interpersonal learning, group cohesiveness, and catharsis. The investigation showed that all the factors examined contributed to the therapeutic process during the support group sessions. Catharsis and group cohesiveness were the most therapeutic and they had the most impact on increasing the participants' well-being.

To sum up, previous research showed that support groups have positive impacts on the participants who take part. All of the described studies were quantitative expect for the research conducted by Øygard, Thuen, and Solvang (2000). Studies that use quantitative data are subject to selection bias, for that reason, it is essential to direct qualitative studies with interviews which will allow participants to express their point of view and their perspective while using their own words.

Imago: the couples' weekend workshop
Dr. Harville Hendrix created Imago Relationship Therapy (IRT) which is based on understanding one's early childhood experiences and how these experiences are connected to adult relationships. Imago means "image" in Latin and it is a representation of the "unconscious image of familiar love" (Imago Relationships International, 2013). For instance, if a child has parents who are too invasive and who smothered him/her then he/she will grow up to be an adult who will feels smothered in

his/her marriage or committed relationship. Childhood experiences will be constantly creating issues in the relationship; however, there is a way out of this cycle. The couples' weekend workshop helps partners to understand and emphasize with each other and to develop a better insight when it comes to childhood hurtful memories. During the workshop, couples are taught the "Imago Dialogue" which is a process during which couples put aside the blaming and defensiveness to replace it with understanding, empathetic attention, and active listening. The "Imago Dialogue" involves that one of the partners becomes the receiver while the other becomes the sender. The receiver's role is to listen and show the other that they are understanding what they are trying to tell them. For example, one tactic to show understanding is to repeat what the sender is saying. Furthermore, the goal is to replace arguments by a healing process that encourages growth for the partners as individuals but also for the relationship as a whole. IRT involves several kinds of therapeutic approaches which include but are not exclusive to attachment theory, psychoanalysis, gestalt psychology, and cognitive-behavioral techniques (Zielinski, 1999). When couples enter in power struggles, they use coping styles to protect themselves which can also happen to hurt the other partner in the same way he/she was hurt during childhood. Teaching couples how to communicate, listen to each other, empathize with each other, validate each other's opinions, and mirror during conversations are the core skills of IRT (Zielinski, 1999). In relation to that, the "Imago Dialogue" has three main components: mirroring, validation, and empathy. Mirroring involves the paraphrasing correctly what the message that the sender is trying to pass to the receiver. Validation is related to the receiver acknowledging that the message being transmitted is based on reality and therefore makes sense. Empathy corresponds to the receiver putting him/herself in the shoes of the sender by trying to imagine the sender's feelings and by reflecting on them. One important aspect of IRT which is highly empathized is that the partners in the relationship have to be very committed to each other and determined to make their relationship work; the option of breaking up should be non-existent for this therapy to work. Some of the exercises used during IRT are the following: parent-child dialogue, behavior change requests, caring behaviors, surprises, and positive flooding (Zielinski, 1999). During the parent-child dialogue, one of the partners takes the role of the parent of the other who starts describing his/her childhood wounds. Positive flooding involves describing the positive qualities that one sees in his/her partner. Caring behaviors is related to one of the partners describing the behaviors that the other does and which make him/her feel loved and cared for. Behavior change requests is concerned with voicing out the desire that creates frustrations and anger and then transforming this desire into requests. Finally, surprises is an exercise which implicates making a list of things that one knows would surprise the other and then giving him/her a surprise randomly every month.

The relationship enhancement workshop teaches the group listening skills and communication skills but the therapeutic and self-healing work has to be done separately from the group. In both kind of workshops, the one for divorcees and the one for relationship enhancement, the therapist is a facilitator and does not interfere more than necessary. He/she gives space to the self-healing process and when necessary can guide towards one direction or the other by providing subtle pointers and tips.

In a qualitative study, which aimed to examine the impact of participation in IRT on the participants marital satisfaction, the researcher interviewed five couples (Weigle, 2006). The findings indicate that all the participants expressed that their marital satisfaction increased after participating in the workshop as well as their conflict

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resolution skills. Another study used mixed methods to examine dyadic adjustment and whether the couples are using the skills taught during the IRT after the workshop is completed (Beeton, 2005). 102 participants answered numerically-scored surveys and open-ended questionnaires. The results showed that the participants have an average dyadic adjustment and are using the Imago skills averagely with validation and empathy being the skills that are most used. Furthermore, the IRT workshop was evaluated through a qualitative/quantitative assessment which entailed the use of the dyadic adjustment scale, dyadic trust scale, waring intimacy questionnaire, and marital satisfaction inventory (Heller, 1999). In addition to that, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews before the workshops and three months after the workshops were completed. The results from the quantitative assessments showed that there was positive changes on all the dependent variables. Moreover, the findings from the qualitative assessments were reflecting the results from the quantitative study. During the interviews, respondents were asked questions about their communication skills, conflict management, and intimacy.

Study Design

The study aimed at examining the perceptions of men on the impact of coping strategies that are activated or taught during the workshops on their psychological well-being. The study research design is a descriptive qualitative study which aims to offer a thorough summary of a phenomenon or of events in everyday language (Polit and Beck, 2004). In this study, I tried to get a thorough summary of the perceptions of men on the coping strategies that are activated or taught during the workshops. Some researchers state that a limitation of qualitative research is that generalization is not possible (Bryman, 2012). However, other researchers do not agree and argue that findings can be generalized but the way to do that is different from the traditional generalization resulting from studies that have large and randomly selected samples with statistics (Leavy, 2014). For example, one concept of generalization could be process generalization, another could be concept generalization. For the purpose of this study, I considered process generalization which is the ability to transfer a process that is observed in one case or numerous cases to other contexts (Leavy, 2014). According to Gobo(2008), it is important to look at generalizability in regard to general structures rather than single social practices. To illustrate his point Gobo uses Becker's (2007) example of practices taking place everywhere in the world such as marriage, migration, or divorce. These practices have fairly stable structures worldwide even though the people involved are different. Similarly, this study is looking at the perceptions of men on the coping strategies that are taught or activated during the workshops. The workshops taken into consideration have fairly stable structures worldwide and therefore the perceptions of the participants on the coping strategies taught or activated may be fairly stable as well. Moreover, the relationship between the research design and the theory in qualitative research tends to be inductive (Bryman, 2012). An inductive orientation suggests that the theory does not guide the research questions and the research design but comes along after data collection and sort of emerges from it. In this study, my aim was not to generate a theory or to test an existing theory. I used the concepts from already existing theories to apprehend empirical data in new ways. What I mean when I say that the theory emerged from the data is that I did not have a preexisting theory that I meant to use before I started the analysis. I decided on a theory after I started looking at the data and I chose it on the grounds that it will help me better understand my data.

