THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF DIVORCE FOR CATHOLIC WOMEN

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A dissertation to fulfill the requirements for a

DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY IN COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY

at

Northwest University

2018

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November 19, 2018

Abstract

According to Catholic teaching, marriage is permanent and divorce is not an option. The nine Catholic women in this phenomenological study experienced divorce despite their beliefs in the indissolubility of marriage and their efforts to stay married. Grounded in both cognitive and sanctification theories, this research included an exploration of the cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and behavioral experience of divorce related to spiritual trauma, religious coping, and transformational pathways. Two main goals of this study were to gain an understanding of the lived experience of divorce for Catholic women and to explore religious coping strategies, such as, annulment, which is uniquely Catholic. Methods included semi-structured interviews, a questionnaire on frequency of Catholic practices, Brief Religious Coping Scale (Brief RCOPE), and Sacred Loss and Desecration Scale (SLDS). Most of the women in this study experienced spiritual trauma in relation to their divorce. They all engaged in uniquely Catholic religious coping strategies (e.g., confession and Communion), as well as, a variety of others, which demonstrated the complexity and individuality of religious practices even within a well-defined religious group. Some of the women temporarily disengaged from religion after divorce but most turned toward spiritual practices. Some of the women completed an annulment, in which a Church tribunal declared their marriage invalid from the beginning. They found the process to be both difficult and healing. For them, annulment was an instrumental pathway toward acceptance of their civil divorce and hope for the future. However, annulments were underutilized and often misunderstood by the other women in the study. All of the women received counseling at some point either during their marital struggles or after divorce. Some of the women sought counselors who could

integrate spirituality in therapy and others did not. The majority of the women reported that spirituality was not addressed in counseling.

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Chapter One

People often turn to religion in times of trouble (Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez, 1998). Yet, when it comes to divorce, religious beliefs about the sacredness and permanence of marriage (see Appendix A) can lead to further feelings of distress for women of faith. Thoughts may arise in the form of spiritual struggles, such as, "Is my divorce a sin?" or "Is God going to abandon me too?" (Exline & Rose, 2013). Thus, the experience of divorce for Catholic women may include symptoms of psychological distress and depression commonly associated with divorce (Lowenstein, 2005), as well as, spiritual struggles that feel disorienting (Pargament, 2010). For instance, those who derive a strong sense of identity from their affiliation with the Church (see Appendix A) may feel that they no longer belong in the same way to their Catholic community as when they were married (Jenks & Woolever, 1999). Coping strategies to deal with spiritual struggles associated with divorce include efforts to make sense of the experience, seek comfort, or to connect with God and others (Exline & Rose, 2013). In due course, engaging in positive or negative religious coping strategies are likely to have an impact on adjustment following divorce and can lead to either spiritual growth or spiritual disengagement (Pargament, 2010; Park, 2013).

From a cognitive theory perspective, a person's religious beliefs about divorce and the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors associated with it, can be a critical focus for therapy (Beck, 2005; Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emery, 1979). Cognitive theory is based on the premise that thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are affected by basic schema or core beliefs (Beck, 2005; Beck et al., 1979). According to Beck et al. (1979), core beliefs commonly develop in childhood and involve basic assumptions and attitudes about

oneself, others, and the world. Cognitive therapists help clients recognize automatic thoughts that stem from core beliefs, and the connection between automatic thoughts with feelings and behaviors (Beck, 2005; Beck et al., 1979). For instance, a core belief that dogs are dangerous can result in an automatic thought "bad dog" when a dog approaches. This thought is likely to be accompanied by fearful feelings and avoidant behaviors. On the other hand, a core belief that dogs are friendly can lead to "good dog" thoughts, happy feelings, and approach behaviors. In a similar way, sacred beliefs, and underlying cognitive assumptions and attitudes related to them, tend to influence a person's choice of avoidant or approach coping strategies related to religious or spiritual practices (Exline & Rose, 2013; Pargament, 2010; Park, 2013).

A basic assumption of this study was that divorced Catholic women were likely to experience a religious struggle, namely, the struggle to reconcile a core belief in the ideal of marriage as permanent with the reality of their divorce. According to Pargament and Mahoney's (2005) sanctification theory, a person's spiritual journey or "search for the sacred" inevitably involves a religious struggle. The struggle includes a transformational process in which a person will engage in various coping strategies, either positive or negative, that result in modified, solidified, or shattered sacred beliefs.

