

Opposite Sides of the Same Coin: Former Spouses' Divergent Perspectives in Coping With Their Divorce

Janice D. Gray
University of Waterloo
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

Roxane Cohen Silver
University of California, Irvine

The extent to which people are assisted in their adjustment to divorce by their tendency to appraise the breakup in a biased, ego-enhancing fashion was investigated. Comparisons of the perceptions of 90 ex-spouses (45 couples) revealed that (a) ex-spouses did not differ in their positive self-perceptions nor in their negative perceptions of each other; (b) Ss rated themselves more positively along dimensions of responsibility for the breakup, villain/victim status, and desire to reconcile than they were rated by their ex-partner; (c) both partners agreed that the women were more likely to have had control over the separation process than the men; and (d) wives' views of their ex-husband tended to correlate with the men's self-perceptions; men's and women's views of the wives were unrelated. The greater the control over the breakup attributed to one's ex-spouse, the lower one's level of psychosocial adjustment and resolution of the breakup. The article discusses how distorting perceptions of ego-threatening situations may facilitate adjustment to and maintenance of change.

Stress and coping researchers have long been interested in how people cope with undesirable events that they can neither control nor predict—outcomes such as getting cancer, losing a loved one, or being raped (see Silver & Wortman, 1980, for a review of this literature). Retrospectively perceiving oneself to have had some control over such uncontrollable outcomes has been found to be an important aspect of the coping process (Bulman & Wortman, 1977; Janoff-Bulman, 1979; Thompson, 1981). Yet, people also prospectively seek to control the events of their lives. They may change their residence or job, get married, or have children. Although such decisions typically involve seeking a positive change in one's circumstances, even controllable events are fraught with uncertainty. For example, the decision to terminate an unhappy marital relationship usually involves entering an ambiguous and potentially negative situation. The present research investigated the extent to which people are assisted in their adjustment to such an outcome by their tendency to appraise it in a biased and ego-enhancing fashion.

Evidence for the tendency for people to perceive events in a biased or inaccurate manner comes from a long line of research

in social psychology. In fact, over 35 years ago, Hastorf and Cantril (1954) observed that football fans of opposing teams perceived different events to occur during the same game. Since that time, a vast body of literature has developed around the study of the accuracy of people's perceptions of themselves and their world. These judgments have often been found to involve information processing that is biased by prior expectations and self-serving interpretations (see Fiske & Taylor, 1984; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; and Ross, 1989, for reviews of this literature).

Taylor and Brown (1988) have recently exchanged the term *bias* for the broader concept of *illusion*—implying a more global and enduring pattern of distortion. They discuss three such illusions that have emerged consistently in studies of self-relevant information processing: exaggerated perceptions of control, overly positive self-evaluations, and unrealistic optimism about the future. They argue that these illusions are maintained, in part, by cognitive-processing mechanisms that filter incoming information and distort it in a positive direction. Such filtering or distorting mechanisms are thought to be most apparent and most adaptive under adverse circumstances. Other research has similarly suggested that when coping with an undesirable event, people tend to engage in complex cognitive strategies that change the meaning of the stressor (see Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Rothbaum, Weisz, & Snyder, 1982; Taylor, 1983). To the extent that one is able to appraise (or reappraise) a potentially negative situation in a more positive light, adjustment to the outcome is expected to be facilitated.

To date, much of the evidence for perceptual distortion has come from experimental investigations manipulating success and failure in the laboratory (for notable exceptions, see McFarland & Ross, 1987; Ross & Sicoly, 1979), a situation from which generalizations to the "real world" may be difficult. As Taylor and Brown (1988) note, experimental evidence may be biased by its measurement of short-term perspectives in unfamiliar environments. Moreover, although there is some evidence that

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Roxane Cohen Silver, Program in Social Ecology, University of California, Irvine, California 92717.

self-enhancing biases promote positive mood (e.g., McFarland & Ross, 1982), the evidence for the link between positive illusions about self and psychological well-being is limited, and further research is warranted (Taylor & Brown, 1988). In fact, recent evidence indicates that self-enhancing distortions may not always be adaptive (Mirowsky & Ross, 1990) or at least may only be adaptive within limits (Baumeister, 1989). Undoubtedly, an ideal situation in which to examine such biases and their relation to adjustment would be among people coping with a stressor in which the issues of self-esteem, personal control, and optimism about the future are important. Furthermore, a situation that allows for examination of the perceptions of two parties experiencing the same stressor would provide the opportunity to measure self-enhancing biases by comparing the perceptions of one with the other. One population that fits these criteria is couples who have experienced the breakup of their marital relationship.¹

Marital separation is a highly stressful event (Bloom, Asher, & White, 1978; Spanier & Casto, 1979; Spanier & Thompson, 1984; Weiss, 1975, 1976) and one that involves and affects issues of control, self-esteem, and future orientation (see, e.g., Hagestad & Smyer, 1982; Levinger, 1976; Pettit & Bloom, 1984; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). In an effort to study divorce, researchers in the area of close relationships have gathered people's retrospective accounts of why their marital relationship ended (see, e.g., Hunt & Hunt, 1977; Weiss, 1975). More recently, Harvey and his colleagues have focused on the cognitive properties of these accounts (see Harvey, Agostinelli, & Weber, 1989; Harvey, Weber, Galvin, Huszti, & Garnick, 1986; Harvey, Wells, & Alvarez, 1978; Weber, Harvey, & Stanley, 1987) and have recognized that such accounts are likely to be motivated by a variety of factors. Specifically, they argue that emotional release, a search for understanding, and a variety of self-presentational concerns (including the characteristics of the audience) may all bias the tone and content of the account provided at any particular time. Moreover, accounts formulated at the end of a relationship may be "fleshed out," so that the outcome is retrospectively predicted by the nature of the characters and the events in the account (cf. McFarland & Ross, 1987). Thus, people's later accounts might be expected to differ from earlier ones, the story told to one's friends might be expected to differ from the one told to one's mother, and accounts from ex-partners might differ in issues of focus, details remembered, and perspectives taken (cf. McCall, 1982).

Nonetheless, very few studies of relationship termination have examined the accounts given by both members of a dissolved couple (see, e.g., Stephen, 1987). In their classic study of dating partners, Hill, Rubin, and Peplau (1976) found that after their breakup, former partners' reports were similar on objective issues such as the month the relationship ended or the external factors responsible, but they differed on subjective features such as how abruptly the relationship was terminated or on causal attributions that involved internal inferences to the breakup (e.g., differing interests, attitudes, backgrounds). In addition, there was a systematic self-bias in respondents' reports, with a general tendency for respondents to report that they, rather than their partner, had most wanted to end the relationship. Hill et al. suggested that this bias might have been a way of retroactively taking control of the breakdown process. Al-

though they did not test it, Hill et al. also speculated in passing that such a view might have made it easier to cope with and accept the breakup. Surprisingly, this proposition has not been examined in any subsequent research on the topic.