Study Area

The workshops that are of interest to this study are offered by the Family Counselling Service (Familievernkontor_Bufetat) which offers services for couples, families, or individuals who are facing troubles with their families or relationships. Familievernkontor is part of Bufetat which is the children, adolescents, and family department and its main role is to provide help and support to the service users no matter where they are in Norway. Bufetat is under the direction of the Ministry for Children, Equality, and Social Inclusion (BLD) and some of its responsibilities are child welfare service, the family counselling service, and adoption (Children, Youth, and Family Affairs, 2015). In every county in Norway, one can find a family counselling service center and some of them are ecclesiastical which means that they are members of Kirkens Familievern. The services offered by the Family Counselling Service are free since they are subsidized by the Norwegian government. In Rogaland County there are three Family Counselling offices; one is in Stavanger, the second is in Bryne, and the third is in Egersund. The employees at Family Counselling Service are psychologists or social workers who are specialized in family therapy and they all have a duty of confidentiality (Children, Youth, and Family Affairs, 2015). The services offered at Familievernkontor include providing support to couples who want to improve their relationships, to new parents who are dealing with the changes in their lives, to parents and their children who are struggling in their family life, to couples who broke up, to families who are going through mourning or who are dealing with the illness of one of their members, to parents or children who are experiencing violence, and to individuals who have experienced forced marriage or other traditions that are harmful to them. The Family counselling center is also responsible for mandatory arbitration which couples have to attend if they are breaking up and they have children under the age of 16 (Children, Youth, and Family Affairs, 2015). During these sessions the parents discuss with the therapist where the child/children is/are going to live, custody arrangements, and visitation rights. Familievernkontor also offers workshops for new parents, for couples who are cohabitating, for parents of children who have special needs, for families with a violence problem, and for adults after a break up. In this study, I take into consideration two workshops offered by Familievernkontor which are the workshops for divorcees and for relationship enhancement.

Recruitment of the participants

I established contact with the psychologists leading the workshops at familievernkontor since spring 2014. The leader at Familievernkontor became aware of the research project and gave his consent. During December 2014, the psychologists leading the workshops asked the men if they would like to be participants in a research project and they explained briefly what the research project was about. The psychologists gave me afterwards the email addresses and the phone numbers of the men who agreed on being part of the research study. In January 2015, I signed a confidentiality agreement at Familievernkontor and I presented them with the license I obtained from the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) to be able to conduct my study in Norway (Appendix 1). During that month, I also contacted the men via email or phone to establish a potential meeting date with them. I was given the contact details of seven men and I tried to contact them all; however, only five men responded to my repeated trials of establishing a meeting time. I was given the opportunity to conduct the interviews at an office at Familievernkontor in Stavanger; therefore, three of the interviews took place there. The two other interviews were conducted at the participants' home and it was decided so since they lived far away from Stavanger and

it was hard for them to take time off their work to travel for an hour or so. Briggs (1986) writes about the role of the context in interviews. He discusses two point of views about how context should be defined. One perspective is that context is a combination of physical, social, and psychological spurs that take place during the interview. Another perspective describes the context as being a construct that is created by both the participants in the interview (ibid). I believe that the physical space where the interview takes place matters whether one is considering the first or the second perspective about context. Having the interviews at the home of the participants might have led them to feel more comfortable and to open up more easily than it would have been the case in an office.

The participants

Two of the participants attended the workshop for relationship enhancement and I named them Marc and Olav. The other three participants attended the workshop for divorcees and I named them Karl, Johan, and Alexander. I was interested in examining the perceptions of men in regard to the coping strategies taught or activated during the workshops; therefore, I used purposive sampling. I selected the interviewees purposively based on the groups which my research problem addresses. The criteria for inclusion were the following:

- Men who attended (up to ten years ago) or are currently attending workshops for relationship enhancement or for divorcees.
- Have children.
- Willing to communicate in English.

Purposive sampling can be constraining because of two factors (Silverman, 2013). First, there may not be enough participants to describe all the aspects of the research topic. Second, the researcher might not have enough resources to examine all the aspects of the research topic (ibid). In this study, I had to deal with many constraints which are limited amount of time, limited amount of resources, and limited amount of participants comfortable enough to communicate in English. Furthermore, some of the men who took the workshop within the past year were still going through a life crisis and I wanted to interview them. However, It is common for people who are dealing with problems not to be interested in being part of a research project about these problems (Leavy, 2014). Consequently, it becomes hard to recruit and retain participants in these circumstances. I wanted to conduct more interviews; however, I was also realistic about the time I had and I was avoiding to be drowned in data. It would be such a waste to invest a lot of time on data collection and then not to have enough time to properly transcribe the data and analyze it. Thus, I had to limit my sample to five participants.

Data collection methods and instruments

The purpose of the qualitative research interview is to obtain descriptions of the perceptions of the men on the impact of the coping strategies activated or taught during the workshops on their psychological well-being. The form of the interview used is a semi-structured interview which means that there are established themes that are supposed to be covered as well as suggested questions that could be used. I considered using focus groups but then I opted for one-on-one interviews because I read in the literature that participants would feel more comfortable if they do not have to share their divorce or separation experience with strangers (Seale et al., 2004). Furthermore, in a semi-structured interview, the interviewer has the possibility to change the order and form of the questions to follow up what the participants are telling (Kvale, 1996).

The reason behind using semi-structured interviews is to encourage the participants to use their own words to describe from a first-hand experience their perceptions. Indeed, semi-structured interviews allow a lot of freedom in the way the respondents choose to answers the questions, the length of their answer, and the issues they choose to talk about with the interviewer (Packer, 2010). Furthermore, qualitative interviews are defined as being very different from the conventional survey research and as being very similar to the conversations that people engage in every day. In fact, if the interviewer is following a strict plan with immovable questions then it becomes quite hard to establish and preserve understanding. One does not consider the continuous work that is put in random conversations on a daily basis and which aims at detecting and fixing ambiguity (Packer, 2010). However, interviewing as mundane interaction does not mean that any kind of behavior is acceptable. What is advised is that the interviewer should follow his/her common sense (Seale et al., 2004). At the end of the day, interviews are not just conversations because the interviewer has some level of control over what topics to be discussed and which direction should the interaction take. The interviewers could present themselves as either passive or active and that would be made clear to the participants from their actions and their words (ibid). As an interviewer, my task is to obtain relevant responses by encouraging the shy participants while at the same time being neutral and avoiding a display of bias. During the interviews, I kept track of my verbal as well as my non-verbal work in order to avoid leading questions or directing the participants' talks (Seale et al., 2004). For this reason, I did not want to force the participants to discuss what I was hoping they would say and hence I did not push them too hard to stick to the interview guide. Flexibility allowed me to obtain the interesting data and the more interesting findings. During the writing up phase of the analysis chapter, I selected quotes from the transcribed interviews with the participants and I used them as a concentrated statement of my various patterns of data.