In this phenomenological research study, the lived experience of divorce of nine Catholic women was explored with both cognitive and sanctification theories in mind. The purpose of this study was to fill a gap in the research on spiritual struggles related to divorce for Catholic women. Underlying cognitive processes were highlighted with regard to the ways Catholic women perceive marriage, divorce, and annulment (see

Appendix A). A summary of the current understanding of psychology and religion was also included with regard to spiritual trauma, spiritual struggle, and spiritual coping.

The intention of this qualitative research study was to add to the body of research on psychology and religion. The use of qualitative, phenomenological methods to explore the lived experience of divorce for Catholic women supported the discovery of underlying cognitive and spiritual processes. The emerging methods approach of this study provided the context in which to explore positive and negative spiritual coping strategies of Catholic women, as evidenced, in part, by their decision to either approach or avoid religious involvement after a divorce.

Literature Review

Religion plays an integral role in the coping process for many people who are struggling with significant stressors or life changing events (Harris et al., 2008; Koenig, King, & Carson, 2012; Krumrei, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2011; Paloutzian & Park, 2013; Pargament, 2010; Schuster et al., 2001). Yet, until recently, religion and spirituality have been largely ignored in the field of psychology. The shortage of research on the subject may be due, in part, to the influence of early psychologists such as Freud (1928/1927), who viewed religion as an illusion to deal with anxiety. According to Freud (1928/1927), religion is merely a mechanism to satisfy longings for a father, a need for protection, and a defense against helplessness. John B. Watson (1878-1958), known as the founder of behaviorism, was an outspoken atheist (Kimble, Wertheimer, & White, 1991), as were Raymond Cattell, Melanie Klein, Hans Eysenck (Martin, 2007), and Albert Ellis (Nielsen & Ellis, 1994). The lack of research on religion and spirituality may also reflect a disinterest of psychologists who tend to be less religious than the general population in

the United States. In a recent survey, only 24% of psychologists said they believe in God, while more than 90% of the population in the United States consider themselves to be believers (Shafranske, 2001).

Over the past three decades much has changed. Researchers have begun to explore links between religiosity and health (Koenig et al., 2012; Paloutzian & Park, 2013; Pargament, 1997; Pargament, 2010) and have discovered some positive correlations (George, Larson, Koenig, & McCullough, 2000; Koenig, 1997; Larson et al., 1992; Poloma & Pendleton, 1990). For instance, studies have shown that turning to religion can be beneficial for people suffering from physical illness (Levin & Schiller, 1987); chronic pain (Greene Bush et al., 1999; Rippentrop, Altmaier, Chen, Found, & Keffala, 2005); and significant negative life events (Pargament et al., 1990). Religiosity is also linked with mental health benefits, such as, less depression, suicidal thoughts (Exline, Yali, & Sanderson, 2000), and substance abuse (Al-Omari, Hamed, & Abu Tariah, 2015; Pardini, Plante, Sherman, & Stump, 2000).

Empirical research studies have shown that people reported significantly more positive than negative religious coping styles (Pargament, Feuille, & Burdzy, 2011). Positive religious coping is often associated with posttraumatic growth and adjustment (Pargament et al., 2005). Negative religious coping, even though it is less prevalent, is an area of concern since it has been linked to psychological distress, such as, depression and suicide (Exline et al., 2000), as well as "poorer quality of life and greater callousness toward other people" (Pargament et al., 2011, p. 87).

In a review of 850 studies published in the last century, Moreira-Almeida, Lotufo Neto, and Koenig (2006) found that religious involvement is generally associated with

positive cognitive processes that enhance resilience and generate purpose (Moreira-Almeida et al., 2006). Forgiveness, which is often associated with religion, may be an important cognitive process in healthy adjustment after divorce. For instance, in a study of 135 separated or divorced parents who attended a brief seminar on forgiveness, researchers found a strong positive correlation between forgiveness and good quality of co-parenting after divorce ($r=.53$, $p<.001$; Bonach & Sales, 2002). In another study of 199 divorced individuals recruited from church-based divorce recovery and other community singles groups, researchers found links between forgiveness of an ex-spouse and healthy adjustment after divorce (Rye, Folck, Heim, Olszewski, & Traina, 2004). In this study, forgiveness was positively correlated with both existential and religious well-being and negatively correlated with depression and anger. Rye et al. (2004) did not find any differences between Protestant and Catholic participants with regard to the perceived importance of forgiveness. Another researcher conducted three separate studies and found positive associations between forgiveness and health measures in older adults (Lawler-Row, 2010).