In fact, studies that have investigated the accounts of both partners of a former marriage have been most notable in their almost complete absence. Although there is some research evidence concerning the degree of divergence between accounts of former spouses (Fletcher, 1981 [cited in Fletcher, 1983]; Newcomb, 1984), it has tended to focus largely on gender differences in causal attributions for relationship termination or on current attitudes toward one's ex-partner (Ambert, 1988). In addition, research involving former spouses has tended to use small, biased, or self-selected samples. For example, Fletcher (1981) used a sample of 12 couples recruited by means of singles' clubs, newspaper advertisements, and acquaintances of colleagues, and Newcomb used a sample of 8 couples who had been part of a larger longitudinal study and who had divorced within the 4 years in which the study was being conducted. Thus, although a number of researchers have recognized that the gathering of information from both former partners would provide valuable information for research in this area (Edwards & Saunders, 1981; Harvey et al., 1978; Hill et al., 1976), this has received limited research attention.

The present study investigated and compared perceptions regarding the events of a marital separation between both partners of a former marriage. As part of a larger study of marital separation and divorce, a subsample of couples provided an ideal opportunity to explore the existence and possible systematic nature of the biases in perceptions between individuals experiencing the same event. Although distortion was possible in a number of areas, on the basis of the stress and coping literature discussed earlier (Taylor & Brown, 1988), we expected to see systematic biases in the service of self-esteem maintenance and enhancement of personal control. In addition, we hoped to help untangle the complexities of control by broadening our conceptualization to distinguish between positive and negative elements of personal responsibility. Brickman et al. (1982) drew a distinction between acceptance of responsibility for the origin of a problem (i.e., blame) and acceptance of responsibility for the solution to a problem (i.e., control; see also Shaver & Drown, 1986). Research on wives' attributions of blame for and control over marital conflict underscores the validity of this distinction (Madden & Janoff-Bulman, 1981). Thus, we have conceptualized accepting blame or personal re-

¹ A large body of literature has been conducted on couples in intact marriages, and the focus of this work has been on comparing the different types of attributions made by partners in distressed versus non-distressed marriages (see Bradbury & Fincham, 1990, for an extensive review of this literature). However, this work has tended not to compare the attributions made by partners within a couple. Moreover, as Bradbury and Fincham indicate, most of this research has not compared appraisals made about self with appraisals made about partners. Yet, as they point out, judgments made about self serve as a standard against which partners are compared. Among those studies that have collected the relevant data, Bradbury and Fincham conclude that "dissatisfied spouses exhibit a tendency toward partner-effacing or self-enhancing attributions" (p. 29).

sponsibility for the problems leading to the breakup as undesirable control—something one is likely to minimize. In contrast, perceiving oneself as having had control over the breakup is desirable and might be exaggerated in the service of effective coping.

A benefit of examining both partners' perceptions is that it allows for the investigation of several combinations of self-other perceptions. Thus, in the present study, we could examine several sets of comparisons between former spouses: comparisons of husband's versus wife's self-perceptions, comparisons of husband's versus wife's perceptions of each other, comparisons of the husband's and wife's view of the husband, and comparisons of the wife's and husband's view of the wife. Inasmuch as both partners were expected to distort their perceptions in the same way, we expected self-self and other-other comparisons to reveal few, if any, differences. Any differences found for these comparisons would suggest a gender difference for the variable(s) involved. Note that one of the more consistent gender differences to emerge in the relationships literature is that women more often initiate a breakup than do men (e.g., Goode, 1956; Hill et al., 1976; Spanier & Thompson, 1984). We therefore expected that this gender difference might be found for reported control over the separation process. The final two sets of comparisons were expected to reveal positive, control-enhancing biases. Thus, in relation to how they were seen by their former spouses, we expected ex-partners to distort their self-perceptions so as to reduce their own negative responsibility, or self-blame, for the breakup (e.g., minimize the extent to which one sees oneself as a villain or one's ex-partner as a victim), to enhance perceptions of their own control over the separation process, and to bolster their own level of self-esteem (e.g., by exaggerating the extent to which one's ex-partner is seen as wanting to reconcile).

Importantly, because we expected these perceptions to be in the service of mental health maintenance (Taylor & Brown, 1988), we hypothesized that self-enhancing appraisals of the breakup would be related to positive adjustment. We conceptualized adjustment as a multifaceted construct, not only involving general psychosocial well-being (i.e., symptoms, life satisfaction, and self-esteem) but also including emotional and cognitive resolution of the breakup (cf. Weiss, 1988) (i.e., continued distress, regret, and preoccupation with thoughts of the breakup). In addition, we were particularly interested in detecting naturally occurring cognitive appraisals rather than biases induced by experimenter demands or by self-presentational concerns (cf. Harvey et al., 1986; Taylor & Brown, 1988). To this end, an anonymous and confidential assessment mailed to participants and completed by them in their homes allowed us to obtain data from both members of a couple without requiring them to cooperate jointly in any way.

Method

Recruitment of Subjects

Through the cooperation of the Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General, names and addresses were obtained for both members of all couples who had filed for divorce in Kitchener-Waterloo County Court, Ontario, Canada, between March and September 1985. The

Kitchener-Waterloo Courthouse serves the cities of Kitchener and Waterloo and the surrounding villages and rural areas, thus representing a large and varied populace. Five to 8 months postfiling, a contact letter introducing the study was mailed to all people for whom a Canadian address was provided in the court records. In the contact letter, we explained how the subjects' names were obtained and indicated that the study involved completing a questionnaire regarding one's experience of marital separation and divorce. Potential participants were also informed that because of our subject recruitment method, it was possible that their former spouse would also be contacted. We assured subjects that all responses would be kept completely confidential and told them that they would receive \$10 as a token of our appreciation for their assistance. They were also given a telephone number to call to avoid receiving the questionnaire if they did not wish to participate.

Within 3 weeks, a questionnaire packet was mailed to all subjects whose contact letters were not returned without a forwarding address, excluding those who called to decline participation. A cover letter accompanying the questionnaire reminded participants of the voluntary and confidential nature of the project. Participants were asked to complete the questionnaire in private and anonymously. They were also provided with a separate, stamped postcard to return, indicating that they had completed the questionnaire and indicating where they wanted their payment to be sent. A list of resource people was also included in the questionnaire packet in case subjects subsequently desired to obtain counseling. Approximately 6 and 12 weeks after distribution of the questionnaire, we sent follow-up letters, encouraging those who had not yet returned the questionnaire to do so. The researchers' telephone numbers were provided with all letters in the event of any questions or concerns on the part of participants. Thank-you letters were sent to all those who participated, along with a check for \$10.

