BRIEF REPORT

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Determinants of personal growth and life satisfaction in divorced adults

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Abstract

Divorce is a major life event that can trigger sudden changes in how adults perceive themselves and operate in their social environments. Some previous evidence has documented changes in personality in reaction to marital dissolution. However, little is known about the determinants of personality development in the post-divorce period. Guided by the positive personality development model in adulthood, this study examined sociodemographic characteristics, divorce-related variables and personality-related indicators as determinants of life satisfaction and personal growth in divorced adults. Participants included 460 divorced adults who completed self-reported measures regarding sociodemographic characteristics, divorce-related variables and personality development indicators. Results showed that autonomy, environmental mastery, self-acceptance, emotional self-regulation indicators and motivation for personality adjustment goals were associated with post-divorce life satisfaction. Personal growth was associated with purpose in life, self-expansion, psychological mindedness and motivation for personality growth goals. The sociodemographic characteristics and divorce-related variables differently predicted life satisfaction and personal growth. We discussed the implications of the positive personality development model in understanding post-divorce personality adjustment and maturity.

KEYWORDS
divorce, life satisfaction, personal growth, personality, personality development

1 | INTRODUCTION

Personality development during adulthood is a cutting-edge theoretical and empirical issue in the personality field. Reitz and Staudinger (2017), Staudinger and Bowen (2010) and Staudinger and Kessler (2009) proposed a model of positive personality development (PPD) based on the lifespan developmental psychology theory (Baltes et al., 2006). The primary assumption of this model is that personality development is a dynamic and symbiotic corollary of gains and losses across lifespan (Staudinger & Bowen, 2010). In this model, gains in personality are not circumscribed and oriented toward higher maturity levels, as argued by some classical theories (e.g., Loevinger, 1976). Instead, two types of positive development gains can be identified in

the personality system: gains in personality adjustment and gains in personality growth. These two types of development exhibit distinctive indicators/markers and criteria and distinct but interrelated development patterns (Reitz & Staudinger, 2017; Staudinger & Bowen, 2010).

Personality adjustment is defined by the adults' ability to master developmental changes that may arise in biological, psychological and interpersonal domains of their lives to attain, preserve or recover subjective well-being and quality of life (Staudinger & Kessler, 2009). Adults' motivation for adjustment goals reflects the desire to nurture meaningful activities and relationships that facilitate the allocation of personal and environmental resources in the acquisition of a flexible repertoire of coping strategies designed to manage normative

developmental tasks and effectively respond to societies' norms and expectations (Bauer et al., 2015; Hoyt et al., 2020; Kaiser et al., 2021). This successful management of a developmental-contextual world can be measured having as a subjective criterion the satisfaction with life (as an indicator of subjective well-being) and as objective criteria of personality adjustment, longevity and competence (Staudinger & Bowen, 2010).

Personality growth pertains to gains in personality system that reflect a more profound conceptual and insightful knowledge about the self, the others and the world (psychological mindedness); a more complex self-regulation system facilitator of a proactive integration of the dialectic ambiguity; and a motivational orientation to generative and self-transcending actions to pursue societal actualization and well-being of others (Staudinger & Kessler, 2009). Personal growth and personal wisdom are conceptualized as the subjective and objective criteria of personality growth, respectively (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Staudinger & Bowen, 2010).

In the PPD model, personality units from other conceptual personality models are seen as correlates/indicators of the positive personality development (PPD) outcomes (Reitz & Staudinger, 2017; Staudinger & Bowen, 2010). For example, Staudinger's model of personality development shares some conceptual similarities with psychological well-being. Psychological well-being may be defined as the individual efforts for self-actualization, meaning in life and self-actualization toward an ideal kind of psychological health (Ryff, 1989, 2014a; Ryff & Singer, 2008). Ryff (1989) developed a measure of psychological well-being with six scales intended to capture the eudaimonic side of well-being: self-acceptance (accepting oneself and being aware of one's strengths and limitations), environmental mastery (being able to manage the environment to meet personal needs), positive relations (being capable of having intimate, meaningful and trustworthy relationships with others), autonomy (seeking a sense of self-determination and taking independent decisions), purpose in life (determining and being guide by meaningful goals) and personal growth (having a sense of continued development and being open to new experiences for self-expansion, self-knowledge and self-improvement). According to Staudinger's model, personality adjustment in young and middle-aged adults tends to be associated with Ryff's conceptions of environmental mastery, self-acceptance, positive relationships and autonomy (at least partially) (Staudinger & Bowen, 2010). At the same time, personality growth and wisdom relate to purpose in life and personal growth (Staudinger & Bowen, 2010; Wink & Staudinger, 2016).

Although past longitudinal studies have reported a robust rank-order stability in personality traits during adulthood (Atherton et al., 2021; Terracciano et al., 2010), life events seem to emerge as developmental contributors to changes in the personality system during this lifespan period (Bleidorn et al., 2018). Perceived as one of the most challenging events during adult life, divorce may operate as a major life event with a high potential for personality adjustment and personality growth, beyond the impact of biological maturation and age effects. This study aimed to test personality-based predictors of divorce-related PPD.

