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At the Crossroads of Divorce: A Formative Evaluation of a Self-Directed Intervention for Utah's Divorce Orientation Education Class for Divorcing Parents

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At The Crossroads of Divorce: A Formative Evaluation of a Self-Directed
Intervention for Participants of Utah's Divorce Orientation
Education Class for Divorcing Parents

Carma Martino Needham

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Marriage, Family, and Human Development

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ABSTRACT

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Carma Martino Needham

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Master of Marriage, Family, and Human Development

This formative evaluation focuses on feedback regarding a self-guided educational intervention for those at the crossroads of divorce. Entitled *Should I Keep Trying to Work It Out? A Guidebook for Individuals and Couples at the Crossroads of Divorce (And Before)*, this Guidebook aims to help individuals minimize possible ambiguity in the decision-making process surrounding divorce. Fifty-three participants were recruited through divorce orientation education classes to provide formative feedback via brief phone surveys. Eighteen of these provided in-depth interviews for additional feedback. Though the participants in this study were largely past the crossroads of divorce, most agreed or strongly agreed that the Guidebook was helpful (61%), trustworthy (88%), helped them change some of their attitudes about divorce (67%), and helped them be more prepared for the divorce (81%). Additionally, 64% reported feeling more confident about their decision to divorce, including three noteworthy cases that cited domestic violence as their reason for divorce. Overall, this Guidebook appears to be useful to those who are contemplating divorce. Options for improving the Guidebook and introducing it earlier in the decision-making process are discussed.

Keywords: divorce, divorce education, formative evaluation, reconciliation, self-guided intervention.

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More than 49 million Americans alive in 2004 reported having been divorced, and there were 1,182,000 new divorces in 2004 alone (Munson & Sutton, 2005). In the same year, the parents of more than 1.1 million children divorced (Kreider, 2008). Furthermore, 40% of all children in the United States born to married parents will experience their parents' divorce by age 16 (Leite & Clark, 2007). Additional family instability may be accounted for when considering the rates of cohabitation break-up and children who are born to or reside in these families (Riley & Bumpass, 2003).

Utah feels the strain from divorce as well. In 2005, there were more than 10,000 divorces in Utah with 52% of those divorces involving children under age 18 (Office of Vital Records and Statistics, 2005). While about 18% of Utahns have been divorced at one time or another, more than 90% think that divorce is a serious problem (Schramm, Marshall, Harris, & George, 2003, p. 11). Even for those who have not experienced divorce, 29% report that their marriage was in serious trouble at some point (Schramm et. al, 2003).

Many who divorce may do so without full awareness or consideration of the economic and social costs to themselves, their children, and society at large. This study presents a formative evaluation of an educational resource designed to promote such thoughtful consideration. The findings of this study will be important to those who work in the thick of divorce education, either from a preventative point of view or from a transitional standpoint.

The Economic Cost of Divorce

Each year, divorces (and failures to form marriages) in this nation cost an estimated \$112 billion tax dollars (Scafidi, 2008). For comparison, that is almost twice the amount in the federal budget for the entire Department of Education in 2008—only \$57.4 billion (United States, 2008).

Scafidi's estimate includes draws on government resources such as TANF, food stamps, WIC, Medicare, and other government assistance programs used to help divorced families who often fall into poverty. The average divorce in Utah, according to one study, costs the state \$18,000. Therefore, with 10,000 divorces each year, divorce costs for Utah are about \$180 million annually (Schramm, 2006). A more sophisticated national study of divorce and unwed childbearing put the costs for Utah at \$276 million (Scafidi, 2008, Table A.5) annually—up to 10.7% of all Utah tax dollars go to such family dissolution-related costs (Scafidi, 2008). In addition, for those couples experiencing the divorce, they will lose an additional \$18,000, on average, in lost wages, relocation costs, and legal fees, among other personal costs (Schramm).

Because the cost of keeping two households is greater than the cost for maintaining one, the immediate financial burden on the family increases. An average income increase of 30% is needed in order for both of the divorcing individuals to maintain their pre-divorce standard of living (Sayer, 2006), though these economic challenges affect men somewhat less than women. While men may experience a 10-40% decrease in family income as a result of the divorce, if they earned 80% or more of the income prior to the divorce, their finances are not affected as severely, and sometimes not at all. Women typically have a much harder time. Due to their divorce, 20% of women fall into poverty (Grall, 2003), about one third of home-owning women with minor children lose their homes (Hanson, McLanahan, & Thomson, 1998), and almost 75% of mothers who are supposed to receive child support do not receive the full amount (Grall, 2003). The former Oklahoma Cabinet Secretary of Health and Human Services, Jerry Regier, said: "There's no faster way for a married woman with children to become poor than to suddenly become a single mom" (Regier, 2001).

The Social Cost of Divorce

The costs for divorce are not only monetary. Children whose parents divorce are more prone to experiencing lower rates of academic performance (Kelly & Emery, 2003) and have poorer psychological and overall well-being (Acock & Demo, 1994; Amato, 2003). The quality of the parent-child relationship suffers, regardless of whether the relationship of interest is with the resident or non-resident parent (Booth & Amato, 2001). Also, the self-esteem of the child of divorce is often lower than that of those who do not go through such an experience (Kitson, 1992), which can lead to increased antisocial behavior (Zill, Morrison, & Coiro, 1993). In addition, Hetherington and Kelly (2002) report that children whose parents divorce are more than twice as likely to have behavioral problems than children who do not. Brandon (2006) found that the children who experience divorce experience greater difficulty in forming close relationships, are more likely to marry as teens, and more likely to cohabit when compared to children from continuously intact families. When they do marry, they are more likely to divorce, and thus perpetuate these challenges through future generations (Wolfinger, 2005).

It is not only the children who suffer; adults also may not find the improvement that they were hoping for. One study (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002) followed divorcing individuals over a 20-year span. They found that 10% never reformed romantic attachments though they adjusted well; 20% actually felt that their life had improved, including improved romantic relationships; 40% formed new romantic relationships but experienced the same types of problems as in their previous marriage; and the last 30% actually experienced more difficulty.

For many, the hope that leaving a spouse will also mean leaving a situation of conflict is not realized. Emery and Sbarra (2002) found that for most couples, conflict actually increases at the time of the divorce. Waite and her colleagues (Waite, Browning, Doherty, Gallagher, Luo, &

Stanley, 2002) list the following as common areas over which ex-spouses experience conflict: ex-spouse's and own emotional response to divorce, reactions of children, relocation, ex-in-laws and other family, financial struggles, child custody and visitation, child support, and new romantic involvement. Thus, conflict continues, but it is often with a new set of problems.

Reconciliation Reconsidered

Waite and her colleagues (Waite et al., 2002) suggest that there are not as many bad marriages as there are bad patches in marriage. Even when couples are unhappy, it does not necessarily lead to divorce (Heaton & Albricht, 1991; Kalb, 1983). One national study shows that the majority of couples who reported being unhappy or very unhappy in their marriages but chose to stay together, were happy or very happy with their relationships five years later (Waite et al.). Seventy-five percent of those who were once very unhappy, and 66% of those who reported being unhappy, said that five years later they were happily married to the same spouse that they had previously been unhappy with.

There is evidence to suggest that successful reconciliation is possible even when the couple perceives it to be hopeless, and that when reconciliations are successful, the trust in these once-damaged relationships is both stronger and less innocent (Holeman, 2003). For those who divorce, about a year later, at least one partner in 75% of divorced couples is having second thoughts about their divorce (Heatherington & Kelly, 2002), saying they should have “worked harder at the marriage” and that “the alternatives no longer looked very good” (p. 57). For some, the second thoughts begin before the divorce is even finalized; more than 20% of divorce petitions are retracted every year (Kitson, Holmes, & Sussman, 1983). One study notes that even during divorce education programs, about 25% of individuals and 10% of divorcing couples express interest in services geared toward reconciliation (Doherty, 2009).