Participants in studies of religion and psychological well-being generally report receiving more comfort than strain from their religious beliefs (Exline et al., 2000; Harris et al., 2008; Pargament et al., 1998). However, religiosity can also lead to feelings of guilt and negative obsessive thoughts (Hale & Clark, 2013). Thus, it would not be accurate to assume religiosity is always helpful. In addition, when it comes to divorce, religious institutions tend to lack the framework and context to assist individuals undergoing a rupture of their marriage (Mahoney, Krumrei, & Pargament, 2008). "Religious institutions offer divorcing individuals little in the way of spiritual teachings,

scriptural stories, or rituals that could facilitate effective spiritual coping responses with this painful transition" (Mahoney et al., 2008, p. 106). In a survey conducted by Smith and Smith (2000), parishioners from three religious institutions in the New York City area indicated that their church did not provide sufficient support or assistance to help individuals and families cope with divorce. Yet, Greeff and Merwe (2004) found that 51% of individuals from 98 divorced families identified faith as an important resource. Blomquist (1985) and Nathanson (1995) also found spirituality assisted in post-divorce adjustment and growth. Hence, individuals may to turn to their faith to cope with their divorce, although they tend not to receive suitable assistance from religious institutions.

In an article entitled "The Divorced Catholics Movement," Reverend James J. Young, C.S.P. (1978) encouraged priests and parishioners to respond more sympathetically to the needs of individuals when they experience divorce. In the same article, he also affirmed the strong values of the Church regarding marriage (Young, 1978). Thus, nearly four decades ago he endorsed concepts that have yet to be realized, namely that the Church find a way to embrace and support those who divorce, while at the same time uphold the sanctity of life long marriage. The annulment process, in which a divorced person can petition the Church to declare that the marriage was invalid from the beginning, may be a step toward achieving this dichotomous goal.

The Meaning of Catholic Marriage

To understand the meaning of divorce and annulment to a Catholic woman, it is important to first understand the meaning of marriage from a Catholic perspective. The marriage vows create a *covenant*, or a family, as opposed to a *contract* that can be dissolved if one or both parties decide to do so. Marriage is an unbreakable bond and a

symbol of Christ and the Church (Kippley, 1994). Saint Paul quoted the Old Testament and Jesus when he claimed, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh . . . This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:31-32, Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition [RSVCE]). Thus, marriage is meant to be permanent and a reflection of Christ's relationship with the Church. Catholics are called to walk together with Jesus in their marriage, imitating his many acts of love, healing, and forgiveness (Wuerl, 2015).

According to Kippley (1994), Catholic marriage is a vocation (i.e., a calling from God) and a special type of Christian discipleship for the express purpose of helping each other achieve eternal life in heaven. After the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s, Pope Paul VI (1965) proclaimed that God created marriage for the perfection of the spouses and the procreation of children (n. 48; Kippley, 1994). From this perspective, God's grace is available to the spouses, by way of the Sacrament of Marriage, to help them overcome selfishness and grow in holiness (Wuerl, 2015). In other words, the blessings received on the wedding day are perpetuated over the course of the marriage in the form of promptings from the Holy Spirit that motivate the spouses to make sacrifices for the benefit of the family. With God's help, they become truly patient, kind, and thoughtful, which enhances the marriage experience and promotes both spiritual and emotional growth (Kippley, 1994).

The Catholic meaning of marriage is communicated to the couple both formally and informally in the wedding preparation and ceremony (Duba & Ponton, 2012). Formally, the couple engages in pre-marital classes at their local parish where the

teachings of the Church about marriage are interwoven into discussions about their future life together. In addition, the wedding ceremony, which is officially known as the Rite of Marriage, emphasizes the indissolubility of marriage with the reading of Bible passages, such as "a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24, RSVCE) and "what therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder" (Matt. 19:6, RSVCE).