At the beginning of each interview, I explained in details the research project and read with the participants the informed consent form (Appendix 2) while addressing any questions the participants could have in mind. I asked permission to record and explained issues of confidentiality and anonymity. The participants received a clear presentation of their rights such as their ability to withdraw from the study at any time even if the interview has been conducted. After that, the participants signed the informed consent form and the interview could go on. The presence of the tape recorder, the interview guide, the informed consent form, and the talks about the research project already set the social atmosphere for the interview (Gubrium and Holstein, 2002). In the interview guide, three themes were considered. First, some general information about the workshop were gathered such as what motivated the men to join the workshop. Second, questions addressed the consequences that the workshop attended could have on the men's parenting skills. Third, the relationship with the children in regard to the workshop was discussed. At the end of the interview, I asked the participants if they had any questions or if they had any additional themes they would like to consider with me. This gave the men being interviewed an opportunity to address issues they have been thinking about during the interview.

Analysis Process

The interviews were recorded and then transcribed. According to Strauss and Corbin (2007), transcribing the interviews is a beginning of analysis and can help the researcher in grasping an overview of the data. The complete interviews were transformed from

an oral to a written form. Kvale (1996) described five approaches to analyze data from interviews and there are: categorization, condensation, narrative structuring, deeper interpretations, and ad hoc tactics for the generation of meaning. In this study, I used meaning condensation which is to create shorter formulas to the expressions that the participants used. For example, one the participants said that "I was the adult, the man of the family…before I just wanted to fix things, now I would just hear it." This statement was condensed to "instead of top-down approach having a bottom-up approach" which in turn was coded as "Partnership" which was later on placed under the general theme of "Overall Family Atmosphere". Condensation of meaning involves five important steps. First of all, as a researcher I read through the transcribed interview several times to get a general sense of it. Second, I wrote notes about comments that are considered interesting, these are the "meaning units". Third, I decided on a general theme that is simple and that covers the "meaning unit". Therefore, the codes emerged from the data and were not predetermined. Fourth, I examined the themes in relation to the research question. The fifth and final step, consists of putting together all the themes into a meaningful descriptive statement. After completing the five steps of meaning condensation, I was left with 5 "meaning units" which are the following: negative or positive affect, personal development and growth, overall family atmosphere, relationship with partners or ex-partners, and relationship with children. At this point, I was considering different theories and was trying to find the best theory that would explain the data. I realized that even though I originally wanted to study fatherhood and how these workshops affected the relationship of fathers with their children, the data that emerged was mainly about the psychological well-being of the men interviewed which was partly related to their role as fathers but not solely. I opted for coping theory which led me to organize the 5 "meaning units" under four categories: seeking social support, positive reinterpretation and growth, focus on and venting of emotion, and active coping.

Ethical Issues

Silverman (2013) points out the five main aspects of doing ethical research. He explains the principle of informed consent which means that the participants must be fully aware of the purpose, methods, and potential uses of the study as well as possible risks. In this study, all the respondents signed an informed consent form (Appendix 2) after having discussed with me the aims and methods of the research. Moreover, confidentiality is another essential pillar of doing ethical research which goes hand in hand with keeping the anonymity of the respondents. I assured the participants that all the personal data they decide to share with me will be treated confidentially. I explained that the recordings of the interviews will be stored on a laptop protected by a password which will be constantly kept in a locked room. I made the participants anonymous in the transcription of the interviews by giving them pseudonyms and by taking away all the personal information that could identify them. Upon completion of the research project, I will destroy the personal data and the recordings. Furthermore, Silverman emphasizes that participation in the research must be voluntary and participants should not be coerced into doing the interviews (Silverman, 2013). Accordingly, I informed the participants of their right to withdraw their consent at any time and without explanation. If they decide to withdraw, then it was made clear that their relationship with the workshop group leader would not be affected. Additionally, a fourth principle of doing ethical research in social science is that the research should avoid to harm the participants. This study could harm the participants psychologically by exposing deep-seated fears and anxieties that the participants had previously repressed. To avoid or

minimize the psychological harm, I carefully phrased the questions and I had debriefing sessions with the participants before and after each interview to allow them to ask questions and express their complaints. Qualitative studies like this study often address personal matters and therefore require the researcher to practice greater sensitivity and vigilance (Polit and Beck, 2004). Finally, a last principle of ethical research is to elucidate any conflict of interests or partiality on my side as the researcher.

Before starting the research project, I applied in December 2014 to obtain an authorization from the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) to be able to conduct my study in Norway. A notification form was submitted which was examined by the Norwegian Data Inspectorate at NSD and approval was given to the project in January 2015 before commencement of the research (Appendix 1). The notification form included questions about confidentiality, anonymity, informed consent, purpose and background of the research project, interview questions and I attached a copy of the informed consent form.

Limitations of the Study

This study could only include participants who were comfortable enough with the English Language. Therefore, the language barrier could be considered a limitation since one would always express himself more freely in his mother tongue. Moreover, the men who were interviewed in this study attended the workshop from ten to one year ago. Faded memory of the participants who attended the workshop several years ago could be a limitation. Furthermore, my background, culture, past, and gender as a researcher could be considered a limitation since it influences in one way or another the interview process and later on the analysis and interpretation of the data.

The Researcher

As a researcher, I am not totally foreign to all the issues that were handled during the study. It would be deceitful to deny that I am bias because of my past, gender, culture, and background (Bryman, 2012). My interpretation of the findings cannot but be influenced by my own perspective on the matter. For example, the fact that I am a woman interviewing men may have made some issues more predominant than others if one would consider my socialization and experience. Furthermore, being non-Norwegian may have also influenced in a way or another the interview process and later on the analysis and interpretation of the data. Moreover, Hollis (1994) discusses relativism and rationality in the context of understanding an action by reconstructing its meaning. He describes two conflicting lines of thought. The first line of thought promotes an open-minded approach to reach an understanding of people who live in different intellectual worlds than ours. The second line of thought encourages an assumption that there are similarities between people who live in different intellectual worlds and we should explore these similarities in order to understand them better (ibid). In this study, I was trying to understand the perceptions of men who live in different intellectual worlds than mine. They have a different culture, a different perception of the truth, and a different conception of morality. My approach was to keep an open-mind to our differences but also acknowledge our similarities which created a common ground for me to reach a better understanding of their perceptions.

5 Findings and Analysis

In this chapter, I will present the findings and the analysis of the data. The research question is the following: How do men perceive the impact of the coping skills taught or activated during the workshops on their psychological well-being? The findings are organized under four categories which are: seeking social support, positive reinterpretation and growth, focus on and venting of emotion, and active coping. In order to answer the research question, I will start by presenting seeking social support. Then, I will discuss positive reinterpretation and growth. After that, I will move on to focus on and venting of emotion. Finally, I will talk about active coping.