Response Rate

We attempted initial contact with 1,078 potential participants. Undelivered mail was returned for 30% of our addresses (324 letters or questionnaires returned). Seven hundred fifty-four (754) people were assumed to have been contacted through our recruitment efforts. Of these, 31 (4.1%) chose not to participate in the study by either calling to decline or sending the questionnaire back incomplete. Three hundred ten (310) completed questionnaires were returned, representing a 41% response rate. Three questionnaires were not used because of missing data or problems with interpretation (1 was written in Russian; 2 were largely unintelligible or illegible). The final sample of 307 subjects was composed of 113 men (36.7%) and 194 women (63.2%).

Although this response rate is slightly lower than the ideal for survey research (Babbie, 1973), it is comparable to other studies on divorce (Chiriboga, Roberts, & Stein, 1978; Green, 1983; Kolevzon & Gottlieb, 1983; Spanier & Thompson, 1984). Note also that given the transient nature of this target group, as well as the fact that our addresses were approximately 1 year old when we obtained them and mail is not automatically forwarded without charge in Canada, we feel we are being conservative in our calculation of questionnaires assumed to have reached their destinations. However, we were able to obtain recorded information from the court files (i.e., year of marriage, length of time legally married, petitioner/respondent status, and grounds cited for divorce) on the entire group of people who filed for divorce in the county during the period under study. To ascertain, to the extent possible, that our obtained sample was representative of this population, we used *t* tests and chi-square analyses, where appropriate, to test for differences between participants and nonparticipants on those variables for which we had information. Results revealed no significant differences between participants and nonparticipants on any of these variables.

Couples Subsample

Pairs of questionnaires were inconspicuously coded with a case number so that on their return, although anonymous, we would be able to match former couples. Questionnaire data from both marital partners were received from 45 couples (90 men and women), representing 29% of the total questionnaires returned. We conducted several analyses to determine if any group differences existed between these 90 women and men and the remaining 217 subjects who made up the total study sample. Specifically, within gender, *t* tests and chi-square analyses, where appropriate, were used to compare the couples subsample with the remainder of the study sample on a series of demographic variables (i.e., present age, income, education, current marital or relationship status, age at marriage, length of time dating before marriage, year of marriage, length of marriage, length of time living apart from former spouse, petitioner/respondent status, grounds cited for divorce, or number of children) and measures of psychosocial adjustment and emotional and cognitive resolution of the breakup (described later). Few significant differences emerged. In particular, people in the couples subsample were slightly older than those in the noncouples group: men from the couples subsample and those from the noncouples group were 42.3 and 37.6 years old, respectively, $t(192) = 2.76, p < .01$; women from the couples subsample and those from the noncouples group were 39.2 and 35.3 years old, respectively, $t(192) = 2.27, p < .05$. In addition, men from the couples subsample had been married somewhat longer (13.4 years) than the remaining men (9.7 years), $t(107) = 2.32, p < .05$. This difference was not significant for women. On the basis of these results, we feel confident in considering the subsample of couples used for the present report to be representative of the larger sample obtained. Note also that the analyses used to test hypotheses in the present report involved treating each couple as a single case in a repeated measures design. Therefore, because comparisons of interest were conducted within couples and couple participation appears to be relatively random, results are unlikely to be compromised by any serious selection biases.

The 45 marriages involved lasted an average of 12.93 years (range = 3 months–36 years); 50% of subjects were married 10 years or less. Seventy-three percent of the couples were divorced, and 27% were legally separated at the time of the study.² One couple did not agree on their separation/divorce status. Couples had been living apart for an average of 3.66 years (range = 5 months–13 years). Fifty percent had been apart 3 years or less, and 95% had been separated less than 7 years. With respect to current relationship status, 16.7% (10 men and 5 women) had remarried, 28.9% (15 men, 11 women) were living with a romantic partner, and 25.5% (8 men, 15 women) reported being involved in a romantic relationship. Seventy-nine percent of couples reported having an average of 2.65 children for whom the average age was 18.8 years (range = 3–36 years). Current annual household income ranged from less than \$5,000 to over \$50,000 per year, with a mode of \$20,000–\$30,000. Education levels of men and women ranged from less than Grade 8 to advanced university degrees; the majority of subjects (63.3%) had completed at least high school.

Measures

Data for the study was gathered by an extensive 40-page questionnaire, composed of standardized psychological measures, as well as open-ended and fixed-response items that were based on previous research and modified for the purposes of this study.³ Variables of interest for this report are described in more detail below.

Perceptions of the Relationship Breakup

Twenty-four items were designed on an *a priori* basis to assess the degree to which ex-partners made esteem- and control-enhancing ap-

praisals of the breakup of their relationship, as well as to distinguish between the positive and negative elements of personal responsibility (cf. Brickman et al., 1982) described earlier. Twelve of these items assessed the subject's desire for and role in the breakup, and 12 comparably worded items assessed the subject's perceptions of his or her former spouse's desire for and role in the breakup. Specifically, each partner's esteem-enhancing appraisals were measured with items assessing desire for reconciliation ("At present, to what extent would you like to reconcile with your former spouse?" and "At present, to what extent do you think your former spouse would like to reconcile?"), rated on 5-point scales with endpoints of *not at all* (1) and *a great deal* (5). Each partner's control-enhancing appraisals were assessed with three variables measuring perceptions of responsibility for the breakup and two variables assessing perceived control over the breakup process. These variables had been grouped conceptually on an *a priori* basis, and the formation of the specific constructs was supported through the use of a principal-components analysis with varimax rotation performed using the total sample of respondents who returned completed questionnaires ($N = 307$). The resulting theoretical groupings are described in more detail below. The intercorrelations obtained for the couples subsample on the six self-perception variables averaged .22, and the intercorrelations obtained on the six variables assessing perceptions of one's former spouse averaged .16.

Perceptions of responsibility for the breakup. Three variables measured self-perceptions of responsibility for the breakup. First, personal responsibility was assessed with three items: (a) the extent to which subjects presently felt that their "actions or behavior" contributed to the marital breakup, (b) the extent to which they presently felt their "character or personality" contributed to the marital breakup, and (c) how "responsible" they felt at present for the breakup of the marriage.⁴ Each item was rated on a 5-point scale, with endpoints of *not at all* (1) and *a great deal* (5), and they were combined to form an index with an internal consistency of .76 and .72 for the total sample and couples subsample, respectively.