Indissolubility refers to an unbreakable marital bond. According to Catholic teaching, marital indissolubility is the plan of a loving creator and not simply a rule of the Church (Kippley, 1994). Pope Pius XI (1930) outlined five benefits of indissoluble marriage including: (a) both spouses enjoy a guarantee of stability, (b) it sets up a defense against infidelity knowing you have to face your spouse with the truth of your actions, (c) it is a pledge to grow old together, (d) it provides for consistent education of the children, and (e) it benefits society by providing a foundation for security and prosperity.

Along with the reading of Scriptural passages that emphasize the indissolubility of marriage, the meaning of Catholic marriage is further transmitted to the couple during the wedding ceremony (Duba & Ponton, 2012). For instance, a Catholic wedding is never celebrated on a beach or in an orchard. The Rite of Marriage only takes place in a Catholic Church before the altar, and includes, among other symbolic elements, the wedding vows, Eucharist (see Appendix A), and a nuptial blessing. Best understood in the context of Scripture, the altar signifies Christ's sacrificial love to "walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us" (Eph. 5:2, RSVCE). The vows involve the giving and receiving of consent that bind the couple in the Sacrament of Marriage. Marriage is deemed sacred because it was instituted by God in Genesis 2:24 (RSVCE),

when He said, "a man . . . cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh," and elevated to a sacrament in Matthew 19:6 (RSVCE) when Jesus said, "what therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder." After the vows, the couple receives the Eucharist, commonly known as Holy Communion or the Body and Blood of Christ in the appearance of bread and wine. According to Catholic teaching, the Eucharist is the Real Presence of Jesus. It commemorates Jesus' sacrifice and His love for mankind. It is a precious, sacred gift and those who receive it are united to Jesus in a special way.

Finally, the couple receives the nuptial blessing, which is a blessing over the marriage with the priest acting *in persona Christi*, in the person of Christ, as a witness to the union. During the nuptial blessing, the priest and the couple ask the Holy Spirit to seal and strengthen the couple's marital commitment. The altar, the Scripture passages, the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, and the nuptial blessing are all sacred elements that add to the gravity of the marital commitment on the wedding day and are likely to echo back when a couple is struggling in their relationship and contemplating divorce.

Spirituality Versus Religiosity

For the purposes of this paper, Pargament's (1997) definition of spirituality as "the search for the sacred" (p. 12) and his broad view of spirituality as a key function of religion provided the framework for this study. Some researchers have proposed that religiosity should be differentiated from spirituality by suggesting that religion represents institutional and rigid practices, whereas spirituality is more personal and life-enhancing (Elkins, 1995). However, traditionally, researchers did not distinguish between the two (Pargament & Mahoney, 2011). Pargament and Mahoney (2011) suggested that distinctions, such as these, tend to misrepresent the complexity of religion and spirituality

since both constructs "can be expressed individually and socially, and both have the capacity to foster or impede well-being" (p. 612). Therefore, in this paper, the terms religion and spirituality will be used interchangeably.

Spiritual Trauma: Sacred Loss and Desecration

To differentiate spiritual trauma from other forms of trauma, the American Psychiatric Association (2013) defined a traumatic stressor as "an event that may cause or threaten death, serious injury, or sexual violence to an individual, a close family member, or a close friend" (p. 830), whereas a spiritual trauma is defined as a negative spiritual experience associated with an unpredicted and devastating stressful event (Mahoney et al., 2008). For instance, divorce for Catholics is likely to be experienced as a spiritual trauma since Catholic marriage is expressly indissoluble, making the breakup an unpredicted and devastating stressful event. According to Young (1978), divorce is a "wrenching experience" that goes beyond breaking the rules of Christian marriage. It defies one's fundamental value system regarding trust and commitment and it threatens elementary aspects of one's religious identity (Young, 1978).

Mahoney et al. (2008) identified two facets of spiritual trauma as (a) sacred loss (e.g., a loss of something sacred like a marriage or a lost connection with God), and (b) desecration (e.g., a purposeful violation of something sacred as in the case of infidelity). The "wrenching experience" of divorce is likely to be viewed as a sacred loss or desecration, as evidenced in a study of 100 divorcees conducted by Krumrei, Mahoney, and Pargament (2009). Krumrei et al. (2009) found that "most appraised their divorce as a sacred loss or desecration (74%), experienced spiritual struggles (78%), and engaged in adaptive spiritual coping (88%)" (p. 373). Participants who experienced sacred loss or

desecration and spiritual struggles also tended to struggle with higher levels of depression, whereas positive spiritual coping (e.g., secure, connected, and meaningful spiritual practices) was associated with greater posttraumatic growth that could not be explained by other nonspiritual forms of coping (Krumrei et al., 2009).