Surveys in various states suggest that even many years later that one-third to nearly one-half of divorcees believe their divorce may have been a mistake or that they should have worked harder to try to save their marriage (see Gallagher, 2004, p. 22). This regret may stem from the fact that half to two-thirds of divorces come from low-conflict marriages (Amato & Booth, 1997; Amato & Hohmann-Marriott, 2007). That these marriages may be “repairable” is suggested by research documenting the most common reported reasons for divorce: lack of commitment (73%), too much arguing (56%), infidelity (55%), marrying too young (46%), unrealistic expectations (45%), lack of equality in the relationship (44%), and lack of premarital preparation (41%) (Amato & Previti, 2003). While many of these reasons are certainly serious, they are reasons potentially amenable to intervention.

When a couple decides to separate, many (about 50%) go on to divorce, while 32% decide to get back together and stay together for at least one year (Wineberg, 1994). The other 18% are couples who are legally separated or whose attempts at reconciliations are not successful but have not yet divorced. Even of these couples, many go on to attempt reconciliation again. Wineberg (1994) further explains that 51% of couples whose marriages end in divorce try to reconcile two or more times. Things that influence the likelihood of a reconciliation effort being successful are: older age, higher education, age similarity between spouses, cohabitation before marriage, having the same religion, and if one spouse converted to the other’s religion at the time of marriage (Wineberg).

About half of all marriages that ended in divorce are classified as high-distress, where the couple has a set of divorce factors combined with a conflicted and unhappy relationship (Amato & Hohmann-Marriott, 2007). These marriages report high rates of violence, conflict, and perceived instability and low marital interaction and happiness. The other half of divorces come

from relationships that are defined as low-distress. In these marriages, the same divorce risk factors are present, but the marriage is moderately happy, low in conflict, and average on most indicators of marital quality. Both husbands and wives who divorce from low-distress marriages report becoming less happy over time, while divorcees from high-distress homes report becoming happier. For these low-distress couples, relationship quality may not be the driving force in their divorce, but rather, commitment level to marriage. According to Amato and Hohmann-Marriott, “Half of...divorces [involve] relationships that most outside observers would probably think of as being reasonably untroubled” (p. 636) Children from high-distress homes benefit from divorce probably because they are allowed relief from the hostile and highly stressful home environment. However, children who come from the divorces of low-distress couples are more likely to show long-term problems following the divorce (Amato, Loomis, & Booth, 1995; Booth & Amato, 2001; Hanson, 1999; Jekielek, 1998). Children from these low-distress marriage divorces “derive few benefits from divorce because they were living in what appeared to be relatively calm and happy households” (Amato & Hohmann-Marriott, p. 636).

Unhappy marriages can become happy again, lingering unhappiness does not inevitably lead to divorce, the decision to divorce is not always final, and some main causes cited for divorce can be ameliorated. If some of the urgency that comes with the high emotionality of divorce can be set aside, there is hope that individuals at the crossroads of divorce may be able to look to a brighter future together rather than apart. By participating in an educational intervention during the period of decision making, those considering divorce can not only become apprised of the likely ramifications of divorce, but also learn ways to repair their relationship and gain hope to do so. Alternatively, some may gain greater certainty for the necessity of divorce in their particular circumstances.

Divorcing Parents Education Policy Efforts

Utah lawmakers passed a law in 2007 that opens a mandatory window of consideration, but it was neither the first nor the most popular policy effort concerning divorce education. Owing to the difficulties that ensue from divorce, policy makers have tried a number of different approaches to helping families in these situations. The most widespread policy efforts deal with helping the family transition into a post-divorced life. Commonly called divorcing parents education, these programs operate on the assumption that parents' decision to divorce is final and thus focus education on topics such as how to co-parent effectively, what to expect from their children in terms of child development, or how to navigate the legal process of divorce.

The first divorcing parents education program began in Kansas in 1978. Since that time, the popularity of these programs is seen in their vast proliferation. During the 1990's the number of programs tripled (Geasler & Blaisure, 1999) and, as of 2007, programs were found in 46 states, with 27 states mandating attendance (Pollet & Lombrelia, 2008). This also represents a sizeable investment in development and implementation costs on the part of researchers and program developers. The amount of time and money pouring into this area resulted in a 1996 issue of *Time Magazine* calling divorcing parents education "the latest trend for family courts" (Schepard & Schlissel, 1995, p. 9).

An excellent review conducted by Geasler and Blaisure (1998) helps give a snap shot of these programs in regard to content covered, teaching strategies used, and theoretical bases from which these programs spring. Content covered is categorized by the reviewers into three main areas: parent-focused, child-focused, and court-focused. The most common topics covered (by 40% or more of the programs analyzed) in the parent-focused category were the grief/loss cycle, the divorce process, emotional aspects, and co-parenting. In the child-focused area,

developmental stages of children, typical reactions of children (including grief and long-term reactions), impact of divorce on children, and responding to children's distress were covered most often. Court-focused items were not covered nearly so extensively by these programs. When they were addressed, custody issues were most commonly talked about. Reconciliation or possible reconsideration were not cited here as topics covered by these programs.

Studies show that levels of satisfaction with these divorce education programs are high among parents and family court judges. For example, Petersen and Steinman (1994) surveyed 600 parents who had been divorced for an average of four months who reported feeling very pleased with the programs they had attended. Of these 600 parents, 73% said that as a result of the program they understood better what divorce was like for their children, and 70% said it would make a difference in how they interacted with their children about the divorce. In another multi-site study (Thoennes & Pearson, 1999) involving five different programs, 88% of parents agreed that divorce education should "definitely" or "probably" be mandatory. Additionally, regarding these programs, 98% of family court judges agree or strongly agree they benefit the families who attend them, 80% believe that they aid the parents in reaching agreements on custody matters more quickly, and a full 95% believe they help lessen the negative effects of divorce on children (Fischer, 1997). These findings echo results found both previously and later (Arbuthnot, Segal, Gordon, & Schneider, 1994; Pedro-Carroll, 2005).

There is some evidence that these divorce education programs actually produce the benefits they were designed to produce. In a meta-analysis (Fackrell, Hawkins, & Kay, in press), researchers found that participants in divorcing parents education programs generally experience moderate benefits in the five categories investigated when compared with those who did not participate. In terms of co-parental conflict, participants of divorce education were reported to be

40% better off ($d = .36$); in parent-child relationships and parental discipline they were 60% better off ($d = .49$). In the category of child well-being, the children of parents who participated in divorce education were reported to be 70% better off ($d = .53$) than those who had not attended, though it is pointed out that rather than being directly measured it is the parents who are reporting on their children's well being, which may introduce some overly optimistic bias to the reporting. The fourth category of parental well-being showed the largest affect size ($d = .61$) which equates to parents being about 80% better off compared to those who had not participated in such programs. Relatively few of the studies used in the meta-analysis included data on the last category of interest: relitigation. With this subject, the effect size ($d = .19$) was non-significant. This valuable study suggests that divorcing parents' education programs are cost-effective in bringing at least moderate benefits to families in the short term. It was also pointed out that only four studies followed the participants for more than a year; therefore, more research may be needed to determine if the benefits received from these programs endures over time.

Utah Divorcing Parents' Education Policy Efforts

Utah mandates that each divorcing couple with children under the age of 18 participate in two pre-divorce classes: a standard two-hour co-parenting class designed to reduce potential conflict and poor parenting after the divorce, and a one-hour divorce orientation education class, wherein parents are asked, in short, to revisit the divorce decision and make sure they are making the right choice. This 2007 law requiring divorce orientation education obliges all divorcing parents with dependent children to participate in a one-hour class aiming to help parents carefully consider their options, including repairing their marriage, understand the repercussions of divorce on themselves and their children, and to learn about mediation and other legal options for divorce. Despite the evidence that many divorces may be preventable, little educational

intervention work has explored the potential for helping individuals considering divorce to seriously consider trying to repair their relationship. To date, educational intervention at the crossroads of divorce has focused on helping parents to reduce conflict and effectively co-parent their children after divorce (Douglas, 2006; Haine, Sandler, Wolchik, Tein, & Dawson-McClure, 2003). Utah's mandated Divorce Orientation Education class is the first of its kind and provides a unique opportunity to test whether educational (as opposed to clinical) intervention at the crossroads of divorce may be able to prevent some unnecessary divorces.