A second variable measuring personal responsibility was the extent to which subjects perceived themselves as "villains" regarding the breakup of their marriage. It was assessed by four items: (a) the extent to which subjects remembered seeing themselves as a "villain" at the time of the breakup, (b) their present view of self as a "villain," (c) the extent to which subjects remembered, at the time of the breakup, seeing their reasons for breaking up as "selfish," and (d) their present view of self as "selfish."⁵ Each of these items was rated on a 5-point scale,

² This status was unrelated to any of the outcome measures used in the study (i.e., Psychosocial Adjustment, Continued Emotional Distress, Continued Regret Over the Breakup, or Preoccupation With Thoughts About the Breakup).

³ A copy of the measures used in this report may be obtained from Roxane Cohen Silver.

⁴ Although a conceptual distinction has been made in the control literature between behavioral and characterological self-blame (Janoff-Bulman, 1979), we failed to find them to be empirically distinct in our data (i.e., both loaded on the same factor assessing personal responsibility for the breakup). In fact, others have also found that when behaviors are exhibited repeatedly over time, as is likely to be the case during a marital breakup, there appears to be little distinction made between the two constructs (see, e.g., Miller & Porter, 1983, for a comparable discussion).

⁵ Note an apparent consistency between subjects' current views and their reports of how they viewed themselves and their spouse at the time of the breakup. This is reflected in the finding that these items loaded on the same factor in the principal-components analysis and that the scales that combined these items had high degrees of internal consistency. This result is likely due to the fact that such assessments

with endpoints of *not at all* (1) and *a great deal* (5), and they were combined to form an index with an internal consistency of .81 and .79 for the total sample and couples subsample, respectively.

The final variable measuring personal responsibility for the breakup was a single item that assessed the extent to which subjects presently felt their "involvement with another person" contributed to the breakup of their marriage. This item also was rated on a 5-point scale, with endpoints of *not at all* (1) and *a great deal* (5).

Parallel questions measured perceptions of one's former spouse's personal responsibility for the breakup. Thus, the extent to which responsibility was attributed to one's former spouse was a three-item index of identically worded items about one's ex-partner. This index had an internal consistency of .65 and .63 for the total sample and couples subsample, respectively. Similarly, four comparably worded items assessed perceptions of one's ex-partner as a villain surrounding the breakup of the marriage. These items were combined to form an index that had an internal consistency of .81 and .75 for the total sample and couples subsample, respectively. The final variable measuring one's partner's responsibility for the breakup was a single item that assessed the extent to which subjects presently felt their "former spouse's involvement with another person" contributed to the breakup of the marriage.

Perceived control over the breakup process. We measured perceived control over the breakup with two variables. First, the extent to which subjects perceived themselves as victims as a result of the breakup of their marriage was used as a measure of perceived lack of control over the breakup process. We assessed this perception with two items: (a) the extent to which subjects remembered seeing themselves as a "victim" at the time of the breakup, (b) their present view of self as a "victim." Each of these items was rated on a 5-point scale, with endpoints of *not at all* (1) and *a great deal* (5), and they were combined to form an index with an internal consistency of .82 and .76 for the total sample and couples subsample, respectively.

Second, perceived control over the breakup process was further assessed by an item that asked, "How much control do you feel you had over the process of separating (i.e., the decision, actual separation, etc.)?" Subjects rated this item on a 5-point scale, with endpoints of *none* (1) and *a great deal* (5).

Parallel questions measured perceptions of one's former spouse's control over the breakup process. Thus, the extent to which one's former spouse was perceived as a victim because of the breakup of the marriage was a two-item index of identically worded items about one's ex-partner. This index had an internal consistency of .80 and .83 for the total sample and couples subsample, respectively. Finally, a second parallel measure of perception of one's ex-partner's control over the breakup process was assessed by an item asking, "How much control do you feel your former spouse had over the process of separating?"

Psychosocial Adjustment

Current psychological well-being was assessed by three standardized scales. The Brief Symptom Inventory (Derogatis & Melisaratos, 1983) is a 49-item self-report measure that assesses psychopathological symptomatology in nine dimensions (i.e., somatization, obsessive-compulsiveness, interpersonal sensitivity, depression, anxiety, hostility, phobic anxiety, paranoid ideation, and psychoticism) and provides a score of overall psychological distress. The Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) is composed of 10 Likert-type items and measures atti-

tudes about the self. The Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) is a five-item scale measuring current degree of satisfaction with one's life. Subjects also completed an item that measured self-assessed adjustment to the separation ("to what extent do you feel you are coping well with the breakup of your marriage?"), rated on a 5-point scale with endpoints of *not at all* (1) and *a great deal* (5). A principal-components analysis with varimax rotation was conducted on the three adjustment scales and the self-assessed adjustment score, using the total study sample ($N = 307$). It yielded one factor having an eigenvalue greater than 1.0 and accounting for 61.2% of the variance. Therefore, a single index of Psychosocial Adjustment was formed using the standardized scores on each of these measures. The internal reliability of this index was high ($\alpha = .79$ for the total sample; $\alpha = .80$ for the couples subsample).

Emotional and Cognitive Resolution

Thirty-six items measured lack of emotional and cognitive resolution of the breakup. Most items were developed for a larger program of research on coping with loss (Wortman & Silver, 1989) but were modified to be divorce specific. Others were taken from Spanier and Thompson (1984). To examine underlying relations among these items, we performed a principal-components analysis with varimax rotation, using the total study sample ($N = 307$). This analysis yielded five factors with eigenvalues greater than one, but only the first three (accounting for 54% of the variance) were conceptually interpretable. Moreover, inspection of the eigenvalue scree plot supported a three-factor solution.⁶ These constructs were labeled Continued Regret Over the Breakup, Continued Emotional Distress Over the Breakup, and Preoccupation With Thoughts About the Breakup and are described in more detail below.

Continued Regret Over the Breakup. This factor included 16 items measuring thoughts and feelings of regret and lack of acceptance or resolution about the breakup (e.g., "regret the effects of your breakup," "feel as though the breakup was a horrible mistake," "feel I will never get over the breakup," "feel 'we should have tried longer'"), assessed on 5-point scales ranging from *not at all* (1) to *a great deal* (5). Internal consistency of the items was high ($\alpha = .92$ for the total sample; $\alpha = .93$ for couples). Therefore, the items were combined to form a single index representing Continued Regret Over the Breakup.