Janoff-Bulman (1989) studied trauma related to disability late in life and found that trauma can shatter an individual's worldview, particularly when it comes to assumptions about benevolence, justice, and self-worth. Sacred beliefs encompass such concepts and are a critical aspect of an individual's worldview (Pargament, Magyar, Benore, & Mahoney, 2005). Along these lines, Pargament et al. (2005) claimed that sanctified objects also tend to provide people with a sense of identity, stability, and consistency, and can be a source of comfort during difficult times. There are four aspects of the theory of sanctification worth noting including: (a) people invest more in sanctified objects, (b) people tend to protect and preserve sanctified objects, (c) people find greater satisfaction in sanctified ventures, and (d) people suffer more from the loss or desecration of sanctified objects (Pargament & Mahoney, 2011).

In a study of 97 couples, Mahoney et al. (1999) discovered that husbands and wives who perceived greater sanctification of their marriage also experienced greater global marital satisfaction and individual benefits from the marriage. Conversely, individuals are likely to suffer deep psychological and spiritual pain when something sacred is lost or violated (Doehring, 1993; Pargament et al., 2005). In a study of 117 adults, Pargament et al. (2005) found that sacred loss was more likely to elicit sadness than those who experienced a desecration. Sacred loss was also associated with self-

reflection and a sense of healing and growth despite the pain involved in the spiritual struggle and transformation process (Pargament et al., 2005).

On the other hand, participants who perceived their negative experience as a violation or desecration were more likely to experience anger and avoidance than those who identified sacred losses (Pargament at al., 2005). Interestingly, those who experienced a desecration also missed less days of work, which suggested to the authors that these participants shifted their focus away from the trauma toward work in an attempt to manage their lives (Pargament et al., 2005). However, unlike sacred loss, these participants did not appear to experience the benefits of posttraumatic growth (Pargament et al., 2005). The authors proposed that violations of sacred beliefs might utterly shatter a person's most fundamental assumptions about benevolence, justice, and self-worth (Janoff-Bulman, 1989) and, in turn, inhibit psychological and spiritual growth (Pargament et al., 2005).

Spirituality: The Search for the Sacred

Pargament's (1997) definition of spirituality as "the search for the sacred" involves the process of discovering sacred beliefs that continues throughout the life span. Within this definition, Pargament and Mahoney (2005) suggest that the "sacred" applies to a vast array of objects transformed by sanctification. Almost any person, place or thing can be sanctified, including a day of the week (e.g., the Sabbath), a piece of wood (e.g., a crucifix), or a marriage (e.g., Holy Matrimony). The "search" for the sacred is also limitless and unique to each individual. According to Pargament and Mahoney (2011), the search includes pathways of discovery, conservation, and transformation.

The process of *discovery* and wonder about the sacred begins in childhood (Robert Coles, 1990). Discovery of the sacred is often brought about by challenges that come with the realization of human limitations (Johnson, 1959) and is rooted in social learning from family, church institutions, and culture (Kirkpatrick, 2005).

Once a sacred object is discovered, a process of *conservation* ensues to sustain it. Conservation involves "developing, maintaining, and fostering their relationship with the sacred" (Pargament & Mahoney, 2011, p. 614) through pathways that could include traditional religious practices, such as attending Mass, or individualized ones, such as meditation or prayer. When something sacred is threatened or violated, people tend to turn to various religious coping strategies to conserve them (Pargament, 2010).

At such times when painful, heartbreaking events cause a person to question religious beliefs, a spiritual struggle may ensue leading to a process of *transformation* (Pargament & Mahoney, 2011). Pargament (2010) described two transformational pathways for processing religious struggles. One pathway ultimately leads to *integration* of beliefs after a period of disorientation and struggle. Beliefs that are integrated become stable, orienting influences that are maintained through conservation. Religion offers a variety of spiritual pathways to facilitate the process of change both individually and communally (e.g., spiritual conversion or rites of passage such as funerals; Paloutzian, 2005). In contrast, some attempts to resolve a spiritual struggle may yield unsatisfactory responses and can result in *disengagement* from the search for the sacred. Disengagement is most often temporary, which infers that the search often continues at a later time when a person is ready to reengage again, but it can also remain permanent (Pargament & Mahoney, 2011).