This legislation opens the door for reconsideration, but it is not a very big opening. The law requires only one hour to be spent on this class. The short time requirement circumvented potential political and monetary obstacles, allowing this law to navigate the legislative process successfully. However, one noted researcher on divorce education programs (Brandon, 2006) argued that one four-hour class is not enough to sustain behavior change long-term. Of the few studies that do follow their participants for more than a year, two programs that have produced measureable behavior changes are 13 and 14 one-hour sessions long (Haine et al., 2003). The research concerning long-term outcomes is sparse in this area. Considering that Utah's divorce orientation education class is only one session for one hour, the time may be too brief to intervene effectively. The complexity and seriousness of this matter, if it is to be adequately assessed, demand that more time and energy be given outside this one-hour time frame. Hence, scholars are considering supplementing the class with a self-guided intervention.

Theoretical Background for a Self-Guided Intervention at the Crossroads of Divorce

Decision Making Theory, posited by Janis and Mann (1977), provides a theoretical framework for offering an educational intervention at the crossroads of divorce. While they do not speak directly about divorce, they do speak more generally of weighty and long-lasting

decisions and flesh out the necessity for taking decisions of such magnitude slowly and deliberately. They divide decision making into two modes: (1) making optimizing decisions, in which a person has all of the relevant information and can process it; and (2) satisficing decisions, ones that are good enough to get a person through the current crisis, placating upset emotions or conscience or discomfort. Satisficing decisions most likely occur when a person does not have all of the pertinent information, or importantly, cannot process it effectively. Hence, individuals tend to consider only select factors and thus base their decision on incomplete information, or they give certain parts undue importance while undervaluing or ignoring others.

When individuals have all of the relevant information and can process it, they are more likely to make decisions ideal to their particular needs. However, Janis and Mann (1977) and others (Lowery, 1986) note the limitations of the human capacity to process information. They say that the average person can address between five and nine categories of information in immediate memory. Due to the overwhelming amount of information to be processed concerning a decision so complex as divorce—costs and benefits in emotional, physical, relational, financial and legal areas both in their current situation and comparing those to their alternatives—the human mind may not be able to organize and process all of this information without systematic help. When dealing with such a decision, the demand for expenditure of intellectual resources is so great that it is understandable how an emotionally stretched individual facing a divorce may make a “good enough” decision rather than an optimal one.

As cited above, the decision to divorce is generally, though not always, made over a long period of time. Therefore, in fact there are many small decisions before the final divorce decision is made. Decision Making Theory (Janis & Mann, 1977) describes decisions of this sort as incremental, where a person progressively makes small decisions toward a final, bigger end.

During this process, a person takes small steps toward a major action. In reality, these incremental, satisficing decisions lead them to be further and further committed to a particular outcome, even if they are unaware of it.

For those who have made satisficing and/or incremental decisions, once the final destination is reached, decisional conflict or regret regarding their decision is there to meet them. As the true weight of some of the contributing factors are realized, and as additional information comes to light, the feelings of regret may become poignant. These feelings can linger on for months or years and can manifest themselves in psychological maladjustment, resentment, anger, and other destructive ways (Janis & Mann, 1977).

In the case of divorce orientation education, the self-guided intervention explored in this study seeks first to bring the relevant issues into awareness through research-based information and personal learning activities. Recognizing the enormity of variables that divorcing individuals face, the intervention also helps participants to organize their thoughts so that they can effectively keep track of and process them. In this way, potential divorcees can feel more confident with their final decision—to stay or to go—knowing that they were in possession of the relevant information and gave that information due diligence and proper consideration. In light of such informed decisions, they are more likely to minimize or avoid the post-decisional conflict and regret that comes with the despairing feeling of “if only I’d known” and be more confident that they have made the ideal decision for their personal situation.

Self-Guided Education/Interventions

The proposed intervention to assist with the divorce decision is a self-guided one. As stated above, with a matter so complex, not only could a person have difficulty processing all of the pertinent information, but one hour—the time allotted for Utah’s divorce orientation

education class—is likely insufficient. When the time of the class expires, participants must guide themselves through any further consideration they wish to undertake. As with many other areas of marriage and family education, there is much research to suggest that a self-directed approach can be beneficial.

Research is beginning to show that these self-directed approaches are effective as a means of disseminating family life education. Not only do these flexible methods disseminate the information to many people, but they also have been found to have significant impact in helping participants to change attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Steimle & Duncan, 2004; Halford, Moore, Wilson, Farrugia, & Dyer, 2004). In one meta-analytic review of psychological treatments, self-administered interventions were significantly more effective than no intervention, and no significant differences were found between those self-administering and those in a therapist setting (Scogin, Bynum, Stephens, & Calhoun, 1990), though the researchers were careful to clarify that they were not endorsing that self-directed efforts are the same as therapist-directed.

Web-based marriage relationship educational interventions also show promise. In one study (Duncan, Steed, & Needham, 2009), the same material was delivered to two groups: a traditional workshop group and a self-directed web-based group. When compared to a control group, the self-directed group showed significant improvement in relationship satisfaction and empathic communication. The traditional group showed improvement in the same areas. Furthermore, there was no significant difference in the magnitude of change between the traditional and self-directed groups.

Similarly, other self-directed means, such as newsletters, have also been effective in producing behavioral changes (Bogenschneider & Stone, 1997; Riley, Meinhardt, Nelson,

Salisbury & Winnett, 1991), at least according to self-reported measures. Additional benefits of self-directed interventions include being self-paced, interest-focused, tailored to individual needs, low cost, private, flexible, and convenient. A thorough review of the literature reveals no known self-guided interventions at the crossroads of divorce, though the potential benefits of such an educational intervention suggest that it is likely worth the time and cost.

Should I Keep Trying to Work It Out?

Scholars with the Utah Healthy Marriages Initiative have produced a guidebook they hope will better serve the purposes of Utah's mandated divorce orientation education class. This one-hour class is currently taught in a didactic fashion, using video and lecture presentation, with limited class discussion. It is taught at the beginning of the other class that divorcing parents are mandated to attend about co-parenting and assisting their children with the transition of divorce.

Should I Keep Trying to Work It Out? A Guidebook for Individuals and Couples at the Crossroads of Divorce (And Before) (Hawkins & Fackrell, 2009) aims to meet the requirements of the divorce orientation education legislation by providing a wealth of targeted information to help parents not only hear what they are legislatively mandated to hear, but also to seriously consider the personal application of this information to their decision. This guidebook would not replace the class that is currently taught but would supplement the current curriculum with additional thought-provoking material and learning activities to invite personal application and increased intellectual involvement. With strong research-based material covering topics such as unhappy marriages becoming happy again, common reasons for divorce, social and financial consequences of divorce for parents and children, and legal options, the authors see this guidebook partly as a compendium for those facing the decision of divorce. Also included in this guidebook are thought provoking activities such as *Hanging On or Moving On?* (pp. 23-25), and

Thinking about Conflict After Divorce (pp. 73-74) to assist with the internalization and personalization of the material. Personal narratives of others who have been at the crossroads of divorce are included to add a human and a more personal touch. (See Appendix A for full table of contents.)

The authors hope their Guidebook fully meets the requirements of the divorce orientation education legislation. The Guidebook is designed to help couples prevent unnecessary divorce. By helping to put a more objective lens on a highly emotional situation, it is hoped that when using this guidebook some couples may consider or reconsider courses of action to repair their marriages that they either had not previously been aware of, or had not previously contemplated. Alternatively, recognizing the necessity for some marriages to end for the health and safety of spouses and children, this guidebook is not intended to dissuade all divorces. Sections of the guidebook deal with the serious problems of abuse, infidelity, or addiction. The authors hope that by providing accurate information about what to expect during and after the divorce process a person may be more fully prepared, thus easing the transition into a post-divorced life. It can help these parents to be vigilant against the challenges that may face their children. The information about strengthening relationships may be applied forward to help prevent similar challenges from affecting a future romantic relationship.