Key Practitioner Message

- This study examined sociodemographic characteristics, divorce-related variables and personality-related indicators in predicting life satisfaction and personal growth in divorced adults.
- Gender, current intimate relationship status and time since divorce were associated with life satisfaction and personal growth.
- Autonomy, environmental mastery, self-acceptance, emotional self-regulation indicators and motivation for adjustment goals were associated with post-divorce life satisfaction.
- Purpose in life, self-expansion, psychological mindedness and motivation for personality growth goals were associated with adults' reports of personal growth.
- Overall, this study highlights the potential clinical applications of positive personality development in promoting personality adjustment and maturity opportunities related to the divorce experience.

1.1 | DIVORCE AND PPD

Previous research has documented gains in subjective well-being and personal growth after divorce for some individuals (Kulik & Heine-Cohen, 2011; Luhmann et al., 2012; van Scheppingen & Leopold, 2020). This interindividual variability among divorced adults in the levels of subjective well-being and personal growth has been associated with differences in personality-related dimensions. In particular, life satisfaction or affect balance after intimate relationship dissolution were associated with higher levels of self-esteem (Cross et al., 2021), self-compassion (Davarinejad et al., 2022) and a sense of psychological autonomy (Lindfors et al., 2006). Higher levels of life satisfaction were also associated with lower emotional attachment to the ex-spouse (Lamela et al., 2014) and post-divorce positive relations with the former partner (Yárnoz-Yaben et al., 2016). Post-divorce personality maturity is less well-researched than subjective well-being. Still, it has been predicted by a higher sense of meaning in life and perception of self-development (Weststrate et al., 2018), self-complexity (King & Raspin, 2004) and greater efforts and activities of self-expansion (Riessman, 1990).

However, studies about predictors of PPD in divorced adults are residual and mainly focus on personality adjustment outcomes. A major constraint of the previous research is the lack of a theoretical framework to examine personality-related indicators, which reduces the interpretability of personality-related determinants of personality adjustment and growth outcomes. Additionally, sociodemographic characteristics and divorce-related variables may assume significant effects on predicting personality development outcomes above and beyond personality-related indicators, as suggested by previous research. For example, a large body of literature has linked post-

divorce adjustment and growth outcomes with gender (Marshall et al., 2013; Sander et al., 2020), income (Symoens et al., 2013), number of children (van Winkle & Leopold, 2021), having a new intimate relationship (Symoens et al., 2014), time since the divorce (Gloor et al., 2021), divorce initiator status (Sander et al., 2020) and quality of the former marital relationship (Lamela & Figueiredo, 2011). However, prior findings regarding sociodemographic characteristics and divorce-related variables have been somewhat contradictory (e.g., Lamela et al., 2014; Sander et al., 2020). For example, some research suggested that women report higher levels of post-divorce subjective well-being than men (Lucas, 2005; Næss et al., 2015), while some other studies showed no differences between women and men (Gustavson et al., 2012; Leopold, 2018). The number of children was negatively associated with life satisfaction in divorced adults (Perrig-Chiello et al., 2015). Still, more recent research has suggested a positive link between the number of children and subjective well-being outcomes for divorced men (Sander et al., 2020). Furthermore, longitudinal studies have provided non-consensual data regarding the effect of time since divorce on subjective well-being outcomes, with some research suggesting gradual gains in life satisfaction over time (Luhmann et al., 2012), while others did not find this association (Gloor et al., 2021). Empirical evidence is also inconsistent about the association between divorce initiator status and subjective well-being outcomes (Perrig-Chiello et al., 2015; Sander et al., 2020).

In summary, a systematic understanding of how the interplay between sociodemographic characteristics and theory-informed personality attributes contribute to personality adjustment and personality growth in divorce adults is still lacking. To address this significant gap, the goal of this study was to examine sociodemographic characteristics, divorce-related variables and personality-related indicators in predicting post-divorce life satisfaction and personal growth. Along with sociodemographic characteristics and divorce-related variables, the model of life satisfaction contemplated seven personality-related indicators of personality adjustment. In particular, we included the four dimensions of psychological well-being postulated by Staudinger as indicators of personality adjustment (autonomy, positive relations, environmental mastery and self-acceptance) (Staudinger & Bowen, 2010). Given the pivotal role of emotion regulation in understanding adults' life satisfaction under social and interpersonal stressors (Jiang et al., 2022), we also considered two indicators of expression of positive/negative emotions (i.e., divorce-related negative affect and emotional attachment to ex-spouse) and the motivational orientation to select personality adjustment goals (Wayment & Bauer, 2018).

The personal growth model included sociodemographic characteristics, divorce-related variables and four personality indicators. We considered purpose in life, a growth-related dimension of psychological well-being (Staudinger & Kessler, 2009); divorce-related self-expansion, which describes the evaluation of new or augmented gains in self-improvement as a consequence of the divorce adversity (Hughes et al., 2020); psychological mindedness, defined as the interest in and ability for understanding one's psychological states and processes (Appelbaum, 1973; Nyklíček & Denollet, 2009); and

motivational orientation for personality growth goals, which highlights an aspiration to think complexly and coherently in the exploration and gaining of new (self-transcending) perspectives on one's psychosocial life (Bauer et al., 2015, 2019). Previous research has documented associations between these four personality indicators and personality growth criteria (Hughes et al., 2020; Teas et al., 2022; Wink & Staudinger, 2016).