Seeking Social Support

Karl is one of my participants who attended the workshop for divorcees and he said:

> *"It was social to talk to other people about things that we share, not everything, someone had worse breakups than me, but it was good to hear what they went through and I could say what I went through and maybe talk about to somebody who understands different from normal people who have good relationships." (Karl).*

I see that Karl is emphasizing the importance of being able to share common experiences with other people who are also going through a divorce. Karl is reporting that one of his motivations to attend the workshop was to connect with people who are in the same situation and try to learn from them. Indeed, Karl is saying that the workshop for divorcees provides a setting where one can find social support in the midst of those who understand exactly what one is feeling and dealing with. I understand that Karl is looking for warmth and acceptance from people who are in the same situation as he is. According to the coping theory, using social support can be either problem-focused (instrumental social support) or emotion-focused (emotional social support) (Carver et al., 1989). From Karl's statement, it seems that Karl is looking for emotional social support. I am given the impression that he wants to discuss his feelings with someone and he is trying to get support, understanding, and sympathy from other participants in the workshop. Karl wants to sense that he belongs somewhere and he felt better once he achieved that through being part of the workshop. Social support increases psychological well-being and I assume that this is the case for Karl.

Karl further stated the following:

> *"At least I think I learned how other people on the course saw things and learned something from them, how they communicated, and maybe I learned a little bit from them I learned something there I try to be more positive even though it's not always so easy. Talk and be nice. Before we broke up we had very bad communication."*
> *(Karl).*

From my understanding, Karl is reflecting on the learning he had during the workshop. Karl observed his colleagues in the workshop and listened to them which lead to

learning about them but also about himself. He noticed from the interactions during the workshop that he needs to be more positive. Karl used the verb "learn" four times in his statement which is a sign that interpersonal learning successfully occurred during the workshop. The social microcosm theory discusses interpersonal learning as a therapeutic factor that occurs during therapy groups (Yalom, 1995). The participants learn from each other about themselves but also about the others. In this case, Karl got practical advice from the others about how to improve the bad communication he has with his wife. I see that he accepted that advice because he felt that he could relate to those giving it to him and that is a sign that Karl has a good social support system in the workshop.

Johan is one of my participants who attended the workshop for divorcees and he said:

> *"You see the reaction, some of them have been in court about how to split children, and craziness about how they react to each other. And some people are crazy and you go crazy to react to them of course. But what I was thinking about is when you react this way to your ex-husband, what do you do to your child? Because the child is staying between you and your husband. Are you crazy, and you talk about the problems that your child has got, your child has got yours problems." (Johan).*

From Johan's statement, I understand that being an external observer of the conflict between two ex-partners helped Johan to acknowledge that hurting your ex-spouse also hurts your children. Through this process of acknowledgment, Johan accepted his own responsibility in the clashes that took place and led to the final separation. Johan started his statement by saying "you see the reaction". From these words, I recognize that Johan has been observing how other people react to their ex-partner. In this situation, interpersonal learning took place. Seeking social support can be either an emotion-focused or problem-focused coping mechanism. From a problem-focused or instrumental level, seeking social support can involve getting practical advice from others about how to solve a problem. From an emotion-focused or emotional level, seeking social support can involve feeling better about oneself after knowing that other people are getting separated as well and their breakup might be worse than ours. Johan is talking about how he reached some conclusions after observing his colleagues. He achieved interpersonal learning. I believe that interpersonal learning can be instrumental or emotional the same way social support is. Interpersonal learning and social support are linked together and evolve in the same way in a workshop like the one Johan attended.

Summary
Workshops like the ones attended by Johan and Karl provide both instrumental and emotional social support. The participants give advice to each other (instrumental) but also express their acceptance and understanding of each other's experiences (emotional). Seeking social support is a coping mechanism that appears to increase the psychological well-being of the participants. Universality, group cohesiveness, and interpersonal learning are therapeutic factors that Yalom (1995) pointed out to be activated during group therapy. Seeking social support is a coping mechanism that

activates these therapeutic factors. Furthermore, it appears to me that emotional and instrumental social support need to be the basis for interpersonal learning to occur. From my point of view, if the participant does not feel comfortable enough amidst the group, then it becomes very hard to teach or to be taught. I believe that group cohesiveness should be a pre-requisite for interpersonal learning.

I have presented the first category which is seeking social support. I will move now to the second category which is positive reinterpretation and growth.

Positive reinterpretation and growth

Johan was one of my informants who attended the workshop for divorcees and he said: *"I was left with a lot of thinking, I said in the last day as a joke but in a way I meant it. I said it is very ok to be in the course with the normal people and not with your crazy partners in the other course. You make some reflections about it." (Johan).*
Johan explains that being in the workshop was a step for him to work on his personal development and growth. He uses the words "a lot of thinking" and "reflections" which signify to me that the workshop sessions gave him the opportunity to reflect on his actions and to learn more about himself. The coping process involves the use of emotion-focused coping strategies and positive reinterpretation and growth is one of them (Folkman and Lazarus, 1988). From what Johan is telling me, I understand that he is using positive reinterpretation and growth. Indeed, Johan is growing as a person by thinking and reflecting about his actions. Emotion-focused coping works on changing the way one thinks and perceives a stressful situation (Folkman and Lazarus, 1988). By doing so, the negative emotions that are first generated by the stressful encounter are flipped around to become relatively positive and therefore the psychological well-being of the person can increase. In Johan's case, I see that he is able to take a step back and look at his situation with a different perspective which is a sign of positive reinterpretation and personal growth.

Johan further explains,
"I know I did have a strong reaction but I did not see the strength of my reaction but it was easier to see the strength on other people's reaction." (Johan).
I see that the participant felt that going to the workshop helped him acknowledge his responsibility in the break up process. Listening to other people talk about their problems with their ex-spouses opened his eyes to the fact that conflict is born and rises only when two people take part in it. The participant talks about the importance of learning from others who are participating in the workshop. Interpersonal learning took place through listening, interacting, and observing others during the workshop sessions. The interpersonal learning that Johan experienced is an indication of personal growth and development. Yalom (1995) discussed interpersonal learning as a therapeutic factor that occurs in therapy groups. Interpersonal learning is defined as learning about oneself and others and getting a better understanding of interpersonal procedures (Øygard et al., 2000). Feedback from others is an essential part of this factor, it will allow group members to acknowledge the positives and the negatives about their behavior, their strengths and their weaknesses. This is what Johan said happened during the workshop. Furthermore, his ability to look at his behavior with a critical perspective is a representation of positive reinterpretation and growth.