The difference between spiritual pathways that lead either toward integration or disengagement may be related to the breadth and depth of a person's engagement in the search for the sacred. Spirituality that is well integrated appears to lead toward positive psychological growth versus spirituality that is poorly integrated that tends to lead toward decline (Pargament & Mahoney, 2011). According to Pargament and Mahoney (2011),

> At its best, spirituality is marked by pathways that are broad and deep, responsive to life's situations, nurtured by the larger social context, capable of flexibility and continuity, and oriented toward a sacred destination that is large enough to encompass the full range of human potential and luminous enough to provide the individual with a powerful guiding vision. At its worst, spirituality is disintegrated defined by pathways that lack scope and depth, fail to meet the challenges and demands of life events, clash and collide with the surrounding social system, change and shift too easily or not at all, and misdirect the individual pursuit of spiritual value. (p. 615)

Posttraumatic Growth

Despite the distress associated with spiritual trauma, there are potential benefits of spiritual struggle and adaptive spiritual coping strategies including posttraumatic growth (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006; Groleau, Calhoun, Cann, & Tedeschi, 2013). Spiritual crisis can lead to spiritual growth in the form of increased devotion, modifying beliefs, or discarding beliefs (Exline & Rose, 2013). Thus far, the small number of studies on the association between spiritual struggle and posttraumatic growth has yielded inconclusive results (Exline & Rose, 2013). For instance, Pargament et al. (2005) found that even though sacred loss and desecration were linked to intrusive thoughts, depression, and

varying patterns of emotional distress, sacred loss was associated with more positive spiritual change and greater posttraumatic growth. On the other hand, sacred desecration was associated with greater anger and less posttraumatic growth.

In a study of 100 divorced adults, Krumrei et al. (2009) found that most participants experienced their divorce as a sacred loss or desecration (74%). They also discovered links between (a) spiritual struggles and depression and (b) posttraumatic growth and adaptive spiritual coping strategies. The authors mediated for nonspiritual methods of coping and found that spiritual struggles and adaptive spiritual coping contributed uniquely to adjustment after the divorce (Krumrei et al., 2009).

According to Simonič and Klobučar (2017), the problem solving aspects of religious coping can help mitigate the impacts of life-stressors such as divorce. In a phenomenological, qualitative study of eleven Catholic men and women who experienced divorce, Simonič and Klobučar (2017) found that it is important to be aware of religious and spiritual sources when planning psychosocial interventions to help regulate difficult emotions. For instance, positive forms of religious coping that predict well-being outcomes should be encouraged, while negative forms should be transformed (Simonič & Klobučar, 2017).

In a study of positive and negative religious coping strategies for dealing with major life stressors, Pargament et al. (1998) found links between positive religious coping and cooperativeness, stress-related growth and positive religious outcomes. Pargament et al. (1998) also found that negative religious coping was related to depression, lower quality of life, stress-related growth, and positive religious outcomes. Results are mixed

with some studies showing positive links between spiritual struggle and posttraumatic growth, while others found negative links or no links at all (Exline & Rose, 2013).

Catholic Marriage Annulment

The Church offers an annulment process that may provide a transformational pathway to restore beliefs in the permanence of marriage and lead to psychological and spiritual growth. This study explored the role that annulments play in the spiritual struggles of divorced Catholic women. As such, it would be good to clarify the Catholic Church's definition of annulment and under what conditions one could be civilly divorced and in good standing, with or without an annulment.

An annulment, officially known as a declaration of nullity (Catholic Church, 1983), is a judgment rendered by a Church tribunal declaring that the marriage in question was invalid from the beginning. The process includes an investigation of each spouse's decision to marry, state of mind on the wedding day, understanding of the vows, as well as related testimony from several witnesses. The annulment process is lengthy and cumbersome and it can take eighteen months or longer to complete. Unlike no fault divorce decrees, there is no guarantee an annulment will be approved. Similar to court proceedings, one spouse initiates the annulment process with a parish appointed advocate. That spouse acts as the petitioner while the other spouse takes on the role of the defendant. The defendant has the option to contribute testimony or decline to take part in the process all together. The petitioner, with the help of an advocate, submits the request for a declaration of nullity based on one or more grounds from a list of twenty options in *Code of Canon Law* (Catholic Church, 1983; see Appendix B).