2 | METHOD

2.1 | Participants

The sample consisted of 460 divorced adults who participated in the Portuguese National Study about Divorce Experience. Participants included 330 women (72%) and 130 men. Participants' age ranged from 24 to 65 years ($M = 41.7$, $SD = 8.1$). Participants had on average 17 years of education ($SD = 4.16$, range 6–25). The average income was €1827 ($SD = €2589$). On average, the time since divorce was 5.19 years ($SD = 5.01$ years). Divorce was by mutual consent to 91% of participants. In 57% of the cases, divorce was initiated by the participants, in 21% by the participants' ex-spouses and in 22% by mutual decision. Twenty-six per cent of the participants did not have children with the ex-spouse, 40% had one child, 30% had two children and 4% had three children. One hundred and thirty participants (28%) had a new intimate relationship.

2.2 | Measures

2.2.1 | Independent variables

Indicators of personality adjustment
Adjustment dimensions of the psychological well-being. We used the 42-item version of Ryff's Psychological Well-being Scale (PWBS; Ryff & Keyes, 1995) to assess the adjustment dimensions of the psychological well-being according to Staudinger's taxonomy (Staudinger & Bowen, 2010). We used the Autonomy, Positive Relations, Environmental Mastery and Self-acceptance scales of the PWBS. The Autonomy scale measures the sense of self-regulation and psychological independence. The Positive Relations scale examines the ability to develop and maintain valued and trustful relationships with significant others. The Environmental Mastery scale assesses the self-perception of proficiency in managing contextual demands. The Self-acceptance scale measures the positive attitude toward the self and the capacity to reflect and integrate diachronically and synchronically the multiple dimensions of the self. Each scale was comprised of seven items. Higher scores correspond to greater well-being in the assessed dimensions. The Portuguese version showed good psychometric properties (Novo et al., 1997). These scales yielded a satisfactory reliability in the present sample ($\alpha = .78$ in the Autonomy scale; $\alpha = .72$ in the Positive relations scale; $\alpha = .70$ in the Environmental mastery; and $\alpha = .83$ in the Self-acceptance scale).

Divorce-related negative affect balance. The Negativity-loneliness subscale of the Psychological Adjustment to Separation Test (PAST, Sweeper & Halford, 2006) was used to measure negative affect balance related to the divorce process and the ex-spouse. Higher scores in this 10-item subscale reflect more inability to regulate divorce-related negative affect. The Portuguese version of the PAST showed good psychometric properties (Lamela et al., 2014). Cronbach's α for the current data set was .91.

Emotional attachment to the ex-spouse. The continual aspiration for emotional closeness and connectedness with the ex-spouse after divorced was measured with the seven-item Attachment to ex-partner subscale of the Portuguese version of the PAST (Lamela et al., 2014; Sweeper & Halford, 2006). Higher scores correspond to higher emotional attachment to the ex-spouse. Cronbach's α was .90 for the current sample.

Motivation for personality adjustment goals. The Experiential Growth motivation subscale of the Portuguese version of the Growth Motivation Index (GMI; Bauer et al., 2015) was used to assess individuals' orientation to select goals that promote a deeper experience of individuals' psychosocial life, however without efforts for a deeper conceptual view of the one's experience. This scale also examines the importance of being involved in meaningful activities and relationships on a 7-point-Likert scale. Higher scores revealed a higher motivation for emotive growth (i.e., motivation for personality adjustment goals). The Portuguese version of the GMI showed good psychometric properties (Lamela, 2013). A Cronbach's α of .78 was found for the current sample.

Indicators of personality growth
Purpose in life. The Purpose in Life seven-item scale of PWBS (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) was used to measure individuals' sense of life meaning and their perception of whether their goals provide life directedness. Higher scores indicate higher purpose and meaning in life. The Portuguese version showed good psychometric properties (Novo et al., 1997). Internal consistency was .75 for the present study.

Divorce-related self-expansion. The sense of perceived progress as a consequence of divorce was assessed using a composite measure comprised of three items of the short form of the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI-SF; Cann et al., 2010). We administered these items to assess to which degree the individuals' view of themselves and the world was transformed due to the divorce and to what extent such transformation governs their sense of growth in everyday life. The psychometric properties of the Portuguese version of the PTGI-SF were very good (Lamela et al., 2014). Cronbach's α of this composite was .71.

Psychological mindedness. Four items of the Balanced Index of Psychological Mindedness (BIPM; Nyklíćek & Denollet, 2009) were used to assess mindedness, defined as 'a person's ability to see relationships among thoughts, feelings, and actions, with the goal of learning the meanings and causes of his experience and behavior' (Appelbaum, 1973, p. 36). The items were selected based on their elevated factor loadings in the Portuguese version of the BIPM (Lamela, 2013). Higher scores represent greater psychological mindedness ($\alpha = .70$, for the current sample).