Karl is also one of my informants who attended the workshop for divorcees and he said:

"It wasn't an easy period. I think she changed because she had a father and her father suddenly left her mother… he said he has to pick someone up from the airport, and then he just left. Now he lives in Thailand and has two children there. I don't know if she thought that I could be like that." (Karl).

From this statement, I understand that Karl is reflecting on an experience that his ex-wife went through with her parents. I see that Karl shows that he is trying to get a better understanding of his ex-wife by taking the time to think about how this experience might have affected her, her view on things, and her feelings. He stated that she changed after that disappointment with her father and he is reflecting that she might be transferring her anger and negative feelings on him. Karl's ability to put himself in his ex-wife's shoes and his efforts to see the world the way she sees it are conveyed through his statement. Karl is experiencing personal growth and positive reinterpretation since he is able to empathize with his ex-wife. Karl's empathy and increased understanding towards his ex-wife were stirred up during the workshop. The coping theory stated that emotion-focused coping strategies help the people using them to focus their energy and efforts on seeing their experience in a different light and on learning something from it (Richard S. Lazarus, 1998). Positive reinterpretation and growth is an emotion-focused coping strategy activated during the workshop and Karl used it to take a second look at his beliefs about his ex-wife and examine them. After taking the time to think about how different circumstances affected his ex-wife and therefore their relationship, Karl was able to look at things differently. Karl grew as a person as a result of the triggering of this coping strategy.

Karl further said,
"It's better for me, now I know when I have the children. I think it is better for the children also." (Karl).
From this statement, I realize that Karl is reflecting on the positive aspects that followed the divorce. He is acknowledging his increased well-being since the divorce that lead him to move out to a different house. From what he is saying, I can see that Karl's attention is not focused solely on the negative facets of the break-up. Karl is able to look at the good things that are associated with what is happening to him and to appreciate them. It appears to me that Karl is using positive reinterpretation. The coping process involves a reappraisal of the stressful situation which occurs after the use of coping strategies (Folkman and Lazarus, 1988). Consequently, the meanings associated with the stressful situation change. Therefore, the stressful situation appears to be less threatening or less harmful than it seemed after the first appraisal. Positive reinterpretation is a coping strategy that seems to be used by Karl to help him change the meanings associated with his divorce. Karl is now able to see that his divorce is not only a crisis but it is also associated with desirable outcomes, in this case his well-being and his children's well-being.

Olav is one of my participants who attended the relationship enhancement workshop and his stated the following:
"Most the lesson time and also combined to the period we talk together as a couple and especially when some counsellor also helped us to say the right words or to think about or to let us come in to it more deeper than we would." (Olav).

I understand from the statement Olav is making that the counsellor's help during the workshop was valued by him because it allowed him to go "deeper" into the issues that he has with his wife. Olav attended the relationship enhancement workshop and the workshop dynamics facilitated the passage from a shallow discussion to a more consistent and valuable conversation about the problems that Olav and his wife were experiencing. Being able to have a talk about the profound structures that are creating a crisis in the relationship is a sign of growth and development. Positive reinterpretation and growth is not only an emotion-focused coping strategy but it is also a problem-focused coping strategy (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). Indeed, the people using positive reinterpretation and growth are not only trying to change the meaning associated with the stressful situation but they are actively trying to fix it as well. Olav is trying to solve the issues behind the crisis that is threatening his relationship and in order to achieve that he does not hesitate to go the extra mile and work on his personal development. Olav is opening up to discuss deep feelings which could be painful and difficult to deal with; his willingness to do that is a sign of maturity and growth.

Olav further said:
"I kind of like to be in that move. To go deep into childhood, and I like that too because it will give growth. That was the most emotional, emotional difficulties." (Olav).
From my understanding, Olav expressed that facing one's difficulties can be an emotionally challenging task but that the challenge leads to a positive outcome which is growth. Olav described how the workshop helped him grow as a person by guiding him towards rethinking of his childhood experiences. Lazarus considers coping as a mediator of emotion (Folkman and Lazarus, 1988). Coping is generated during the encounter after the primary appraisal and before the reappraisal and it changes the outcome of the interaction between the person and the stressful situation. In this case, Olav got to think about his childhood experiences. The reason why the counsellors guide the participants towards childhood is because they believe that childhood attachments affect present relationships (Love and Shulkin, 2001). Olav got to reflect on the ways childhood attachments are intervening with his relationship with his wife and that is growth. Growth is a coping strategy which changed the way Olav was feeling about his relationship crisis and made him aware of his vulnerabilities.

Alexander is one of my participants who attended the workshop for divorcees and he made the following statement:

> *"You can only change yourself, because sometimes when in feel triggered emotionally in relationship with my children, I am not that a good therapist that I can stop the situation take two steps back evaluate it … at least afterwards you try to analyze it more. Why was this important to me, could I have done something different." (Alexander).*

From my point of view, Alexander is saying that he learned that one cannot expect to change others. He perceives that it is impossible to make people think and behave the way we want them to. He understands from the workshop that in relationships, whether with children or with partners or ex-partners, the most productive attitude would be to work on how we perceive things. Alexander acknowledges that it is central to try to

understand why some situations are so important for us and lead to conflict. It is a first step towards a higher level of acknowledgment of who we are, what we believe in, and what we want to achieve. It is also a step towards personal growth and development. According to Lazarus, the coping process involves the use of emotion-focused coping strategies which lead to changing the meaning one attaches to the stressful situation (Folkman and Lazarus, 1988). By changing how one perceives a situation, then the emotions associated with the situation also change. Alexander took the time to reflect on the situations that trigger him and are thus responsible for conflict. He realized that these situations are attached to a meaning that is important for him. This new knowledge that Alexander earned during the workshop made him change the meaning he attached to the situations that triggered him. Afterwards, Alexander changed the emotions that are associated with these same situations. Alexander's ability to go through this process of meaning change is a sign of positive reinterpretation and growth.

Summary
The statements made by the participants illustrate the coping process described by Lazarus. Positive reinterpretation and growth is an emotion-focused coping strategy and thus works on changing the attention or the meaning one attaches to the stressful situation. The participants described their increased ability to reflect on their actions, the interpersonal learning they gained from each other, the increased insight they got from listening to each other, and the empathy and heightened understanding they developed towards their partner or ex-partner. This coping strategy helped the participants replace their negative emotions regarding their separation or couple crisis by relatively positive emotions and thus it helped them increase their psychological well-being. Furthermore, positive reinterpretation and growth is not only an emotion-focused coping strategy but it is also a problem-focused coping strategy. Indeed, the people using positive reinterpretation and growth are not only reflecting on their emotions and on the meaning they attach to the stressful situation but they are actively trying to fix it as well. For example, I see that doing extra efforts to work on one's personal development is a step towards solving the issues behind the crisis.