Catholic couples are obliged to abide by canonical marriage laws of the Church in order to remain in good standing (i.e., free from mortal sin and, thus, permitted to receive the Eucharist; Kippley, 1994). They are not free to pick and choose which laws they will obey. According to canon law, remarriage is not an option for divorced Catholics without first obtaining an annulment (Catholic Church, 1983). In other words, a divorced spouse who remarries while his or her former spouse is still alive places both spouses in a state of mortal sin, as proclaimed by Jesus when he said, "Every one who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery" (Lk. 16:18, RSVCE). Mortal sins are grave offenses that are committed deliberately and with full knowledge (Catholic Church, 1997, para. 1857). Saint Paul included adultery in his list of grave offenses that prohibit a person from entering the Kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21, RSVCE).

The Church's prohibition on divorce and remarriage is a reflection of the teachings of Jesus and Saint Paul. The Church's provision of an annulment to declare that a marriage was invalid from the beginning provides an option for marriage for divorced Catholics while remaining true to these commands. Jesus granted authority to the Apostles to bind and loose sins (Matt. 18:18, RSVCE) and that authority has been passed down over the years through apostolic succession (i.e., laying of hands during priestly ordination and granted by a bishop). Thus, an annulment is required for remarried Catholics to be in good standing in the Church. However, an annulment is only required for divorced persons who wish to remarry. A civilly divorced person who is not remarried can remain in good standing and continue to receive Eucharist after attending the Sacrament of Reconciliation (i.e., confession with a priest).

Mark Gray (2013), senior research associate at Georgetown University and director of Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) Catholic Poll (CARA

Catholic Poll), reported that adult ever-married Catholics in the United States have the lowest divorce rate (28%) when compared to the total population of ever-married divorced adults (36%) and non-religious affiliated adults (42%) when using General Social Survey (GSS) data on divorce and religious affiliation. Even so, there were nearly 11 million divorced Catholics in the United States in 2012 (Gray, 2013). A recent CARA poll also indicated that only 15% of divorced Catholics sought an annulment (Gray, 2013). In 2012, only 49,912 annulment cases were initiated worldwide with the United States accounting for 24,010 cases or 49% of the world total (Gray, 2015).

Rationale

One goal of this study was to gain an understanding of the psychological and spiritual contexts in which Catholic women experience divorce. The American Psychological Association (APA; 2017) stated in Principle E of the *Ethical Principles for Psychologists and Code of Conduct* that "psychologists are aware of and respect cultural, individual, and role differences, including those based on . . . religion . . . and consider these factors when working with members of such groups" (p. 4). Psychologists are likely to encounter Catholic Americans in their practice since nearly one quarter of the total United States population identifies as Catholic (Gray, 2015) and nearly 11 million are divorced (Gray, 2013).

The purpose of this study was to contribute to research on religion and psychology and to fill a gap in the research on spiritual trauma, struggle, and coping for Catholic women who experience divorce. Paloutzian and Park (2013), editors of the APA *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality,* expressly stated that more

qualitative research is needed to extend and advance the growing body of knowledge on religion and psychology.

Qualitative research has the potential to add to the body of quantitative research on spiritual trauma, spiritual struggle, and spiritual coping. This research study was grounded in both sanctification theory (Pargament & Mahoney, 2011) and cognitive theory (Beck et al., 1979) in an effort to expand our knowledge of spirituality in relation to psychology. In a landmark neurocognitive study, researchers demonstrated that religious beliefs are facilitated by patterns of brain activity consistent with adaptive evolutionary functions and theories of cognitive psychology (Kapogiannis et al., 2009). The use of qualitative, phenomenological methods to explore the lived experience of Catholic women promotes the discovery of underlying cognitive and spiritual processes involved in the decision to either approach or avoid spirituality and religion when facing a divorce. For Catholics, seeking an annulment may also provide a divorced individual with a transformational pathway to reconcile spiritual struggles related to beliefs about the permanence of marriage and their personal experience of divorce.