Motivation for personality growth goals. Motivation for personality growth goals was assessed with the reflective growth motivation subscale of the GMI (Bauer et al., 2015). This subscale assesses the personal orientation for differentiating and integrating perspectives on the self and others, gaining insight and exploring new and deeper perspectives. This subscale is answered on a 7-point-Likert scale. Higher scores revealed a higher motivation for reflective growth (i.e., motivation for personality growth goals). Cronbach's α was .78 for the current sample.

2.2.2 | Dependent variables

Life satisfaction
The five-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985) was used to measure the subjective sense of global cognitive judgement of one's own life. The Portuguese version of the SWLS showed very good psychometric properties (Neto, 1993). Higher scores correspond to higher levels of life satisfaction. The SWLS revealed very good reliability in the current sample ($\alpha = .87$).

Personal growth
The Personal Growth scale of the PWBS (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) was administered to assess participants' sense of personal growth, self-development and self-improvement and their self-perception of personal potential as a consequence of divorce. This seven-item scale is answered on a 6-point scale so that higher scores reflect a higher sense of personal growth. The Portuguese version showed adequate psychometric properties (Novo et al., 1997). The α coefficient for the overall sample was .73.

2.3 | Procedures

An online survey was designed for data collection. The survey was available on a Portuguese internet research portal for divorce research. The instructions of all self-report measures were slightly adapted to unequivocally specify that participants should consider divorce as the event of reference for rating their degree of accordance with each item. Participants were recruited through notices in the media (e.g., national newspapers) and electronic announcements (e.g., e-mails to institutional public entities' web accounts and announcements on national web forums and websites dedicated to family issues). No financial compensation was provided. Standard methodological and ethical guidelines for internet-based research were followed to guarantee data quality (Kraut et al., 2004). The current study was approved by the Institutional Scientific Committee.

2.4 | Statistical procedures

The initial sample consisted of 483 participants. Twenty-three participants were deleted because they only completed the sociodemographic section of the protocol. For the remaining 460 participants, the amount of missing data varied between 0.2% and 0.8%. The multiple imputation method (with five imputations) was used to handle missing data prior to regression analyses (Carpenter & Kenward, 2013). We then conducted two separate correlation analyses with age controlled between life satisfaction and the indicators of personality adjustment and personal growth and the indicators of personality growth.

Two hierarchical linear regression models (enter method) were separately conducted to identify the predictors of personality adjustment and personality growth in divorced adults. Age was entered first as a control variable. Age was controlled since not all adults experience divorce at the same age and at the same time, and some age-related variability in the saliency in personality-related indicators is expected, as demonstrated by previous research (Costa et al., 2019; Jebb et al., 2020; Springer et al., 2011).

Sociodemographic characteristics were entered in the second step. Step 3 was composed of divorce characteristics: time since divorce, type of divorce and divorce initiator status. Structural and process-related indicators of personality adjustment and personality growth were entered separately in the fourth step to predict life satisfaction and personal growth, respectively. For analytic purposes, gender was coded as 0 (male) and 1 (female), current new intimate relationship status as 0 (with no current new intimate relationship) and 1 (with current new intimate relationship) and type of divorce as 0 (litigious divorce) and 1 (divorce by mutual consent). Finally, divorce initiator status was coded as 0 (non-initiator/mutually initiator) and 1 (divorce initiator) since past research found no differences between non-initiators and mutually initiators on some indicators of adjustment to an intimate relationship dissolution (Sander et al., 2020).

Before implementing the analyses, the assumptions for hierarchical linear regressions were checked for each model: univariate and multivariate outliers, normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, collinearity, multicollinearity and independence of errors. The normality of the residuals was tested with the Shapiro–Wilk's test (normality indicated if $p > .05$) and a visual inspection of normal Q–Q plots. Linearity and homoscedasticity were examined by visual inspection of the scatter plot of absolute standardized residuals by standardized predicted values. Collinearity was verified using the partial correlation matrix between independent variables (desirable correlation coefficient between variables lower than .80). Multicollinearity assumption was met if the variance inflation factor (VIF) was less than 10 and the tolerance value (TV) was greater than .10. Finally, the Durbin–Watson test was conducted to assess autocorrelation among the residuals of linear regression analysis (desired values between 1.5 and 2.5). For the model of life satisfaction, no outliers were found in the data set. The Shapiro–Wilk test result revealed that the residuals were normally distributed (Shapiro–Wilk test statistic = 0.094, $p = .087$). The visual inspection of the scatter plot indicated that linearity and

homoscedasticity were met. The fact that correlation coefficients between variables were lower than .80, VIF values were between 1.00 and 3.1 and TVs between 0.27 and 0.98 showed that the collinearity and multicollinearity were also met. Finally, the value of the Durbin–Watson test was 2.01, implying the absence of self-association between the residuals. No outliers were found for the personal growth model in the data set. The Shapiro–Wilk test result revealed that the residuals were normally distributed (Shapiro–Wilk test statistic = 0.995, $p = .163$). The visual inspection of the scatter plot indicated that linearity and homoscedasticity were met. The fact that correlation coefficients between variables were lower than .80, VIF values were between 1.00 and 1.60, and TVs between 0.62 and 0.97 showed that the collinearity and multicollinearity were also met. Finally, the value of the Durbin–Watson test was 2.12; thus, there was no evidence of autocorrelation among the residuals. Lastly, we conducted a series of Welch's independent samples t-tests/ANOVAs to examine group differences in life satisfaction and personal growth based on gender, and divorce-related variables entered in the regression models. We selected Welch's statistics to perform group comparisons due to unequal group sizes (Delacre et al., 2017).