I have presented the second category which is positive reinterpretation and growth. I will move now to the third category which is focus on and venting of emotion.

Focus on and Venting of Emotion
Karl is one of my informants who attended the workshop for divorcees and he stated the following:
"I think we had a very good connection and talked everyone in the room we could talk very open and spoke about things." (Karl).
From this statement, I can see that Karl really appreciated the possibility to open up and share his feelings with his colleagues in the workshop. It seems to me that the workshop finally gave Karl the possibility to let go of the gate keeping of his emotions and experience a freedom when discussing his feelings. Yalom (1995) discussed catharsis as a therapeutic factor that occurs in therapy groups and it is described as the ability to let down one's guard of his/her feelings. The catharsis described by Yalom can be referred to in other words as focus and venting of emotions which is an emotion-focused coping mechanism. A part of the workshop is to be able to discuss with others how one is feeling about the crisis one is going through and what are the thoughts attached to it. Karl's declaration shows that Karl benefited from the possibility of venting his emotions and it led to a greater psychological well-being for him.

Karl further indicated:

> *"We talked after that about our experiences through that and I talk very much and I think it was hard...I think she tried to keep them (children) away from me...I don't think I deserve that...I was always pushed away and that was not easy because I wanted to do things to participate and do everything." (Karl).*

From my understanding, Karl let his emotions out during the sessions. He was upset and he was aware of it. He is saying that he talked about the frustration and the overwhelming negative affect that he experienced throughout the divorce. He expressed his frustration in regard to his rights as a father. He felt that his ex-wife put him on the margins and denied him his rights to be a father to his children. Karl shared the pain and the hurt he felt and he opened up to the other participants during the workshop and to me during the interview. Focusing on and venting of emotions is an emotion-focused coping mechanism that is sometimes efficient but could also be at other times a maladaptive coping strategy (Carver et al., 1989). Indeed, it is suspected that focusing on negative affect for a long period of time can keep people stuck in their distress and prevent them from moving on (Felton et al., 1984). Reminiscing distress sidetracks people from finding coping strategies that will help them get over their stressful experience and it can actually increase the amount of suffering they are experiencing. In this case, Karl appeared to me that he was still suffering even though he vented his emotions during the workshop. His suffering makes one wonder if the occasion to talk about painful memories does not cause more harm than good.

Johan is one of my participants who attended the workshop for divorcees and he said: *"You can see the problems and talk about it. It can make it clearer about it." (Johan)* From my perspective, Johan really appreciated having the opportunity to talk about his difficulties since he said that it helped him acknowledge and face his troubles. Focus on and venting of emotions is an emotion-focused coping mechanism that is found to be functional in some situations but maladaptive in others (Carver et al., 1989). In this case, Johan found that focusing and venting of emotions helped him develop a broader perspective on the issues he has been facing. Therefore, Johan's psychological well-being increased as a result of using this coping mechanism.

Marc is one of my participants who attended the workshop for relationship enhancement and he said:

> *"They work with the whole group about the way to talk to each other and they do it in the group like that. I don't know if I want to have that in the course. I don't know if I want to have that because it could be difficult for people to do because they don't know each other and they feel uncomfortable. In this course, you have things together and then you go work privately with your own spouse on your own things." (Marc).*

I understand that Marc is speaking about the importance of keeping private problems to oneself and not sharing them with the group. Marc used the word "uncomfortable" to describe his opinion about sharing intimate issues he has with his spouse with other people. In my opinion, Marc is a discreet person who likes to be privy about his troubles with his wife. Yalom (1995) pointed out catharsis as a therapeutic factor in therapy groups. According to Yalom's theory of social microcosm, opening up to others and sharing one's feelings and emotions is supposed to be beneficial. However, Marc does not feel that opening up to strangers can be constructive to him. He prefers to limit his participation in the workshop to taking the learning about how to communicate and how to deal with conflict. Marc's quotation shows how important it is to keep in mind that people are different and that individual characteristics affect how much they are willing to give and take in such a workshop.

Summary
Focus on and venting of emotions appear to be a double barreled coping mechanism which is functional for some while being maladaptive for others. This coping strategy is focused on emotions and can be quite unpredictable in leading the participants to higher or lower psychological well-being. During the workshops, sharing one's feelings is an important part of the sessions. I would argue that the outcome of focus on and venting of emotions does not only depend on the stressful situation but is also affected by the personal characteristics of the individuals.

Focus on and venting of emotions is an emotion-focused coping strategy which if effective changes the meaning or the attention the person carries towards the stressful situation. Indeed, sharing these emotions and thoughts that have been roaming one's mind with others then receiving acceptance and feedback can lead to a certain liberation but also an increased insight of the situation at hand. It can help a person reach a clearer understanding of what has happened and guide them towards establishing different coping strategies to assist them in adapting to the stressful encounter. To conclude, focus on and venting of emotions can either improve the psychological well-being of the participants by guiding them to see their situation under a different light or it can decrease their psychological well-being by keeping them stuck in their negative affect.

I have presented the third category which is focus on and venting of emotion. I will move on now to the fourth and final category which is active coping.

Active coping
Karl is one of my informants who attended the workshop for divorcees and he said:
"I did this to get better, to try to learn something about communication with my ex. It is important for me, for us, to talk about because we have two children. So and it is ok, it's going ok but it could have been better, it's not so easy." (Karl).
From my point of view, this statement emphasizes that Karl knows about the problem which is lack of communication with his ex-wife. One of the drives that led him to attend the workshop was "to try to learn something". He says that he wants to improve the communication pattern with his ex-wife for the best interest of their children. This is one of the incentives that motivated him to attend the workshop which offers communication skills training. Active coping is a problem-focused coping strategy which emphasizes doing something to change the environment and thus getting rid of the stressful situation. A divorce is a crisis and attending the workshop is an active step towards solving it. Learning communication skills, listening skills, and conflict

resolution skills does not erase the divorce but it will pave the way to a cooperative partnership with the ex-wife. Karl is trying to reach a level of cooperation with his ex-wife because I assume that he is hoping that it will minimize the stress related to the crisis.

Johan is one of my participants and he attended the workshop for divorcees. He stated: *"The child has got your problems. They talk about the child has got this and this problems. But the problems of the child are the symptoms of the problems of the mother and the father." (Johan).*
I see that Johan realizes that the stressor they are going through as a couple is also infiltrating their children. Johan is concerned about the well-being of his children who are witnessing the divorce of their parents. Divorced fathers experience high parental role strain (Umberson and Williams, 1993) and Johan feels the pressure. He decided to act and enrolled in the workshop. Active coping is when a person does something to eliminate or decrease the effect of the stressor. These active steps could be direct action or doing more efforts. In this case, Johan is trying to deal with the crisis through active coping by going to the workshop. Johan learned at the workshop different ways to improve his relationship with his ex-partner. I believe that Johan is hoping that reaching a higher level of understanding with his ex-wife will make things easier for their children and thus decrease the feelings of distress he is experiencing.