No matter what individuals decide, by inviting them to take ample time outside of the one-hour required class to deeply consider this life-long decision, the authors ultimately hope that it will help to improve the decision-making process surrounding divorce. In the end, the authors hope that this guidebook will help the readers to garner greater confidence about the decision to divorce, having duly considered their options, or that they will experience a renewed commitment to their marriage and feel empowered to work for improvement.

Formative Evaluation

As with all programs, the need for evaluation is crucial to assess its ability to meet the stated aims of the program. New programs, especially, need careful formative assessment to determine if they are worth the ongoing financial investment and dedication of resources that sustaining a program requires. A formative evaluation may be defined as a method of evaluation that,

typically involves gathering information during the early stages of [a] project or program, with a focus on finding out whether [the] efforts are unfolding as planned, uncovering any obstacles, barriers or unexpected opportunities that may have emerged, and identifying mid-course adjustments and corrections which can help insure the success of [a] work... This feedback is primarily designed to fine tune the implementation of the program (Unrau, Gabor, & Grinell, 2007, p. 33).

The purpose of this study is to obtain feedback from the participants in the divorce orientation education class to assess if this Guidebook helps them to think more deeply about their situation, helps them come to a clearer and more confident decision, and provides helpful information about resources to repair their marriages and about the legal processes for those who choose to proceed with divorce. Possible barriers to these aims may also be uncovered, which the program directors can then take into advisement for future improvements to the Guidebook.

Methodology

The Crossroads Guidebook was evaluated using Jacobs's (1988) five-tiered model for evaluation. This is the proper choice for a program in development, such as the Crossroads Guidebook, because the level of evaluation can increase with the maturation of the program. Tier

one of the model is the most general and is used to determine the needs of the participants. Tier two involves gathering information about who is accessing the information and to what extent the target audience is being served. For the purposes of this study, both the parameters of the program and who will be accessing it have been defined by state law—the needs are to fulfill the requirements of the legislation and those accessing the information are Utah citizens who are seeking a divorce and have dependent children. An important facet of tier two remains and is addressed in this study: to what extent are the intended users accessing the self-guided intervention?

Tier three is the main focus of this study. Dealing largely with consumer satisfaction, this tier addresses how the program can better meet the needs and goals of the participants. The beginnings of tier four which focuses on whether the program is achieving its stated objectives are also briefly explored. Finally, tier five is objectively assessing intervention outcomes using experimental and longitudinal designs. Tiers four and five deal more with summative evaluations than formative. Tier five is beyond the scope of the current stage of program development, though an outcome study may be called for as the program matures. Findings from this formative evaluation will be used to refine the intervention.

Participant Recruitment

Participants were recruited from the court-mandated Divorce Education Orientation class in Salt Lake, Utah, and Weber counties. Though the class is open to the public, all of the participants were those actively in the process of getting a divorce and have dependent children. We first obtained permission from the Office of Court Administration that oversees the class and from course instructors who currently hold contracts for teaching the class. Researchers took a few minutes at the beginning of class to explain what the Guidebook is, what the potential

benefits to the participants would be, and what participation in the formative evaluation study would entail. A cover letter was also included with this introductory information (See Appendix B). Though Brigham Young University's Institutional Review Board found that no formal consent was required for formative evaluation studies, an information letter was provided to the participants. This informed them of the study's purpose, expectations for their participation, and also helped them feel at ease with how their feedback will be used.

Procedures

First, three research assistants—all master's of social work students—met with the author of this study and were trained for the research. Research assistants were provided a uniform (but not precisely scripted) approach to recruiting potential participants. As research assistants visited the various classes, we communicated to study participants our sensitivity that they are facing an enormous decision and painful circumstances. While they are required to sit in this class, for many of them one hour will not be enough to consider seriously all of the pertinent information. We presented the Guidebook as a way for them to help explore more deeply their own questions about the crossroads of divorce. We clarified that we were not looking for couples, but encouraged them to participate as individuals. We briefly introduced the topics, showed them some sample exercises, and allowed them to keep the book in exchange for their contact information. Ultimately, 161 individuals—69 male, 92 female—accepted the Guidebook and the commitment for a follow-up phone call. We informed them that in two weeks we would call each of those who took the book to ask a few straightforward questions, lasting about five minutes: “How much did you read?” “What did you like best?” “What did you like least?” and “Overall, how helpful was it?” (See Appendix C for a sample of the phone survey instrument.)

In this broadest level of feedback, we aimed to enroll at least 100 of the original participants. Research assistants were trained in the procedures of the phone interview. After several weeks of repeated attempts to contact volunteer participants by phone, we also made the survey available via email and altogether obtained 53 responses, for a response rate of 33%. While this seems to be a respectable response rate for cold calls, these were not true cold calls, and the researchers were somewhat disappointed with this response rate. A contributing factor may have been the subject matter itself. Some participants may have felt uncomfortable with the personal nature of divorce and did not wish to discuss it. Some were in the process of relocation, and in the 2-4 weeks between the time of the class and the follow-up call some had moved or could no longer be reached at the phone number they had provided.

At the end of this brief survey, we targeted those who had made significant use of the Guidebook and asked them if we could interview them in greater depth about their use of and opinions about the Guidebook—our second level of feedback. We offered a \$55 Visa gift card (the same amount as the registration cost for their required divorce education classes) as incentive for their participation in the in-depth interview. Seeking equal numbers of men and women, we aimed to have about 30 of the intended 100 surveyed (about one-third) allow us to interview them. These interviews were intended to flesh out the responses of the phone survey, to allow the researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the collective experiences of the participants with the Guidebook, and to leave an open door for other unanticipated feedback. Of our 53 survey respondents, 18 in-depth interviews were conducted. Thirty-four percent of the interviewees were male; 64% were female, which mirrored the demographics of the phone survey group.

The interviews were conducted by a male/female pair at the place of the participants' choosing. Wanting to be sensitive to the to the comfort of the participants, male/female pairs were chosen in consideration that some of the interviewees may have just left troubling situations with one gender or the other. The interviews were conducted in pairs to allow for one researcher to give his or her full attention to the participant while the other made detailed field notes, including verbatim phrases when possible, during each question. The interviewers switched roles on alternating questions. The interviews lasted 45-60 minutes, and focused on the participants' experiences with the Guidebook, including new insights gained, how this Guidebook met or failed to meet their needs and expectations, how they have used or plan to use the knowledge that they have gained, and if they would recommend this book to a friend who was in a similar situation (see Appendix D). Understanding that these questions touched on the circumstances and reasons behind the divorce, the interviewers gently probed into these areas to flesh out the decision-making process, and in what ways this Guidebook may have helped (or not helped) them to deal with the questions and challenges surrounding the matter of divorce.

Instruments

The data collection instrument for the phone survey was designed to capture five rough categories of feedback plus some basic demographic information. Those five categories are: (1) usage of the Guidebook, (2) an increase in positive learning, (3) increase in confidence about the decision to divorce, (4) better preparation for a divorce, should they choose to proceed, and (5) consideration for repairing the relationship. Two open-ended questions about what participants liked most and least were also included to obtain a general sense of what improvements might be made to future editions of the Guidebook. (See Appendix C for the phone survey instruments.)

The in-depth interview was designed to flesh out the feedback obtained through the phone survey. We asked not only about usage but about how the individual used what they learned. We not only asked if the participant completed some of the activities, but if he or she found the activities helpful. Some other questions include, “What was your first impression of the Guidebook?” and “Would you recommend this book to a friend who was approaching the decision of whether or not to divorce? What would you say to them? Why or why not?” (See Appendix D for the in-depth interview instrument.) The list of questions is not comprehensive; as individual peculiarities arose, the interviewers had the freedom to gently ask for elaboration or follow a thread to its end, even when it seemed to go out of the main stream of questions.