3 | RESULTS

3.1 | Preliminary analyses

Correlation analyses showed that life satisfaction and personal growth scores globally associated with all structural and process-related personality adjustment and growth indicators correlated with each other (Table 1).

3.2 | Life satisfaction

Step 1 did not account for the variance in life satisfaction, $F(1, 459) = 0.50$, ns (Table 2). Results for Step 2 indicated that this model significantly explained variance in LS ($R^2 = .141$, $p < .001$), with gender, number of children and having a new intimate relationship being the most significant predictors of life satisfaction. The variables entered in Step 3 did not significantly improve the explained variance of life satisfaction. However, time since divorce was a significant predictor of life satisfaction in this step. Finally, results for Step 4 indicated all entered variables predicted life satisfaction except the Positive relations scale of the PWBS. Self-acceptance, divorce-related negative affect balance and environmental mastery were the best predictors of life satisfaction. Personality-related indicators of personality adjustment entered in Step 4 predicted life satisfaction, with a significant improvement in fit over Step 3, $\Delta F(7, 444) = 95.58$, $p < .001$. Step 4 accounted for additional variance in life satisfaction beyond that accounted for by the Step 3 ($R^2 = .66$, $\Delta R^2 = .51$).

Subsequent group comparisons indicated that life satisfaction was significantly associated with gender, Welch's $t_{241.84} = 14.38$, $p < .001$, and current new intimate relationship status, Welch's

TABLE 1 Descriptive statistics and correlation matrixes for dependent variables and personality development indicators

Variable	M	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
Dependent variable: Life satisfaction									
1. Life satisfaction	22.45	7.13	–						
2. Autonomy	33.61	5.65	.32	–					
3. Positive relations	31.76	5.42	.49	.35	–				
4. Environmental mastery	30.20	5.60	.61	.40	.57	–			
5. Self-acceptance	31.48	7.24	.73	.53	.63	.70	–		
6. Divorce-related negative affect	22.03	9.72	−.59	−.39	−.42	−.51	−.63	–	
7. Emotional attachment to ex-spouse	13.50	7.02	−.29	−.31	−.12	−.23	−.36	.68	–
8. Motivation for adjustment goals	43.37	7.68	.30	.19	.17	.17	.32	−.17	−.15
Dependent variable: Personal growth									
1. Personal growth	35.51	4.97	–						
2. Purpose in life	31.89	6.27	.65	–					
3. Divorce-related self-expansion	10.77	3.38	.22	.10	–				
4. Psychological mindedness	10.83	2.43	.32	.35	.10	–			
5. Motivation for personality growth goals	32.74	7.94	.32	.11	.28	.04	–		

Note: For the life satisfaction correlation matrix, all correlations were significant at .001, except the value −.12 (significant at .01). For the personal growth correlation matrix, correlations ≤.4 were not significant, correlations between .10 and .11 were significant at .01, and correlations ≥.22 were significant at .001.

$t_{232.31} = 12.36$, $p < .001$, with women ($M = 23.22$, $SD = 7.08$) and participants with a current intimate relationship ($M = 24.30$, $SD = 7.14$) reporting higher levels of life satisfaction than men ($M = 20.49$, $SD = 6.90$) and participants with no current relationship ($M = 21.72$, $SD = 7.00$), respectively. However, no group differences were found in life satisfaction related to the type of divorce, Welch's $t_{46.73} = 0.406$, $p = .53$, and divorce initiator status, Welch's $t_{424.62} = 3.733$, $p = .06$.

3.3 | Personal growth

Table 3 shows the results of the hierarchical regression model. Step 1 did not account for the variance in personal growth, $F(1, 459) = 0.88$, *ns*. The sociodemographic characteristics entered in Step 2 accounted for 8.8% of the variance in personal growth. Gender, education and a new intimate relationship emerged as significant predictors of personal growth. Divorce characteristics entered in Step 3 failed to improve the explained variance in personal growth, $\Delta F(3, 451) = 0.68$, *ns*. The final significant step in the model (i.e., Step 4) accounted for 43% of the variance in personal growth. Purpose in life and motivation for personality growth goals were the personality-related indicators most strongly related to personal growth. The final regression model accounted for 53% of the variance of personal growth.