Marc is one of my informants and he attended the workshop for relationship enhancement. He explained:
"I was the adult, the man of the family. Now I wanted to see how they see things, how they experience things. Before I just wanted to fix things, now I would just hear it." (Marc).
From Marc's words, I understand that the workshops made him change his entire perception of his role as a member of his family. Marc is actively working on creating a partnership with his wife and children. He let go of the top-down approach he was following and replaced it with a bottom-up approach; I can see this change through the words Marc used "Before I just wanted to fix things, now I would just hear it". Marc learned through the workshop some tips and tricks to better communicate and listen to the people around him. The life course theory explains that the lives in a family are tied together and that if one member of the family is going through a crisis then other members of the family are going to be affected as well. Marc and his wife were going through a crisis and they decided to attend the relationship enhancement workshop. I believe that active coping was beneficial in this case since it led to Marc establishing a partnership with his family members after taking active actions to improve the overall family atmosphere.

Moreover, Johan stated:

"What we learned there I think is useless for other kind of communication because it is about communication that you need to have but you don't want to have it. It is very different. It is about how to accept and how to not speak too much. Just say what needs to be said and not to argue. Yeah and be polite." (Johan).

I understand that Johan is describing his circumstances which force him to stay in touch and communicate with his ex-partner with whom he has a strenuous relationship. He also specifies that he does not believe that the communication skills learned during the workshop can be transferred to use with people other than an ex-partner. According to the life course theory, lives are interdependent in a family. Johan did not see that the communication skills he learned during the workshop can be used with his children or other people in his life. Johan is making a clear distinction between his relationship with his ex-wife and his relationship with others like his children.

Furthermore, Karl said:

"I also think that she always thought that she can do it better than me and I was always pushed away and that was not easy because I wanted to do things to participate and do everything. Now when I have the children I have more time with them alone…" (Karl).
From my understanding, Karl wants to spend more time with his children and wants to be actively involved in their lives. His problem was that he felt that his wife was behaving as a barrier between him and his children. He decided to take action and he filed for divorce. They could not agree on a custody arrangement; therefore, they went to court. It helped him get some of his denied rights back. Karl took direct steps to get around his problem and it worked but he was still experiencing psychological distress. Active coping which is a problem-focused coping strategy is a double-edged sword that can modify the stressful environment but cannot erase the frustration and the negative emotions that were generated during the stressful environment. From my talk with Karl, I could see that he was still experiencing all the negative emotions that he had before the divorce. In this situation, minimizing the impact of the problem and changing the person-environment relationship did not lead to greater psychological well-being.

Summary
Active coping is a problem-focused coping strategy which emphasizes doing something to change the environment and thus minimizing the impact of the stressful situation. A divorce or a strained relationship is a crisis for the entire family and not only for the parents since lives are interrelated within a family system. Attending the workshops is an active step and the participants are motivated to learn communication skills, listening skills, conflict resolution skills. They are hoping that these skills will pave the way to a cooperative partnership with their ex-partner or actual partner. Once the stressor has been eliminated or reduced, one would think that the psychological well-being of the participants would naturally improve. However, it is not always the case. Furthermore, some of the participants were able to generalize the use of the learned skills during the workshops to different relationships but some others did not see how they could transfer their learning to other situations.

6 Conclusions

This study investigated men's perceptions of the impact of coping strategies activated or taught during the workshops on their psychological well-being. The results point out to four coping strategies which are: active coping, focus on and venting of emotion, positive reinterpretation and growth, and seeking social support. The findings indicated that positive reinterpretation and growth as well as seeking social support have positive effects on the psychological well-being of the men. On the other hand, Active coping and focus on and venting of emotions appeared to act like a double-edged sword. The results showed that active coping and focus on and venting of emotions improve the psychological well-being of the men but not all the time and not in all cases. Therefore, a selective use of these two coping strategies would be recommended. I would suggest that further research should investigate under which conditions and in which situations the workshops should teach or activate these two coping strategies in order to achieve an optimal result for the participants. It would also be valuable to find out which other coping strategies would be beneficial in a setting like the workshops.

The results did not point out to a number of coping strategies that are assessed by the COPE inventory. The coping strategies that I did not see in my data include mental disengagement, denial, religious coping, humor, behavioral disengagement, restraint, substance use, suppression of competing activities, planning, and acceptance. Further research might look at which of these coping skills would be beneficial to the men and at ways to include them in the workshops.

The value of the workshops lies in their ability to prevent family breakdown, to protect children, and to increase their well-being. That is the reason that motivated the Norwegian government to finance the workshops. This study showed that a primary concern one is facing when subjected to a life crisis is one's ability to cope with the crisis. This aspect is directly related to the person's psychological well-being which is related to the person's parental performance (Cummings et al., 2003; Mark et al., 2004). The co-parenting relationship also enters the equation and affects the parent-child relationship quality (Ponnet et al., 2013). These different elements appear to me to form a scaffold which is the support for the construction of a healthy, positive, and stable environment for the children. The parents are at the basis of this scaffold and they have the responsibility to keep it steady. Psychologically healthy parents who are resilient to life's storms are key to maintaining the scaffold standing up and high. Consequently, the workshops are so important in providing support and guidance to parents and especially men who are more vulnerable to divorce or separation than women.

The coping theory and the theory of social microcosm guided me to look at the data from a perspective that allowed me to answer my research question. In another way, the life course theory helped me to go an extra mile and to step away from the data and from the research question. It assisted me to look at the family as one system and to see all the interrelatedness of the relationships that exist within this system. Workshops such as the ones considered in this study should be regarded as a valuable tool for social workers. The institutions in Norway believe in a systemic approach and do their best to cooperate together with other institutions. I believe that more emphasis should be placed on a coordination between social workers and psychologists in charge of the workshops. Indeed, social workers could advise men, who might not be aware of these workshops, to try and attend them.

The couples' workshops are supposed to positively influence the relationship of the men with their partner. The workshops teach the participants better communication skills but also take them back to their childhood and help them understand how their childhood experiences influence their relationships today. By improving the relationship of the parents, and since lives are lived interdependently, then the couples' workshops will also improve the overall family experience and ambiance, thus making it easier for men to interact positively with the children.

Additionally, the life course is shaped by different historical and social contexts, and the men are with the spouse the way they are because of the circumstances they live in and have been through. Consequently, understanding that the past is also part of the present may help the men step away from what they know to learn a new way through the workshop. This learning is transferable from the relationship with the spouse to other relationships as well, such as their relationships with their children.