Continued Emotional Distress Over the Breakup. This factor was composed of 10 items that measured the extent to which subjects reported experiencing emotional distress when thinking about the breakup or their former spouse, including anger (in general and toward former spouse), anxiety, resentment, unhappiness, bitterness, tension, nervousness, feeling undeserving, and feeling miserable. All items were scaled on 5-point scales ranging from *not at all* (1) to *a great deal* (5). Internal consistency of the items was high ($\alpha = .90$ for both the total sample and the couples subsample). Therefore, the items were combined to form a single index representing Continued Emotional Distress.

Preoccupation With Thoughts About the Breakup. Ten items measured preoccupation with thoughts about the breakup and one's former spouse (e.g., "How often have memories, thoughts, and mental

were made at the time of the study and that retrospective assessments were heavily influenced by current appraisals. Longitudinal research would be useful to examine the ways in which these variables change over time.

⁶ A principal-axis factor analysis was also performed on these data, yielding a four-factor solution with eigenvalues greater than one and accounting for 54% of the variance. The first three factors paralleled the same general structure and factor loadings obtained through use of principal-components analysis; the fourth factor was conceptually uninterpretable. Therefore, for ease of conceptual clarity, we used the factors obtained through principal-components analysis in the analyses to follow.

pictures of your marriage or your former spouse come into your mind?" "How often have you been unable to get thoughts or memories out of your mind even when you wanted to?" "How often did you become absorbed or 'caught up' in thoughts and memories of your marriage or former spouse?", rated on 5-point scales ranging from *never* (1) to *always* (5). Internal consistency of the items was high ($\alpha = .89$ for the total sample; $\alpha = .90$ for the couples subsample). Therefore, the items were combined to form a single index representing Preoccupation With Thoughts About the Breakup.

Results

Effect of Time

Previous research on separation and divorce has been equivocal concerning the effects of length of marriage or of time since separation on adjustment to the breakup. For example, length of marriage has been found to be related to adjustment in some studies (e.g., Berman & Turk, 1981; Hagestad & Smyer, 1982; Melichar & Chiriboga, 1988) but not in others (e.g., Spanier & Thompson, 1984). Similarly, length of time since the separation has been related to adjustment in some empirical reports (e.g., Goode, 1956; Klevzon & Gottlieb, 1983; Melichar & Chiriboga, 1988) but unrelated in others (e.g., Brown, Felton, White-man, & Manela, 1980; Spanier & Thompson, 1984). Despite these inconclusive findings, the wide ranges in our couples sample in the lengths of marriages and of time living apart prior to filing for divorce dictated that we investigate the relations, if any, between these time variables and all other variables assessed in the present study. In fact, results failed to reveal any significant relations between either length of marriage or time apart and any of the 12 variables measuring perceptions of the breakup process (i.e., self and partner perceptions). Moreover, there were no significant relations between length of marriage or time apart and any of the four adjustment measures (Psychosocial Adjustment, Regret Over the Breakup, Distress Over the Breakup, Preoccupation With Thoughts About the Breakup). Therefore, these time variables were excluded from further analyses.

Comparisons of Perceptions of Self and Former Spouse

To investigate whether our hypothesized ego-enhancing biases were operating, we conducted a multivariate repeated measures analysis of variance (MANOVA), using the six variables assessing perceptions of the relationship breakup as the multivariate construct. This analysis used 2 two-level within-subject factors: rater (i.e., husband vs. wife) and target (i.e., ratings of self vs. ratings of one's partner). (The couple was thus the unit of analysis.) Group means and standard deviations for each variable of interest are presented in Table 1.

As predicted, the MANOVA revealed an overall significant main effect for target, Hotelling's $T^2(6, 31) = 2.09, p < .001$; at the univariate level, a significant target main effect was obtained on five out of six of the variables measured (all $ps < .01$). Specifically, subjects saw themselves as less responsible than their ex-spouse for the breakup, saw their involvement with another as less responsible for the breakup than their ex-partner's involvement with another, saw themselves as less of a villain and more of a victim than they saw their ex-partner,

Table 1
Mean Scores, Standard Deviations and F Values for Perceptions of One's Relationship Breakup Among Former Spouses

Relationship perception	Rater												T value										
	Ex-husband						Ex-wife																
	Self-rating				Rating of spouse				Self-rating				Rating of spouse				Target main effect	Rater main effect	Target \times Rater interaction	H self vs. W self	H other vs. W other	H self vs. W other	H other vs. W self
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD									
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD									
Target was responsible for the breakup ^a	3.01	0.99	3.96	0.90	2.93	0.84	4.13	0.72	65.12***	<1	<1	0.24	3.07**	7.60***	-3.48**								
Target's involvement with another was responsible for the breakup ^b	1.81	1.42	2.60	1.85	1.31	0.84	3.00	1.79	38.47***	<1	2.24	1.75	1.05	4.22***	-3.95***								
Target was a villain ^c	1.83	0.95	3.01	1.26	1.79	0.84	3.43	1.00	71.79***	2.16	1.83	0.03	1.44	6.98***	-4.71***								
Target was a victim ^c	3.06	1.31	2.18	1.22	3.55	1.18	1.91	1.14	56.21***	<1	3.98†	1.36	-.70	-4.31***	4.51***								
Target had control over separation process ^d	2.72	1.56	3.88	1.18	3.93	1.52	3.07	1.62	<1	2.04	9.23**	3.36**	3.18**	.57	.75								
Target wants to reconcile ^e	1.38	0.95	1.88	1.52	1.28	0.60	1.70	1.31	8.30**	<1	<1	-0.49	.56	2.02†	-2.22*								

Note. Scores range from not at all (1) to a great deal (5). H = husband; W = wife.

^a $df = 1, 44$. ^b $df = 1, 41$. ^c $df = 1, 43$. ^d $df = 1, 42$. ^e $df = 1, 39$.

† $p < .06$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

and wanted to reconcile less with their ex-spouse than they thought their ex-partner wanted to reconcile with them. The only univariate comparison that did not reveal this effect was the variable measuring control over the separation process. Inspection of the means revealed that both husbands and wives were more likely to report that the wives had greater control over the separation than did their husbands.

The MANOVA failed to reveal an overall rater main effect, Hotelling's $T^2(6, 31) = .11$, *ns*, nor did any of the six univariate comparisons differ significantly. The lack of a significant rater effect indicates that husbands and wives did not differ in the ways in which they perceived their ex-relationships. That is, husbands and wives did not differ in their positive self-perceptions, nor did they differ in their negative perceptions of each other.