Subsequent group comparisons indicated that personal growth was significantly associated with gender, Welch's $t_{189.77} = 17.31$, $p < .001$, and current new intimate relationship status, Welch's $t_{265.16} = 5.88$, $p < .05$, with women ($M = 36.18$, $SD = 4.42$) and participants with a current intimate relationship ($M = 36.35$, $SD = 4.52$)

reporting higher levels of personal growth than men ($M = 33.82$, $SD = 5.84$) and participants without current relationship ($M = 35.18$, $SD = 5.11$), respectively. However, no group differences were found in personal growth related to the type of divorce, Welch's $t_{45.73} = 0.36$, $p = .85$, and divorce initiator status, Welch's $t_{407.622} = 0.048$, $p = .83$.

4 | DISCUSSION

Two independent models comprising sociodemographic characteristics, divorce-related variables and personality-related indicators were tested to predict life satisfaction and personal growth, conceptualized in the current study as subjective criteria of positive personality adjustment and growth (Staudinger & Bowen, 2010). Gender and current intimate relationship status emerged as sociodemographic predictors for personality adjustment and growth, with divorced women and participants with a new intimate relationship displaying higher levels of life satisfaction and personal growth. Higher reports of post-divorce life satisfaction in women may be associated with gender differences in the reaction to negative perceptions of marital quality during the marriage (Beam et al., 2018). Women less satisfied with their marriage are more likely to invest their efforts in repairing the marital relationship. However, they are more likely to dissolve the intimate relationship when those efforts are not reflected in improvements in marital quality (Lamela et al., 2020). As a result, women's life satisfaction declines may occur during the pre-divorce period, while men may suffer declines in life satisfaction after marital dissolution (Bourassa et al., 2015). Men's higher risk of engaging in unhealthy behaviours (e.g., smoking and alcohol consumption) to cope with divorce-related

TABLE 2 Hierarchical regression predicting life satisfaction

| Variable | B (SE) | 95% CI for B | | β | R^2 | ΔR^2 | F for ΔR^2 |
		LL	UL				
Step 1					.001	.001	0.503
Age	−0.29 (0.04)	−0.11	0.05	−.04			
Step 2					.141	.140	14.74***
Age	0.05 (0.04)	−0.03	0.14	.06			
Gender	3.58 (0.71)	2.18	4.98	.23***			
Education	0.17 (0.08)	0.02	0.32	.10*			
Income	0.00 (0.00)	.000	.001	.13***			
Number of children	−1.79 (0.40)	−2.58	−0.99	−.21***			
Current relationship status	2.83 (0.70)	1.49	4.20	.18***			
Step 3					.150	.010	1.70
Age	0.01 (0.05)	−0.08	0.11	.02			
Gender	3.16 (0.75)	1.70	4.63	.20***			
Education	0.18 (0.08)	0.03	0.32	.10*			
Income	0.00 (0.00)	0.00	0.01	.12**			
Number of children	−1.62 (0.41)	−2.43	−0.81	−.19***			
Current relationship status	2.17 (0.76)	0.68	3.67	.14**			
Time since divorce	0.01 (0.01)	0.00	0.02	.10*			
Type of divorce	0.83 (1.10)	−1.32	2.99	.03			
Divorce initiator status	0.60 (0.66)	−0.69	1.89	.04			
Step 4					.662	.511	95.58***
Age	−0.07 (0.03)	−0.13	−0.01	−.08*			
Gender	1.48 (0.49)	0.51	2.45	.09**			
Education	−0.07 (0.50)	−0.17	0.03	−.04			
Income	0.00 (0.00)	0.00	0.00	.11***			
Number of children	−0.89 (0.27)	−1.42	−0.35	−.11***			
Current relationship status	−0.05 (0.50)	−1.04	0.94	−.003			
Time since divorce	0.01 (0.00)	−0.00	.013	.05			
Type of divorce	1.45 (0.71)	0.06	2.85	.06*			
Divorce initiator status	−0.23 (0.44)	−1.10	0.64	−.02			
Autonomy	0.13 (0.04)	−0.04	0.65	−.10**			
Positive relations	0.03 (0.05)	0.13	0.50	.02			
Environmental mastery	0.17 (0.06)	0.28	0.41	.13**			
Self-acceptance	0.52 (0.05)	0.63	0.28	.53***			
Divorce-related negative affect	−0.18 (0.04)	−0.11	0.32	−.25***			
Emotional attachment to ex-spouse	0.09 (0.04)	0.18	0.42	.09*			
Motivation for personality adjustment goals	0.08 (0.03)	0.13	0.79	.08**			

Abbreviations: CI, confidence interval; LL, lower limit; UL, upper limit.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

stress may also contribute to additional reductions in men's evaluations of their life satisfaction during the post-divorce period. These results must be interpreted with caution since the contradictory pattern of findings regarding gender differences in post-divorce life satisfaction (Gustavson et al., 2012; Lucas, 2005; Næss et al., 2015). Data from recent longitudinal research have suggested that examining the interaction effect of gender with other sociodemographic characteristics may shed light on these opposing findings regarding a potential gender effect on life satisfaction (Leopold, 2018; Strizzi et al., 2022). For example, Leopold (2018) found that women reported higher life