Table 1 is breakdown of the educational objectives of the Guidebook, and the corresponding questions that were asked to assess if these objectives were met. These are the same questions that comprise the phone and in-depth interviews, but they are laid out here to show the correspondence between the stated learning objectives and the questions that were asked.

Table 1

Correspondence Between Measures and Educational Objectives

Measures from phone interview	Measures from in-depth interview
Usage	
Overall, how much did you read?	Have you used the information in this Guidebook in any way?
Overall, how many of the activities did you do?	
Increase positive learning	
Overall, how helpful was it?	Were there things that were especially helpful for you? Why?
Overall, I trust the information in this Guidebook.	Were there things that were especially unhelpful for you. Why?
Overall, I learned a lot from this Guidebook.	(If applicable) Overall, did you find the activities helpful or not?
^a ...I learned about things to help make a healthy, happy relationship, whether this divorce happens or not.	
^a ...I have a greater understanding of the ways that divorce could affect my life.	
^a ...I have a greater understanding of the ways that divorce could affect my children.	
^a ...I am more confident about my decision concerning whether or not to divorce.	
^a ...I am more confident that in my case a divorce is necessary for the health and safety of me and my kids.	

Measures from phone interview

Measures from in-depth interview

Better preparation

^a ...I thought harder about getting a divorce.

^a ...I will be more prepared for the divorce, whether it happens or not.

^a ...I want to discuss the divorce more with my children.

Consider repairing the relationship

^a ...I want the divorce more than before.

^a ...I want the divorce less than before.

^a ...I want to try something other than divorce (reconciliation, separation, counseling, etc.).

^a ...I learned about options that, if possible, I would like to try to use to repair my relationship.

Has your likelihood to divorce changed because of your experience with this Guidebook?

Did you feel at any point that this Guidebook made you think harder about certain things, or brought things to your attention that you had not previously considered?

General feedback for improvement

What did you like best?

What did you like least?

Would you prefer to have this Guidebook as a computer CD, a booklet, through the internet, or does it matter?

What was your first impression of the Guidebook?

What was your overall experience with the Guidebook?

In the phone interview you said, "...". Will you tell us more about that?

What things do you feel should have been included that weren't?

Measures from phone interview

Measures from in-depth interview

General feedback for improvement

Were there things that were especially bothersome or out of place? Why?

Would you recommend this book to a friend who was approaching the decision of whether or not to divorce? What would you say to them about it? Why or why not?

^aQuestion begins with “As a result of reading this Guidebook...”

Analyses

The quantitative questions from the phone survey were measured on a 1-5 Likert scale with 1 being a response of “Strongly Agree” and 5 being “Strongly Disagree,” or close variations thereof as noted in the tables. Basic frequency and other descriptive statistics were used to analyze responses to the quantitative questions from the phone survey found in table 2. I also performed independent samples t-tests to investigate potential differences between women’s and men’s responses, with gender as the independent variable and the responses to the survey questions as the dependent variables.

For the in-depth interviews, I carefully reviewed the field notes. One question at a time, putting the responses of each participant side-by-side, patterns and common responses emerged and were identified, as well as comments that raised thoughtful issues and helpful suggestions for the continued improvement of the Guidebook. Due to time restraints and the expiration of the contracts with the other three research assistants, they were unable to contribute to the analysis of the in-depth interview data. Common responses and categories were discussed with the faculty member supervising this thesis research and refinements made.

Results

In this section, first I present basic information about usage of the Guidebook. Then I present the descriptive data that assesses the remaining four learning objectives for this intervention: increase positive learning, increase confidence in the decision, better preparation, and thoughtful consideration of repairing the relationship. Next, I highlight some qualitative feedback gained in phone interviews as well as the in-depth feedback interviews.

In order for the Guidebook to achieve its stated objectives, it first must be used. In regard to usage of the Guidebook, on average, the participants read 57% of the book with a wide standard deviation of 26%. All participants read some portion, with 17% reading its entire contents. In contrast, though all participants read parts of the book, 40% of the participants did not do any of the learning activities. They did complete an average of “a few” activities, with 17% completing “most” or “all or almost all” of them. No significant gender differences were found in usage.

Increase Positive Learning

Table 3

Means, Frequencies, and Gender Differences for Quantitative Items—Increase Positive Learning

Question	Mean ^a		Very helpful to not at all helpful ^b					Does not	Male	Female	Gender	<i>t</i>
	(<i>SD</i>)	Mode	1	2	3	4	5	apply	mean	mean	difference	
									(<i>SD</i>)	(<i>SD</i>)	(<i>p</i>)	(<i>df</i>)
Overall, how helpful was it?	2.33	Pretty	19%	42%	29%	6%	4%		2.63	2.19	0.237	1.47 ^c
	(0.98)	helpful							(1.31)	(0.79)		(20)
			Strongly agree to strongly disagree ^b					Does not				
			1	2	3	4	5	apply				
Overall, I learned a lot from this Guidebook.	1.94	Agree	28%	60%	4%	4%		4%	2.19	1.84	0.201	1.30
	(0.91)								(1.05)	(0.82)		(51)
Overall, I trust the information In this Guidebook.	1.70	Strongly	48%	42%	8%	2%			1.75	1.68	0.772	0.29
	(0.85)	agree							(0.93)	(0.82)		(51)

Question	Mean ^a		Strongly agree to strongly disagree ^b					Does not	Male	Female	Gender	<i>t</i>
	(<i>SD</i>)	Mode	1	2	3	4	5	apply	mean	mean	difference	
	(<i>SD</i>)								(<i>SD</i>)	(<i>SD</i>)	(<i>p</i>)	(<i>df</i>)
^d ...I learned about things to make a healthy, happy relationship whether this divorce happens or not.	1.96 (0.83)	Agree	27%	60%	9%			4%	2.06 (0.85)	1.92 (0.83)	0.569	0.57 (51)
^d ...I have a greater understanding of the ways that divorce could affect my life.	1.94 (0.86)	Agree	28%	53%	9%	4%	2%	4%	1.93 (1.03)	1.94 (0.79)	0.967	-0.04 (49)
^d ...I have a greater understanding of the ways that divorce could affect my children.	1.82 (0.89)	Agree	37%	51%	2%	6%	2%	2%	1.93 (1.22)	1.78 (0.72)	0.574	0.57 (49)

^aDoes not apply was not used when calculating Means and *SD*'s. ^bStandard 5-point Likert scale. ^cSignificance of F-value < .01, equal variances not assumed.

^dQuestion starts with "As a result of reading this Guidebook..."

Another objective of the Guidebook was to assess the learning that the participants gained. In overall reaction to the Guidebook, 61% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that, overall, the Guidebook was helpful; 10% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. Similarly, 88% agreed that, overall, they learned a lot from the Guidebook, with only 4% disagreeing. Again, 90% agreed that, overall, they trusted the information in the Guidebook; 2% disagreed with this statement. There were no significant gender differences found. Accordingly, it appears that the Guidebook was well received and seen overall as helpful, trustworthy and something from which participants, regardless of gender, could learn a lot.

In other areas of positive learning, when asked if this Guidebook gave them a greater understanding about how divorce could affect their lives personally, 81% Guidebook users agreed or strongly agreed and 6% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Similarly, regarding gaining a greater understanding of the ways the divorce could affect their children, 88% agreed and 8% disagreed. When asked if they learned about things to make a healthy, happy relationship regardless of whether the divorce in question proceeded or not, 87% agreed and 0% disagreed. Again, gender was not found to have played a significant role in these responses. Overall, it would seem that the Guidebook is a good tool for conveying learning about divorce and healthy relationships.