A Target \times Rater interaction examines the extent to which the discrepancy between ex-spouses' ratings of the wife differed from the discrepancy between ex-spouses' ratings of the husband. Although the MANOVA revealed a significant Target \times Rater interaction, Hotelling's $T^2(6, 31) = 1.18$, $p < .001$, only one univariate comparison reached significance. Specifically, there was a smaller discrepancy in ex-spouses' assessments of the extent to which the wife had control over the separation process than in their assessments of the husband's degree of control. In addition, there was a smaller discrepancy between husbands' and wives' ratings of the degree to which the wife, as opposed to the husband, was a victim, although this effect only approached significance.

Table 1 also presents the results of four sets of planned comparisons: husband's self-perceptions versus wife's self-perceptions, husband's perceptions of his wife vs. wife's perceptions of her husband; husband's and wife's perceptions of the husband, and husband's and wife's perceptions of the wife. Inspection of the first column indicates that on five of the six comparisons, ex-partners failed to differ in their tendency to see themselves in a positive light (self vs. self comparisons). The exception is that women reported themselves to have had more control over the separation process than men reported of themselves. When views of each other were compared (second column), on four of the six variables, husbands and wives did not differ in their tendency to see each other negatively. However, husbands saw their wife as having had more control over the separation process than wives saw their husband. In addition, wives saw their husband as more responsible for the breakup than husbands saw their wife, although the absolute difference in means was quite small (.17 difference on a 5-point scale).

The second two sets of planned comparisons revealed that in four of the six comparisons, husbands tended to see themselves in a more favorable light than their ex-wife perceived them. Similarly, in five of the six comparisons, wives tended to see themselves in a more favorable light than they were perceived by their ex-husband. Inspection of the means reveals that both husbands and wives saw their ex-spouse as more responsible for the breakup (either alone or as a result of involvement with another) than their spouse reported being. Moreover, both husbands and wives were more likely to see their ex-partner as a villain and less as a victim than the spouses reported seeing themselves. Finally, both husbands and wives reported that they thought their ex-spouse was more desirous of reconciling with them than the ex-spouses actually reported themselves to

be (although the husband self vs. wife other comparison only approached significance, $p < .06$). The one variable that failed to reveal this pattern was the item assessing control over the separation process.

Correlations Between Former Spouses' Perceptions of Relationship Breakup

Whereas the analyses reported in Table 1 compare the absolute levels of self and partner perception variables within the couple, Table 2 presents the results of within-couple correlations of these variables. Specifically, the first column presents the relations between former husbands' and wives' self-perceptions; the second column presents the relations between former husbands' and wives' perceptions of each other. The third and fourth columns present the ex-husbands' and wives' perceptions of the husband and present the ex-husbands' and wives' perceptions of the wife, respectively.

As can be seen in the first column, ex-partners' self-perceptions are essentially independent, with the exception of an inverse relation between the item that assesses ex-partners' perception of control over the separation process. Here, the more wives perceive having had control over the process, the less control husbands report and vice versa. As can be seen in the second column, ex-partners' views of each other are also essentially independent. Thus, these analyses offer further support for the conclusions suggested by the earlier paired comparisons.

An interesting pattern of results is revealed in the third column: Wives' views of the ex-husbands tended to correlate with the men's self-perceptions. Specifically, there is a positive relation between husbands' and wives' assessments of the degree to which his involvement with another party was responsible for the breakup; there is also a positive relation between husbands' and wives' assessment of his control over the separation process. Perhaps most interestingly, on average 3 1/2 years after they have separated, there is a remarkably high correlation between husbands' report of their desire for reconciliation and wives' perception of their husband's desire. In contrast, as can be seen in the fourth column, husbands' and wives' perceptions of the wife are essentially independent. Moreover, ex-couples' perceptions of the wife differ significantly from their comparable perceptions regarding the husband on the variable assessing desire for reconciliation.

Relations of Self and Partner Perceptions With Adjustment

Table 3 presents the correlations for perceptions of self and former spouse with each of the four measures of adjustment. First, men and women were considered separately. The pattern of correlations was essentially the same; correlations between men and women differed significantly at the .05 level in only 3 out of 48 comparisons, approximately as many as would be expected by chance. Moreover, adjustment levels within ex-couples were essentially independent, as the within-couple inter-correlations of the four measures of adjustment failed to reveal any significant relations. Therefore, Table 3 presents the correlations for the couples sample collapsed across gender.⁷

⁷ Despite the fact that we used principal-components analysis with varimax rotation to create the four adjustment variables, we obtained

Table 2
Correlations Between Former Spouses' Perceptions of Relationship Breakup

Perception	H self-perception with W self-perception	H perception of W with W perception of H	H self-perception with W perception of H	W self-perception with H perception of W
Target was responsible for the breakup	.10	.03	.20	.20
Target's involvement with another was responsible for the breakup	-.19	-.17	.48 ^{a***}	.18 ^a
Target was a villain	-.01	.05	.05	.06
Target was a victim	-.02	-.15	.15	-.03
Target had control over separation process	-.45 ^{**}	-.07	.37 [*]	.29
Target wants to reconcile	.22	-.02	.63 ^{***}	.04 ^b

Note. H = husband; W = wife. All tests were two-tailed. Correlations that share subscripts differ using Pearson and Filon test of difference between correlated correlations; subscript a indicates $Z = 1.63$, $p < .11$; subscript b indicates $Z = 3.27$, $p < .001$. Minimum $n = 41$.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

As can be seen in the table, all three variables assessing self-perceptions of responsibility for the breakup were essentially unrelated to adjustment. In contrast, perceiving oneself as having been in control of the separation process was positively related to Psychosocial Adjustment and negatively related to Continued Regret, Distress Over the Breakup, and Preoccupation With Thoughts About the Breakup. Similarly, perceiving oneself as having lacked control over the breakup process (i.e., being victimized) was associated with lower levels of Psychosocial Adjustment and continued Regret, Distress, and Preoccupation With Thoughts About the Breakup. Finally, the more subjects reported desiring to reconcile with their ex-spouse, the lower their levels of adjustment.

When considering perceptions of one's former partner, a complementary pattern emerged. In general, perceiving one's spouse as having been responsible for the breakup was associated with lower levels of adjustment and increased distress. In addition, the more subjects perceived their ex-partner as having controlled the separation process, the more they reported continued regret and distress. Perceiving one's former partner as having been a victim in the breakup and as still desiring reconciliation were essentially unrelated to adjustment.