TABLE 3 Hierarchical regression predicting personal growth

Variable	B (SE)	95% CI for β		β	R^2	ΔR^2	F for ΔR^2
		LL	UL				
Step 1					.002	.002	0.88
Age	−0.27 (0.03)			−.04			
Step 2					.088	.086	8.59***
Age	−0.01 (1.58)	−0.07	0.05	−.02			
Gender	2.62 (0.51)	1.61	3.62	.24***			
Education	0.17 (0.05)	0.07	0.28	.15**			
Income	0.00 (0.00)	0.00	0.00	.04			
Number of children	−0.10 (0.26)	−0.64	0.49	−0.01			
Current relationship status	1.55 (0.50)	0.56	2.53	.14**			
Step 3					.092	.004	0.68
Age	−0.01 (0.03)	−0.07	0.07	−.003			
Gender	2.84 (0.54)	1.78	3.84	.25***			
Education	0.17 (0.05)	0.06	0.28	.14**			
Income	0.00 (0.00)	0.00	0.00	.05			
Number of children	−0.07 (0.30)	−0.65	0.52	−.01			
Current relationship status	1.74 (0.55)	0.67	2.83	.16**			
Time since divorce	−0.002 (0.004)	−0.01	0.01	−.03			
Type of divorce	0.06 (0.79)	−1.48	1.61	.004			
Divorce initiator status	−0.63 (0.47)	−1.56	0.30	−.06			
Step 4					.525	.433	101.69***
Age	0.01 (0.03)	−0.04	0.06	.02			
Gender	1.31 (0.40)	0.52	2.10	.12***			
Education	0.04 (0.04)	−0.04	0.12	.04			
Income	0.00 (0.00)	0.00	0.00	.06			
Number of children	−0.08 (0.22)	−0.51	0.35	−.01			
Current relationship status	0.46 (0.40)	−0.34	1.25	.04			
Time since divorce	−0.01 (0.00)	−0.02	−.002	−.11**			
Type of divorce	−0.35 (0.58)	−1.48	0.78	−.02			
Divorce initiator status	−0.79 (0.36)	−1.49	−0.09	−.08*			
Purpose in life	0.46 (0.03)	0.50	0.51	.58***			
Divorce-related self-expansion	0.15 (0.05)	0.04	0.26	.10**			
Psychological mindedness	0.21 (0.07)	0.06	0.35	.10**			
Motivation for personality growth goals	0.13 (0.02)	0.08	0.17	.20***			

Abbreviations: CI, confidence interval; LL, lower limit; UL, upper limit.
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

satisfaction immediately after divorce, but adaptation to post-divorce developmental tasks alleviated gender differences in life satisfaction over time, with no differences between women and men in medium and long-term life satisfaction.

On the other hand, our findings corroborate prior research that showed that engaging in a new intimate relationship after divorce is associated with an additional increase in subjective well-being (Gloor et al., 2021; Lucas, 2005). In terms of personality adjustment, a new intimate relationship may reflect the reduction of stressors that may make difficult the successful adaptation to divorce (e.g., formation of

a new attachment relationship, increase of available financial resources and extension of the social network). A new intimate relationship may provide a higher sense of personal security, and as a threshold-level of personality, adjustment is achieved more rapidly (a *precondition* to engaging in initiatives of personality growth, according to Staudinger's model), and more available resources to invest in personality growth. This finding is consistent with Marks et al. (2004) found that midlife remarried women were those who significantly reported more generativity (also a personality-related indicator of personality growth) than their first-married and divorced counterparts.

The number of children emerged additionally as a negative predictor of personality adjustment. As personality adjustment is contingent on the ability to master contextual constraints and challenges generated by the divorce process, it is not surprising that their life satisfaction decreases as more children individuals have (Perrig-Chiello et al., 2015). Having children might cause more financial hardship, and parenting can be distressing since it requires a cooperative co-parenting relationship with the ex-spouse that can negatively influence the subjective perception of life satisfaction (Lamela et al., 2014; van Winkle & Leopold, 2021). On the other hand, education was found as a positive predictor of personal growth, showing that the ability to reflect more deeply about oneself and the world may entail more pragmatic knowledge and more complex cognitive skills that are more likely to be exhibited by individuals with more education (Curhan et al., 2014).

Interestingly, only the time since divorce emerged as a predictor of life satisfaction, with a positive association between time since the divorce and life satisfaction. This finding is corroborated by prior theoretical proposals that posit that divorce is a process transition that requires the fulfilment of developmental tasks to achieve satisfactory to optimal levels of subjective well-being (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). In this sense, time is a central variable in performing these post-divorce-related tasks. Prior longitudinal and cross-sectional studies have also shown increases in life satisfaction as a function of time since the legal act of divorce (Bowen & Jensen, 2017; Luhmann et al., 2012). Surprisingly, time since divorce was no longer a significant predictor of life satisfaction when personality-related indicators were entered into the model. However, the type of divorce emerged as a significant predictor of life satisfaction; this suggests that divorce by mutual consent may reflect lower levels of conflict and a more positive relationship with the ex-spouse that in turn contribute to lower divorced-related negative affect and a greater sense of environmental mastery that may have a cumulative positive impact on life satisfaction.