Increase Confidence

Table 4

Means, Frequencies, and Gender Differences for Quantitative Items—Increase Confidence

Question	Mean ^a (<i>SD</i>)	Mode	Strongly agree to strongly disagree ^b					Does not apply	Male	Female	Gender	<i>t</i> (<i>df</i>)
			1	2	3	4	5		mean (<i>SD</i>)	mean (<i>SD</i>)	difference (<i>p</i>)	
^c ...I am more confident about my decision concerning whether or not to divorce.	2.23 (1.09)	Agree	21%	43%	13%	6%	6%	11%	2.46 (1.33)	2.15 (0.99)	0.381	0.89 (45)
^c ...I am more confident that in my case a divorce is necessary for the health and safety of me and my kids.	2.30 (1.21)	Agree	25%	38%	7%	13%	6%	11%	3.17 (1.27)	2.00 (1.06)	0.003	3.14 (45)

^aDoes not apply was not used when calculating Means and *SD*'s. ^bStandard 5-point Likert scale. ^cQuestion starts with "As a result of reading this Guidebook..."

In regard to increasing confidence concerning the decision of whether or not to divorce, 64% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they felt more confident about their decision to divorce as a result of reading the guidebook; 12% disagreed. Similarly, 63% agreed that in their case, divorce was necessary for the health and safety of them or their children, while 19% disagreed. Females were significantly more likely to agree with this statement than males ($t = 3.14, p = .003$). These findings suggest that the Guidebook does help to increase confidence about the decision to divorce.

In three notable cases, participants told our researchers that they were divorcing because of domestic violence in their relationships. One participant agreed and the other two strongly agreed that the Guidebook helped them feel more confident that, in their case, divorce was necessary for health and safety.

Better Preparation

Table 5

Means, Frequencies, and Gender Differences for Quantitative Items—Better Preparation

Question	Mean ^a (SD)	Mode	Strongly agree to strongly disagree ^b					Does not apply	Male	Female	Gender	<i>t</i> (<i>df</i>)
			1	2	3	4	5		mean (SD)	mean (SD)	difference (<i>p</i>)	
^c ...I thought harder about getting a divorce.	2.87 (1.20)	Agree, Disagree	11%	26%	16%	26%	6%	15%	2.38 (0.93)	1.68 (0.82)	0.085	-1.76 (43)
^c ...I will be more prepared for the divorce, whether it happens or not.	2.15 (1.05)	Agree	23%	57%	11%	2%		7%	2.31 (1.01)	2.08 (1.06)	0.465	0.74 (51)
^c ...I want to discuss the divorce more with my children.	2.43 (1.12)	Agree	19%	40%	11%	21%	2%	7%	2.00 (1.00)	2.58 (1.13)	0.108	-1.64 (47)

Question	Mean ^a (SD)	Mode	Strongly agree to strongly disagree ^b					Does not apply	Male	Female	Gender	<i>t</i> (<i>df</i>)
			1	2	3	4	5		mean (SD)	mean (SD)	difference (<i>p</i>)	
^c ...I want to discuss the divorce more with my spouse.	2.65 (1.22)	Agree	17%	32%	15%	23%	6%	7%	2.14 (1.03)	2.86 (1.24)	0.063	-1.91 (47)
^c ...I changed some of my attitudes about divorce.	2.35 (1.06)	Agree	19%	48%	15%	14%		4%	2.38 (1.20)	2.33 (1.01)	0.898	0.13 (50)

^aDoes not apply was not used when calculating Means and *SD*'s. ^bStandard 5-point Likert scale. ^cQuestion starts with "As a result of reading this Guidebook..."

Guidebook users were equally divided about thinking harder about getting a divorce: 37% agreed and 32% disagreed, with an additional 15% declaring that this question did not apply to them. While they appeared split over thinking harder about the divorce, 67% agreed that they changed some of their attitudes about divorce, with 14% disagreeing. Similarly, 81% agreed that they would be more prepared for divorce whether it happened or not; 2% disagreed.

In wanting to discuss the matter further with their children, 59% of Guidebook users agreed and 23% disagreed. Fewer agreed that they wanted to discuss the divorce further with their spouse: 49% agreed, 29% disagreed. No significant gender differences were found in response to these items.

Consider Repairing Relationship

Table 6

Means, Frequencies, and Gender Differences for Quantitative Items—Consider Repairing the Relationship

Question	Mean ^a (SD)	Mode	Strongly agree to strongly disagree ^b					Does not apply	Male	Female	Gender	<i>t</i> (<i>df</i>)
			1	2	3	4	5		mean (SD)	mean (SD)	difference (<i>p</i>)	
^c ...I want the divorce more than before.	3.11 (1.22)	Disagree		8%	26%	32%	15%	19%	3.50 (1.03)	2.95 (1.11)	0.130	1.54 (51)
^c ...I want the divorce less than before.	2.57 (1.13)	Same as before	15%	26%	27%	9%	6%	17%	1.93 (1.07)	2.87 (1.04)	0.009	-2.76 (42)
^c ...I want to try something other than divorce (reconciliation, separation, counseling, etc.).	3.21 (1.35)	Agree	7%	25%	7%	23%	17%	21%	2.50 (1.22)	3.57 (1.29)	0.014	-2.58 (40)

Question	Mean ^a		Strongly agree to strongly disagree ^b					Does not apply	Male	Female	Gender	<i>t</i>
	(<i>SD</i>)	Mode	1	2	3	4	5		mean	mean	difference	
									(<i>SD</i>)	(<i>SD</i>)	(<i>p</i>)	(<i>df</i>)
^c ...I learned about options that if possible, I would like to try to repair my relationship.	2.33 (1.07)	Agree	15%	40%	11%	9%	4%	21%	2.42 (1.16)	2.30 (1.05)	0.755	0.31 (40)

^aDoes not apply was not used when calculating Means and *SD*'s. ^bStandard 5-point Likert scale. ^cQuestions starts with "As a result of reading this Guidebook..."

The last objective of the Guidebook was to help potential divorcees consider repairing their existing relationships. When asked if, as a result of reading the Guidebook, they wanted the divorce more than before, 8% agreed, 47% disagreed, with an additional 45% responding either that the question did not apply or they felt the same as before reading the Guidebook. On a similar note, in wanting the divorce less than before, 41% agreed, 15% disagreed, but again, 44% said that they felt the same as before or that it did not apply. Males were significantly more likely to agree with this statement ($t = -2.76, p = 0.009$). Lastly, when asked if the Guidebook helped them to want to try something other than divorce, 32% agreed while 40% disagreed, and 38% said it did not apply or they felt the same as before. In this case, females were significantly more likely to disagree ($t = -2.58, p = .014$).

Open-Ended Items in Phone Interview

The 53 participants responded to two-short answer questions as part of the phone survey: “What did you like best? And “What did you like least?” Among the things most liked were: the chapters on children (10), that the Guidebook was thought provoking (5), the activities (4), the statistics (4), the personal stories (3), and that it was neutral or even-handed (3). When asked which parts were the least favorite, participants responded much less often. Among the responses that were given, the parts they liked least were the sections about reconciling their marriage (3), the activities (2), and that it was not applicable enough to older, longer-married couples (2).

The most common response by far (given 13 different times), seen in both the “liked best” and “liked least” categories, was the wish to have had the book sooner. One told us, “Before individuals go and see a lawyer they should see this book, because they could really pay a lot less. I just think it had some good points about options--looking all of the options.” Another said, “Give this book to people when they obtain a marriage license!”

In-Depth Feedback Interviews

As the researchers met with 18 individuals for 45-60 minutes to discuss in more depth their use of the Guidebook, it became quickly apparent that their comments and experiences supported and confirmed the things that we had heard during the phone interview. This group was selected out of the phone survey group because of their more extensive use of the Guidebook, and as such, we found that almost half of them had completed some of the activities, whereas 40% of the phone participants had not done any of the activities. When asked to share an experience about how they had used the information in the Guidebook, many referenced a specific activity from the Guidebook and what it had made them think about, or new realizations that it had given them. For example, one person mentioned the activity in chapter six to make a list of the people in her social support network. She reported that this helped her to identify the people in her life who might be most supportive of her decision. Another mentioned that he did most all of the activities in chapter three (“How common is divorce and what are the reasons?”) and said that this helped him clear his mind as to what his reasons for divorcing were. Three of our interviewees said more generally that the activities helped them to know what a healthy relationship looked like, or to make decisions toward having a happy relationship in the future. The activities mentioned were spread across many different chapters, with no activity being repeated by two interviewees.