Discussion

The design of the present study offered us a unique opportunity to investigate the use of ego-enhancing biases after the

relatively high correlations between our unit-weighted scores of our dependent variables in the couples sample. We therefore decided to compute a single adjustment dependent variable, made up of a composite of the standardized scores of each of the four adjustment dependent variables (Psychosocial Adjustment, Regret Over the Breakup, Distress Over the Breakup, and Preoccupation With Thoughts About the Breakup). The pattern of results obtained using this single dependent variable was identical to those obtained using the four separate measures (see Table 3), including a lack of any gender differences in relations between perceptions of the breakup and adjustment. For conceptual reasons, we preferred to keep our dependent variables distinct in the discussion to follow.

termination of a marital relationship. We were fortunate to have been able to obtain a reasonably representative, heterogeneous sample of middle-aged, divorced couples who had been married, on average, more than 10 years. Because we were able to collect data confidentially and anonymously from 2 individuals about the same experience and had asked each to appraise the role of both self and other in the process, we were able to make several comparisons that had not been possible in prior research. Overall, our results provide strong support for the use of predictable and systematic cognitive biases that facilitate a self-enhanced appraisal of a potentially stressful situation. Specifically, ex-spouses tended to see themselves in a positive light and to see their former spouse in a negative light. We found no differences in the degree to which husbands or wives were susceptible to this bias: Ex-husbands and wives did not differ in their positive self-perceptions, nor did they differ in their negative perceptions of each other. In addition, the absence of any correlation between these appraisals suggests that the self-perceptions of these men and women were essentially independent.

In relation to how they were perceived by their former spouses, ex-partners tended to minimize their own responsibility for the breakup, their view of self as a villain, and their own desire for reconciliation and tended to maximize their view of self as a victim. Conversely, in relation to their former partner's self-perceptions, subjects maximized their ex-partner's responsibility for the breakup, villain status, and desire to reconcile and minimized their partner's victimization. Finally, there was little evidence that the discrepancies between ex-spouses' ratings of the wife differed from the discrepancies between ex-spouses' ratings of the husband.

One variable that failed to show this pattern of results was perceived control over the separation process. Women were consistently rated, by both themselves and their ex-partner, as having had more control than the men. This is compatible with other literature on separation and divorce, which has found women to be more likely to initiate the breakup. Several points regarding this finding are nonetheless noteworthy. First, although both men and women saw the women's degree of control over the separation process similarly, there was still a rela-

Table 3
Relations of Self and Partner Perceptions With Adjustment

Perception	Psychosocial adjustment	Regret over breakup	Distress over breakup	Preoccupation with thoughts of breakup
<i>Of self</i>				
I was responsible for breakup	.13	-.12	.01	-.17
My involvement with another was responsible	.10	-.10	-.18	-.04
I was a villain	.02	.06	-.01	.05
I was a victim	-.27*	.40***	.36***	.45***
I had control over the separation process	.28**	-.50***	-.21*	-.32**
I want to reconcile	-.24*	.55***	.20	.43***
<i>Of former spouse</i>				
He or she was responsible for breakup	-.09	.01	.23*	.10
His or her involvement with another was responsible	-.36***	.34**	.45***	.34**
He or she was a villain	-.24*	.24*	.34**	.30**
He or she was a victim	-.02	.12	.02	.07
He or she had control over the separation process	-.20	.35***	.22*	.19
He or she wants to reconcile	-.01	.08	.03	-.02

Note. Minimum $n = 84$. All tests were two-tailed.
 * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

tively large discrepancy in their assessment of the extent to which husbands had control (indicated by the significant Target \times Rater interaction). Second, although both ex-partners attributed somewhat more control to the woman, men were nonetheless seen as having a fair degree of control, averaging about 3 on a 5-point scale.

The ability of former partners to perceive a situation in a self-enhancing manner is illustrated by a comparison of the responses of 1 couple, divorced after 17 years of marriage. The husband, who left his wife for another woman, indicated that "I met another woman that I liked better than my spouse. . . . My new wife is younger and better looking. . . ." In contrast, his ex-spouse described the other woman as "a real bimbo" for whom "people were prone to using descriptives such as 'the elevator doesn't go quite to the top.'" The husband of another couple blamed the breakup on his wife, indicating that "all she wanted was money to put in the bank. . . . She insisted I continue farming and working out." His ex-wife, on the other hand, wrote, "My husband seemed to be obsessed with making money, having two jobs most of the time." This example illustrates how individuals can perceive the same problem within the marriage but distort their perception so that the other partner is seen as more responsible.

Of course, the design of our study does not allow us to determine with any degree of certainty which of the partners is actually biasing reality. Nonetheless, both appraisals obviously cannot be accurate. Yet the difficulty of assessing the accuracy of perceptions, even in an ongoing relationship, has been addressed by several authors (see, e.g., Bradbury & Fincham, 1990, for an excellent discussion of the problem). Moreover, we cannot determine the primary direction of these biases (e.g., were subjects predominantly minimizing their own responsibility, maximizing their partner's, or both?). Again, in the absence of

a truly objective standard against which to compare responses, such a determination is virtually impossible to make. We suspect that people engage in a complex and self-enhancing process in which one's own role comes to be viewed more positively and, when measured against this biased view, one's ex-partner's role is evaluated negatively.

Note that on several of our variables, women's and men's reports of the husband's self-perceptions were highly correlated. In contrast, women's and men's reports of the wife's self-perceptions were essentially independent. This was most strongly evident in the variable assessing desire for reconciliation, in which women seem to be much better judges of their former husband's current appraisal than men are in reporting the perception of their ex-wife (although women are still relatively inaccurate regarding the absolute level of their husband's rating). Although in intact couples, women are apparently more sensitive than men to issues of intimacy and to relationship difficulties (see, e.g., Holtzworth-Munroe & Jacobson, 1985; Rubin, Peplau, & Hill, 1981), the fact that we obtained this pattern even after couples had lived apart on average 3½ years is noteworthy.

Note also that despite subjects' tendency to see the marital breakup in a self-serving manner, a somewhat complex pattern of relations existed between these appraisals and adjustment. In relation to the views held of and by their former spouse, people tend to minimize their own responsibility for a marital breakup and to maximize their view of self as a victim. But self-perceptions of one's personal responsibility for the breakup were essentially unrelated to our measures of adjustment or cognitive and emotional resolution. Nonetheless, there are likely to be limits to the tendency to minimize one's responsibility for problems in a marriage, and relinquishing responsibility entirely may not be adaptive. Thus, the extent to which one saw

an ex-partner as responsible for the breakup appeared to be associated with increased distress. Moreover, refusing any responsibility for difficulties in a relationship may diminish one's feelings of control over the success of future relationships (cf. Newman & Langer, 1981).