Divorce-related variables were not significantly associated with personal growth when entered into the model which is consistent with previous studies showing no links between personal growth and these divorce-related variables (Damo & Cenci, 2021; Marshall et al., 2013; Tashiro & Frazier, 2003). However, time since divorce and divorce initiator status emerged as predictors of personal growth but only when personality-related indicators were entered in the final model. These results suggest that divorce non-initiator status and the environmental instability that characterizes the immediate period after divorce may interact with personality-related indicators to create opportunities for personal growth (Ryff, 2014b; Staudinger & Bowen, 2010). Non-initiator adults report more severe mental health symptoms and adjustment difficulties than initiators (Sander et al., 2020). Thus, non-initiators may perceive the post-divorce period (and especially the immediate period after the dissolution) as more uncertain and less controllable and predictable. Adults' efforts to manage this stressful environment may produce higher levels of tolerance of ambiguity and more opportunities for cognitive insight into oneself, others and the world, which are two core facets that characterize personality growth (Law & Staudinger, 2016).

Self-acceptance and absence of negative affect were the individual personality-related indicators that best predicted life satisfaction. In contrast, purpose in life and motivation for personality growth emerged as the most individual predictors of personal growth. Considering personality adjustment, these findings suggest that the positive integration of good and bad aspects of the self in divorce may be relevant to marital dissolution's positive transition. The coherent acceptance of the divorce process and the construction of post-marriage identity have been postulated as the primary developmental tasks raised by divorce (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Therefore, it is not surprising that these two indicators emerged as the main individual predictors of life satisfaction. First, previous research with samples with different demographic characteristics has found the same associations (Kulik & Heine-Cohen, 2011). Second, as self-acceptance was strongly negatively correlated with negative affect, it is plausible to hypothesize that a positive attitude and acceptance toward oneself, as well as self-trust on own ability to manage life demands, may contribute to adults, on the one hand, to assess divorce and divorce-related life changes as less threatening and distress and, on the other hand, to evaluate the self as able to assimilate, buffer and cope positively with such changes, to reduce divorce-related negative affect and, this way, improving self-judgements of life satisfaction. However, given the cross-sectional nature of the current data set, no causal association can be undertaken, and this interpretation should be read carefully.

Purpose in life and motivation for personality growth goals were performed as the main individual predictors of personal growth. Having in mind that participants were asked whether the divorce process triggered personal growth initiatives, these results suggest that a strong motivation to achieve 'goals aiming for heightened conceptual knowledge of self, others, and relationships' (Bauer & McAdams, 2010, p. 763) may serve as a direct path to a greater general sense of self-improvement, self-development and self-knowledge, as well as the openness to new experiences in consequence of divorce. Similarly, the positive association between purpose in life and personal growth may indicate that divorce is a powerful life event that can trigger a more profound ability to identify valuable and meaningful life goals perceived as potentially achievable. Interestingly, these two main individual predictors of personal growth display different levels of the nature of personal growth triggered by divorce since purpose in life measures the extent to which individuals explicitly orientate (i.e., *structure*) their initiatives of personal growth and their efforts to understand, provide significance, meaning and directedness to their lives, while the motivation for personality growth goals reveals whether the *content* of goals reflects intentional efforts to pursue personal growth (Bauer et al., 2019; Bauer & McAdams, 2004). The relationship between purpose in life and personal growth was expected since previous findings have shown a moderate positive correlation between these two scales of the PWBS (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Teas et al., 2022). The predictive value of purpose of life in personal growth should be cautiously interpreted as both constructs were measured using the PWBS. Although these two constructs are conceptually distinct, future research should replicate these findings by applying different measurement tools of purpose in life and personal growth.

Several limitations of the present research warrant discussion. First, the cross-sectional design does not allow establishing causal inferences from statistical associations. Second, the sample was over-represented by female participants. Future research should seek to replicate these findings in more representative samples in terms of gender. Third, some participants showed a significant variation in sociodemographic characteristics (e.g., income and time since the divorce). Finally, purpose in life and personal growth were measured using scales of the PWBS (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Despite the purpose in life and personal growth being conceptualized as distinct constructs, the selection of other non-related self-report measures to measure these constructs could have contributed to controlling possible shared method variance.

Despite these limitations, this study extends the literature by providing empirical evidence to Staudinger's model of PPD. Our findings suggest that personality-related constructs substantially explain the variance in life satisfaction and personal growth after divorce. Examining whether personality-related indicators interact to generate specific post-divorce life satisfaction and personal growth profiles and whether that interactive approach could be extended to other life events will be interesting questions for future research. Longitudinal investigations should also expand our results by identifying divorced adults' pathways of PPD. Particular attention should be given to examining potential variations in life satisfaction and personal growth among divorced adults and the possible explicative mechanisms of such variations. Staudinger's model of PPD could also inform future research regarding the impact of life events on human adaptation by examining life satisfaction and personal in adults with different marital statuses and testing how transitions in the marital status effects personality adjustment and personality growth across lifespan.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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