We also asked if they would recommend the book to a friend, and overwhelmingly, the answer was yes. Some added enthusiastic statements such as, “Definitely!” (3) or, “Do what the book recommends—get a good counselor” (4) or, “Do everything possible to save the marriage first” (3).

Also, as was seen in the phone surveys, many of the interviewees (8) said that reading the book did not change their likelihood to divorce, adding that their decision had been made before they ever took the class or that their divorce had already become final by the time of the interview. In one case, the man being interviewed had separated from his wife three years earlier and was living with his girlfriend of more than a year in a new residence. In another case, a young woman's divorce had become final in the two weeks between the time that we spoke to her on the phone and met with her at her house. Of the 18 interviewees, 9 of them were already divorced or legally separated, and in 100% of the cases, the spouse or former spouse no longer lived there. However, two participants did say that they wanted to try to work things out, if their spouse would consent to it.

Discussion

In this section, I first briefly discuss an observation regarding the timing of Divorce Orientation Education that impacts the results of this formative evaluation study. Then, I consider the implications of the results on the five stated objectives of the Guidebook, and last, look at other issues of interest that arose during the study.

As the phone surveys progressed, an unanticipated issue of timing emerged. While the researchers intended to target those at the crossroads of divorce—those who were active in the decision-making process of whether or not to divorce—it became apparent that our participants were well past this stage. The researchers expected that many of those attending the Divorce Orientation Education class would have some degree of indecision regarding divorce. This was rarely the case for our participants. For most class participants, the class was literally the last formal step taken before having a judge stamp their divorce papers. The common sentiment of wishing to have the Guidebook sooner in the process, or their expressions that it may have made

a bigger difference if they had received this information sooner, colors all of the other feedback given.

In regard to Decision Making Theory (Janis & Mann, 1977), most of the participants had already made the incremental decisions that had led them to their final decision to proceed with a divorce, and their decision making process was all but complete. The common sentiment of wanting to have had the book sooner supports the idea that it may have had a greater impact earlier in the process, but for many of them their decisions had already reached a point of no return. The decisions most of the participants faced now dealt more with how to move forward from here and how to adjust to a post-divorced life. This may explain why the chapters on helping children deal with divorce were some of the most well received, and the chapters on reconciliation and possible repair were less-well liked.

Keeping this in mind, first addressing usage, it appears that those who receive this book, even so near to the end of the divorce process, will make some use of it. Participants, on average, read 57% of the Guidebook. Considering that the Guidebook was intended to be encyclopedic—that readers would hone in on the parts that were of most interest to them, and skip the parts that did not interest them—57% seems to be a favorably high rate of consumption. Everyone who took the book read at least part and the majority did at least a few activities. There may be some self-selection issues here. That is, those who chose to participate in the feedback study are the same people who already may be prone to self-guided learning. Of course, the authors' aim is to reach those who are interested in further exploring the decision to divorce, or fleshing out any feelings of ambiguity that might exist. Thus, while the book may find its way into the hands of many, those who use the book will, in a sense, always be self-selected.

The authors of the Guidebook, being well versed in the research (and familiar with divorce professionally) but not having personally experienced divorce, were keen to collect feedback on how those actually experiencing divorce would receive a resource like this. In the Positive Learning items, the participants clearly responded that the Guidebook was seen as helpful and trustworthy. These responses combined with the sense that they learned a lot, and the several open-ended comments that the book was even-handed or neutral concerning whether or not to divorce, were encouraging. Furthermore, in the in-depth interviews, when asked if the readers found anything offensive or out of place, some mentioned additional things they would like to have gotten out of the book (such as more hope for the future or more statistics on 2nd and 3rd marriages) but none expressed offense, even in a mild sense.

The third learning objective was to help build greater confidence concerning the decision to divorce. The Guidebook authors recognize that not all marriages are healthy, and not all individuals should be encouraged to repair their relationships. With the majority of our participants quickly approaching an impending divorce, the majority (64%) agreed that the Guidebook helped them to feel more confident about their decision. Whether their confidence was that they had made the right decision or that they were better able to deal with the already-made decision to divorce is not precisely clear from the data. Some respondents disagreed with this statement or said that it did not apply to them because the decision to divorce was not theirs, and if they had their wish, the divorce would not be happening at all. Others disagreed or said it did not apply because, again, the decision was already firmly made.

Also encouraging here is that several respondents who had experienced domestic violence anecdotally reported that the Guidebook helped them gain greater confidence in their decision to end the marriage. When legislating any impediments to divorce, an important

concern is the possibility that those in abusive or dangerous relationships may be slowed down by these requirements, thus possibly jeopardizing the health and safety of the one attempting to leave and their children as well. Understanding the motivation to do no harm, the underpinnings of such desires can be easily understood. However, the anecdotal evidence that the researchers received from users of the Guidebook who reported that they were in abusive relationships provided evidence that having this book was helpful in confirming their decision to leave. Though we did not directly ask about abuse, three participants, all female, voluntarily divulged that they were divorcing for abuse reasons. One interviewee described some of the specific violent acts of her ex-husband, and then said, “I had an idea of how I wanted to behave and go forward, but I was having a hard time pulling the trigger [to leave], but the book gave [a] backbone of research and reinforced my commitment and belief system.” She continued on to say that the book “deeply validated” her own feelings. Another woman expressed feelings of guilt over her decision to divorce out of concern for her young children, but said that she knew it was necessary because domestic violence was the reason she was getting divorced. In a third case, a woman told us that she was opposed to divorce on principle, but said that the Guidebook “confirmed [my] reasons for initiating the divorce.” She commented further that her first impression of the Guidebook made her think it would try to convince her to stay together, but after reading it, she said she felt validated because it corroborated her own feelings that she and her children were in danger. From these responses, the Guidebook does not appear to be a significant impediment to leaving abusive relationships.

Perhaps one of the areas that ended up being most pertinent to our group of respondents was the fourth learning objective: Better Preparation. Eighty-one percent agreed that the book would help them be more prepared for the divorce, and considering that almost all of the

participants were already or would shortly be divorced, it was surely a topic of interest to them. All of our respondents also had children, and the majority of them agreed that the Guidebook made them want to talk to their children more about the divorce. To the short-answer questions in the phone survey of what was liked best, respondents cited the two chapters (four and five) that focused on children as most liked or helpful. Additionally, it is interesting to note that while the decision to divorce was final for most, a considerable portion said that they changed some of their attitudes about divorce (67%), and said that they thought harder about the divorce (37%).

With the fifth objective, to consider repairing the relationship, many saw these issues as not applying to them—more so than with any other objective. With a final decision solidly in place, this is easy to understand. This is also the objective in which the most gender differences were seen. Males were significantly more likely to agree with wanting the divorce less than before as a result of their experience with the Guidebook. Similarly, females were more likely to disagree with wanting to try something other than divorce (such as reconciliation, separation, counseling, etc.). One possible explanation is the fact that women are more often the instigators of divorce. Though the numbers vary slightly from state to state, women initiate about two-thirds of divorces (Brinig & Allen, 2000) and thus are likely more firm in their decision and less amenable to change. Men may also agree with wanting the divorce less than before because they were less exposed to or interested in such materials before the divorce was initiated, and therefore derived more benefit from it. Of note, about 30% of the respondents said that they wanted to try something else other than divorce, a figure relatively similar to Doherty's (2009) figure of 25% of participants in divorcing parents education in Minnesota. This current study confirms that a significant minority of participants in the divorce process are interested in preserving their marriage.