The workshops are doing a good job by putting the participants' needs and psychological well-being as their priority. However, it would seem appropriate to have a little bit more space during the workshops to talk about the children. I am not suggesting that a part of the workshop should be about guilt tripping the parents or pushing them towards a direction they really do not want. However, I am suggesting that parents should be given time to develop more insight and perspective in regards to their children. Since the workshops' final goal is the best interest of the children, then it seems only fair to me to provide some more help to the parents. For example, an extra session to teach parenting skills could be highly welcomed by the participants.

If I were to do this study all over again, I would dedicate more time to the selection of the participants. I would try to limit my sample to participants who attended the workshop recently. I would also like to do more interviews.

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Appendix 1: NSD approval letter

Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS
NORWEGIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA SERVICES

Wenche Hovland
Universitetet i Stavanger

4036 STAVANGER

Vår dato: 26.01.2015   Vår ref: 41129 / 3 / LB   Deres dato: Deres ref:

TILBAKEMELDING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV
PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 10.12.2014.
Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

41129	*Fathers perception of the consequences of parenting courses on their relationships with their children.*
Behandlingsansvarlig	*Universitetet i Stavanger, ved institusjonens øverste leder*
Daglig ansvarlig	*Wenche Hovland*
Student	*Aimee Aoun*

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet, og finner at behandlingen av
personopplysninger vil være regulert av § 7-27 i personopplysningsforskriften.
Personvernombudet tilrår at prosjektet gjennomføres.

Personvernombudets tilråding forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd
med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet,
ombudets kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven og helseregisterloven
med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen
endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for
personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema,
http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/meldeplikt/skjema.html. Det skal også gis
melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje
skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig
database, http://pvo.nsd.no/prosjekt.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 01.06.2016, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

Katrine Utaaker Segadal

Lene Christine M. Brandt

Kontaktperson: Lene Christine M. Brandt tlf: 55 58 89 26
Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering
Kopi: Aimee Aoun aimee.aoun@lau.edu

Personvernombudet for forskning

Prosjektvurdering - Kommentar

Prosjektnr: 41129

In the notification form it is reported that the research project is carried out in collaboration with other national institutions. However, it is also reported that no personal information will be exchanged with the institutions.

The sample will receive written and oral information about the project, and give their consent to participate. The letter of information is well formulated.

Data is gathered through personal interviews. Sensitive information relating to health, cf. Personal Data Act § 2, no. 8 c), might be registered.

The Data Protection Official presupposes that the researcher follows internal routines of Universitetet i Stavanger regarding data security. If personal data is to be stored on a private computer, the information should be adequately encrypted.

Estimated end date of the project is 01.06.2016. According to the notification form all collected data will be made anonymous by this date. Making the data anonymous entails processing it in such a way that no individuals can be recognised. This is done by:
- deleting all direct personal data (such as names/lists of reference numbers)
- deleting/rewriting indirectly identifiable data (i.e. an identifying combination of background variables, such asresidence/work place, age and gender)
- deleting audio recordings

Appendix 2: Informed consent form

Request for participation in research project

"Men's perceptions of the impact of workshops on their psychological well-being"

Background and Purpose

The project is a master project at the University of Stavanger which aim is to investigate the men's perceptions of the impact of workshops on their psychological well-being. Participants in the project are fathers who are taking or took in the past a parenting course.

What does participation in the project imply?

The project is a qualitative study and it examines fathers' perceptions through semi-structured interviews. All interviews will be tape recorded. The interviews will be informal and open-ended, and carried out in a conversational style for approximately an hour. The interview questions will concern practical information about the course itself and what are the fathers perceived changes in their relationships with their children and in their parenting skills.

What will happen to the information about you?
All personal data will be treated confidentially.

The student conducting the project and her supervisor will be the only ones having access to personal data.

The recordings will be stored on a laptop protected by a password which will be constantly kept in a locked room. The participants will be made anonymous in the transcription of the interviews by giving them false names.

A publication of the project will preserve the anonymity of the participants.

The project is scheduled for completion by 01/06/2016.

As soon as the project is completed, the personal data and the recordings will be destroyed.

Voluntary participation
It is voluntary to participate in the project, and you can at any time choose to withdraw your consent without stating any reason. If you decide to withdraw, all your

personal data will be made anonymous. Furthermore, if you do not want to participate in the project or if later on you decide to withdraw, your relationship with your counsellor will not be affected.

If you would like to participate or if you have any questions concerning the project, please contact

- Aimee Aoun (93412303 _ aimee.aoun@lau.edu)

The study has been notified to the Data Protection Official for Research, Norwegian Social Science Data Services.

Consent for participation in the study

I have received information about the project and am willing to participate

----

(Signed by participant, date)

Appendix 3: Interview Guide

Research Question:

What are men's perceptions of the impact of workshops on their psychological well-being?

Information about the course:

- When did you take the course?
- For how long did it last?
- Why did you decide to attend this parenting course?
- What is/was the rate of your attendance to classes?
- What are/were the barriers/facilitators of your attendance?
- What did/do you most like about the course?
- What would you change about the course?
- What was the most challenging part of the course?

Parenting skills:

- Did this course help you in recognizing and adequately providing for your child's needs (emotional, developmental, and health)?
- Do you perceive your child as difficult to parent?
- Did this course change the way in which you see your child (as a child with a lot of motivation to learn or as a child with a lot of problems)? Can you give examples?
- Did this course help you in providing routine and consistent care for your child?
- Did this course help you establish stimulation, guidance, and boundaries for your child?
- Did this course help acknowledge problems and engaging with support services to resolve them?

Relationship with their children:

- When you compare your interaction with your children before and after taking the course, did you perceive a difference? If yes, what has changed?
- When you compare your parenting skills before and after taking the course, did you perceive a difference? If yes, what has changed?
- When you compare your overall relationship with your children before and after taking the course, did you perceive a difference? If yes, what has changed?
- Can you give me examples of everyday life situations that illustrate the changes you mentioned? (in case they mention that changes did occur).

Appendix 4: Non-plagiarism declaration

Non-plagiarism declaration

I hereby declare that the Dissertation titled Men's *perceptions of the impact of coping strategies taught or activated during the workshops on their psychological well-being* submitted to the Erasmus Mundus Master's Programme in Social Work with Families and Children:

- Has not been submitted to any other Institute/University/College

- Contains proper references and citations for other scholarly work

- Contains proper citation and references from my own prior scholarly work

- Has listed all citations in a list of references.

I am aware that violation of this code of conduct is regarded as an attempt to plagiarize, and will result in a failing grade (F) in the programme.

Date (dd/mm/yyyy): ....13/05/2015...

Signature: .... [signature] - ....…..…

Name (in block letters): AIMEE AOUN..…......................…