Perceiving oneself as having had control over the separation process was clearly associated with successful adjustment to the breakup. Note that this finding is not simply a result of the fact that those who had veridical control fared better, because our results clearly indicate that both spouses' perceptions of the breakup were biased in an ego-enhancing fashion. However, there are also likely to be limits to the tendency to maximize perceptions of control over the decision to break up. Seeing oneself as singlehandedly controlling the decision and process of separation has the potential to place one in the uncomfortable role of victimizer. Although there is little research that has directly addressed the potential pitfalls of having too much control, one likely problem is guilt feelings. For example, when responding to the query regarding what has most hindered his coping with the breakup, an older man who left his wife of 28 years wrote, "I have guilt, guilt—difficult to cope with." In addition, the few people who, judging by their own accounts as well as those of their former spouse, appeared to have been singlehandedly in control of the breakup often reported being distressed by "almost unbearable guilt feelings" or "friends turning away." If one feels that he or she has been overly in control of the outcome, feelings of remorse or ambivalence—as well as attachment feelings, which are likely to persist after the breakup (Berman, 1988; Berman & Turk, 1981; Weiss, 1975)—are all likely to create dissonance. Other problems, such as perceived or real lack of social support for having victimized one's ex-spouse, are also likely to hinder coping. This issue is clearly reflected in the response of one man who, after leaving his wife of 30 years, writes, "I'm the S.O.B. in everyone's eyes at this point. She is the injured party." It is thus likely that at least for some individuals, some of the distortion taking place may be in the service of coping with these sorts of issues. The fact that subjects appeared to minimize their villain status and exaggerate their victim status suggests that these may be ways of reducing guilt and justifying one's position. Future research is needed to investigate the potential hazards of being in control of such an event.

Our findings do suggest, however, that the reality of some breakups may make it difficult to perceive oneself as having been in control of the outcome. In fact, the more subjects reported having been victimized by their ex-partners, in absolute terms, the greater the distress and the lower the level of adjustment they reported. Having a sense of being a victim and having no explanation for the event may contribute to a focus on the past that may interfere with the ability to move forward with one's life (Silver, Boon, & Stones, 1983). In fact, in the present study, post hoc analyses comparing the responses of 14 persons who were "objective" victims (both they and their former spouse rated them to be victims "quite a bit" or "a great deal") with the responses of the other subjects revealed the victims to be significantly more preoccupied with thoughts of the breakup than were others, $t(68) = 2.35, p < .03$.

In any case, results of the present research show that for the most part, people are able to perceive their marriage breakup

in a way that leaves them feeling neither completely like a victim or a villain nor solely to blame or completely blameless. Whereas research on intact couples suggests that the attributions made in a nondistressed marriage may actually serve to maintain the healthy marital relationship (e.g., Fincham, Beach, & Baucom, 1987; Holtzworth-Munroe & Jacobson, 1985; see Bradbury & Fincham, 1990, for a review), our results suggest that appraisals of members of dissolved couples may serve to maintain the changed state. By biasing one's perception in this way, resolution regarding the marital termination may be bolstered. Although we failed to find any evidence that length of marriage or time apart from the partner influenced appraisals made or adjustment to the breakup, it must be recognized that the couples in our study were contacted reasonably soon after filing for divorce. Although we did have a large range for length of time since separation, it is possible that we may not have studied subjects long enough following the divorce to test the impact of time adequately (cf. Silver & Wortman, 1980). We suspect that eventually, most ex-partners may be able retrospectively to reappraise the situation to feel at least somewhat in control, even if prospectively they did not seek to end the marriage.

We must acknowledge several points about the present study that may limit the conclusions that can be drawn from the findings. First, the research presented herein provided only correlational evidence of a link between cognition and adjustment, obtained in an anonymous sample of volunteers who were willing to complete a rather lengthy questionnaire to "tell their story." We unfortunately have little information regarding how representative they are of those people who chose not to participate in our research, except that they did not differ significantly on variables we were able to obtain from court files. In addition, although we believe that our having used confidential questionnaires that were returned anonymously by mail minimized subjects' concerns for self-presentation, we cannot rule out for certain the extent to which self-presentational factors played a role in our results. Of course, it is not clear that eliminating such concern entirely would be desirable, because as noted earlier, research has found self-presentational issues to be important motivators in relationship account making (Weber et al., 1987).

Whereas we are suggesting that adjustment may be influenced by one's perception of events, other situational or contextual features of a divorce experience might also influence adjustment (see Spanier & Thompson, 1984).⁸ In addition, it is

⁸ For example, there are numerous factors that might influence subsequent adjustment, as well as that might influence the relationship-perception variables we assessed (e.g., financial status, presence or number of children, outcome of legal proceedings). In fact, the influence of reinvolvement in a new relationship is one such factor that we were able to address with our data. Specifically, we repeated the 2×2 multivariate analysis of variance presented in Table 1 with target as the within-subject factor and whether or not the subject was currently involved in a romantic relationship as the two-level between-subjects factor. This analysis failed to reveal a significant overall involvement main effect on our relationship perception variables, Hotelling's $T^2(6, 73) = .10, ns$, or a significant overall Involvement \times Target interaction, Hotelling's $T^2(6, 73) = .16, ns$. Our failure to find any effect for three variables that conventional wisdom might suggest would influ-

possible that the relation between appraisals and adjustment could be in the opposite direction (cf. Stephen, 1987). Most likely, it involves a process wherein one feeds and maintains the other. Longitudinal research, however, might attempt to test the direction of this effect. Such research would also help to address additional questions that have arisen from the present analysis. For example, at what point in a troubled relationship does one shift from a perspective that maintains the relationship to one that facilitates ending the relationship and the subsequent coping with being apart? In contrast to the results of the present study, a recent study of women who remain in abusive relationships suggested that these women focused on the positive rather than negative features of their relationship (Bennett, Silver, & Ellard, in press). Such an appraisal may, in fact, facilitate their staying in a seemingly unhealthy situation. Once people are out of a distressed partnership, however, the present research demonstrated one way that they may process the termination to facilitate their coping more effectively with the changed status. Nonetheless, future research is clearly needed to determine other factors (e.g., self-presentational concerns, social support, prior relationship success or failure, etc.) that may facilitate or hinder the ability to view a stressful situation such as one's divorce in an adaptive fashion.

ence people's perceptions of their breakups—length of marriage (which in our sample ranged from 3 months to 36 years), length of time since separation (which in our sample ranged from 5 months to 13 years), and current relationship status (in which almost 50% of our sample were currently living with a new spouse or partner)—suggests that the tendency to distort one's perceptions of a breakup in an ego-enhancing manner may occur independently of a variety of situational factors.

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