Timing: Finding the Crossroads of Divorce

The evident finality of the decision at the time of the Divorce Orientation Education class, and the evidence suggesting that considerable ambiguity surrounding divorce does exist, taken in tandem with the expressed desire to have the book sooner, all point to a pertinent question for the researchers going forward: how to get the Guidebook in the hands of those who are earlier in the decision-making process—those truly at the crossroads of divorce. There are some natural channels to be explored. Individuals and couples seeking out counseling from licensed professionals or clergy members or even advice from friends may be considered much earlier in the process of making a decision concerning divorce. Perhaps reconciliation-friendly divorce mediators or court representatives may be additional points of contact for information of this nature to be dispersed. Individuals contacting these professionals may be at a stage in which they are feeling more ambiguity, and may find suggestions and information about the possible repair of their relationship more pertinent than our participants from the Divorce Orientation Education class. Efforts have already begun to make the Guidebook known and available to religious leaders and therapists in Utah who may encounter such individuals and couples. The book has also been presented at the 2009 Smart Marriages Conference. Some local marketing has begun through radio interviews, and the Guidebook is advertized online at the Utah Commission on Marriage website. Perhaps other therapists could be reached by accessing the Utah state registry of therapists or attending the Utah Association of Marriage and Family Therapists held annually in May. The Guidebook is currently available online in PDF format for free viewing and downloading at [http://utahmarriage.org/files/uploads/Crossroads for web.pdf](http://utahmarriage.org/files/uploads/Crossroads%20for%20web.pdf). (The spaces here are spaces, not underscores.)

Another effort to make the Guidebook available earlier in the process is being pursued through the Divorce Orientation Education class itself. The same member of the Utah House of Representatives who sponsored the original Divorce Orientation Education class law is now endeavoring to change the timing of the class. Instead of being the last thing a person has to do before having their divorce finalized, she is proposing that it be done before a person can file for divorce. Time will tell whether the law will change in this manner. However, this study provides evidence that the class is less effective in achieving its objectives with the current timing requirement.

One thing that might facilitate a pre-filing requirement is making the required Divorce Orientation Education course available online. This would make access to it easier for most, especially those in more rural areas and those with young children who struggle to find (and pay for) childcare. In fact, Utah State University Cooperative Extension Service is already working to convert the content of the Guidebook to a web-based course. If this delivery option is approved by the Court, it would cut current costs for the facilities and personnel required to teach the class.

Another benefit associated with an online class would be that it would allow for the standardization of the curriculum and presentation of the material. As currently taught, the classes are contracted to mental health clinicians in the various counties in the state of Utah. Having observed several different presenters during the course of recruiting participants into this study, researchers observed wide variation in how the class curriculum was presented, especially the content regarding the possibility of reconciliation. Some instructors appeared to give a sincere consideration of the issue, while others seemed to give it a passing head nod before moving on to the more present concerns of co-parenting and mediation. (Of course, given how

late in the divorce process the class comes for most, perhaps instructors understand that discussing reconciliation is near fruitless.) Standardizing the class material and presentation and putting it at an earlier point in time may provide a realistic opportunity for couples and individuals to consider preventing unnecessary divorce. It may also help those who think they are in abusive situations come to a timely and prudent decision, validating their concerns and helping them overcome possible feelings of guilt.

Guidebook Modifications

Lastly, in regard to the content of the book, readers expressed no sentiment of the book being too long or too detailed, though these were possible concerns voiced by some of the pre-publication reviewers of the Guidebook. The encyclopedic format of the book may help circumvent these concerns for the end users. Additionally, some of the recommendations offered by the participants of this formative evaluation were to include more information on second marriages, and to more fully address marriages of couples who have been together for greater lengths of time, and the effects of divorce on individuals who are older. Some also expressed the desire for a greater sense of hope in the Guidebook, saying that the outcome looked bleak and had the feel of being inevitably so. While the facts which indicate that divorce is challenging even in the best of circumstances cannot be changed, perhaps additional notes of hope may be added. As subsequent additions of the Guidebook are developed, these points of feedback should be considered for inclusion.

Though the effectiveness of the Guidebook in this study appears to have been diminished by the timing of its reception by the participants, overall, the Guidebook shows promise of being able to fulfill its intention—to help those in the decision making process of divorce. In addition, I recommend an implementation study in the near future with individuals who are much earlier

in the decision-making process—truly at the crossroads of divorce. Following the original intent of the authors and the feedback of our participants, I suggest investigating if those who have the Guidebook sooner in their decision making-process benefit more from it than those who have already made a decision and set in motion the legal process.

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Appendix A—Table of Contents for the Guidebook

Should I Keep Trying to Work It Out? A Guidebook for Individuals and Couples at the Crossroads of Divorce (And Before)

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Appendix B—Cover Letter to Participants

This Guidebook is designed to help people in various circumstances make more confident decisions about divorce.

We've worked really hard on this Guidebook. But we need to know what you think about it so we can make it even better. For those who are interested in this Guidebook, it's yours to keep. We just ask that you give us your name and phone number, and a good time to reach you, so that we can call and ask you your feedback. That call should take just 5-10 minutes. That's it. After that, if you made extensive use of the book and would like to give us more detailed feedback, we would love to interview you in person. But many of you won't really be interested in that. If you are interested in giving us more extensive feedback, we have a \$55 VISA gift certificate for you to thank you for your time and effort.

The information in this Guidebook is based on the best research available. This isn't pop psychology. We are not trying to tell you what you should do. We think that in some situations, divorce is necessary for health and safety and happiness. But in other situations, everyone will be better off if couples can repair their relationship and keep their family together. Some of the activities can help you determine if there could still be happiness in your marriage, even if things look really bad right now. It will offer some different ideas that you can try to help face your challenges.

You can see as you look through the Guidebook that there is helpful information about a variety of topics—what you might expect financially, things to look out for with your children, what might happen to you emotionally and socially, and different legal options concerning divorce. There is also information about the chances that an unhappy marriage can become happy again. The most helpful parts, though, probably are the learning activities. We know there is so much to think about and prepare for and consider. These learning activities are there to help you organize your thoughts, and maybe bring to light some things that you hadn't considered before. The purpose of this guidebook is to help you think more carefully about your decision and your future so that you can make the best decision and be better prepared for the future.

The Guidebook is designed so that you can get out of it what interests you most. We expect that those who would like to keep this book will use it like a handbook—that you will read the parts the interest you, and skip the parts that don't. Or you can read it front to back, if you'd like—whatever is going to be most helpful for you.

Just so that you know, we have permission from the course instructor and the Administrative Office of the Courts to offer you this Guidebook and ask for your voluntary feedback.

Dr. Alan J. Hawkins, Ph.D.
Chair, Utah Commission on Marriage

Appendix C—Phone Survey Instruments

Demographic Questions

	Reseracher Code--Gender: M F														
	<17	18-19	20-22	23-25	26-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65-69	70-74	75+
Current Age	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Age at Marriage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Education Level	Some HS			HS Graduate/GED			Some College			College Graduate			Advanced Degree		
Frequency of Religious Attendance	>Once/wk			Once/wk			1-2x/month			Few times/year			<Once/year		
	Months									Years					
How long...	<1	1	2	3-4	5-6	7-8	9-11	12-17	18-23	2	3-4	5-7	8-10	11-14	15+
...was your courtship before marriage?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...did you know each other?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Appendix D—In-Depth Interview Instrument

#	Question
1	Will you tell us a little about you? We'd like to know where you're coming from and your specific situation.
2	What was your first impression of the Guidebook?
3	What was your overall experience with the Guidebook?
4	In the phone interview you said "...". Will you tell us a little more about that?
5	(If applicable) Overall, did you find the activities helpful or not? Why?
6	What things do you feel should have been included that weren't? a. Why would you want those things included?
7	Were there any things that surprised you? What?
8	Were there things that were especially helpful for you? Why?
9	Were there things that were especially bothersome or out of place? Why?
10	Were there things that were especially unhelpful? Why?
11	Did you feel at any point that this guidebook made you think harder about certain things, or brought things to your attention that you had not previously considered? a. If yes, about what part or subject?
12	Have you used this information in this guidebook in any way? a. If yes, will you tell us a/the story of how you used it (If no, how you plan to use it)?
13	Has your likelihood to divorce changed because of your experience with this book? a. If yes, in what way?
14	Would you recommend this book to a friend who was approaching the decision of whether or not to divorce? What would you say to them about it? Why or why not?