The likelihood that a clinician will encounter a Catholic person in counseling for marital issues is fairly high since there are nearly 68 million Catholics living in the United States (Zimmerman, 2010), about 53% are married, 23% have experienced divorce, about 15% sought an annulment, and approximately 71% of separated or divorced Catholics have sought counseling from a professional that was not recommended by their local parish (Gray, Perl, & Bruce, 2007). Counselors who are knowledgeable about Catholic marriage, divorce, and annulment processes can be extremely helpful to Catholic clients regardless of whether or not they are Catholic or

religious. Furthermore, by addressing these issues accurately, clinicians can avoid causing further confusion and distress.

For instance, there are many misconceptions about the annulment process with regard to what it is, how long it takes, and how much it costs (Foster, 1999). Clinicians can encourage clients to take assertive steps to get their questions answered by a priest or an annulment advocate, or by consulting the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website (www.usccb.org). The annulment process is a lengthy one, taking anywhere from 12 months to two years to complete. It involves working with an annulment advocate at a local parish who helps file documents at the archdiocese. The annulment process also involves notifying the former spouse, selecting witnesses, and answering an array of questions about each party (the husband and wife), their families, and the marriage, which can cause much angst and fear depending on the situation. All of this information is submitted to a tribunal who will determine whether or not the marriage was valid based on Canon Law and the testimony provided (Duba & Ponton, 2012).

The role of a clinician for divorced Catholic clients could include an exploration of the meaning of divorce and the value of an annulment to the individual, as well as any reservations the client may have about divorce or annulment (Duba & Ponton, 2012). They can also help the client process, with greater understanding, how family members and friends are responding to the divorce and the client's decision to either seek an annulment or not. Most likely, these clients will need help to process a full range of thoughts and emotions, such as doubts and fears, sadness and loss, as well as joy and gratitude and their expanding or contravening relationship with God and the Church (Duba & Ponton, 2012).

Clinicians can provide a safe haven for clients as old wounds are brought to the surface while responding to annulment questions about their dating practices and any unhealthy patterns that developed during the marriage. This is also an opportunity for clinicians to promote a pathway toward healing as clients are challenged to examine how their behavior may have contributed to their problems in an open, honest, and vulnerable way. Clinicians could also use this process to work with clients to foster insight into what they would like to do differently in the future when dating and choosing a mate (Duba & Ponton, 2012).

Research Questions

The main premise of this study was to gain an understanding of the essence of divorce for Catholic women by examining the cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and behavioral experience. The first research question included a search for the presence of spiritual trauma related to divorce in the form of sacred loss or desecration. The Sacred Loss and Desecration Scale (SLDS; Pargament et al., 2005; see Appendix C) was administered to assess for spiritual trauma. The second research question included an exploration of participants' approach or avoidant spiritual coping strategies as evidenced by seeking or not seeking an annulment and whether or not participants engaged in ordinary Catholic practices of Reconciliation, Mass, and Eucharist. The Brief Religious Coping Scale (Brief RCOPE; Pargament et al., 2011; see Appendix C) was administered to assess for other religious coping strategies. The third research question was an examination of the annulment experience for participants and an exploration of whether or not it provided a transformational pathway for processing spiritual struggles related to divorce.

Chapter Two: Research Design and Methodology

Philosophical Worldview

The framework for this phenomenological qualitative research study was a constructivist worldview with emerging methods, such that the construction of the meaning of divorce for Catholic women emerged as data was collected and analyzed. In addition, emerging methods from a constructivist viewpoint allowed for the discovery of unplanned themes to be examined continuously throughout the data collection and analysis phases. Phenomenological qualitative research relies primarily upon the discovery of "the essential meaning within a phenomenon" (Brown & Kimball, 2013, p. 197) and utilizes the researcher's ability to describe participants' lived experience of a shared phenomenon (Creswell, 2014; Giorgi, 2010; Moustakas, 1994).

Purpose Overview

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the essence of the phenomenon of divorce for a sample of Catholic women. Core beliefs about marriage, divorce, and annulment were explored. Underlying spiritual trauma, struggle, and coping strategies, associated with Pargament's (2010) model of spirituality, were examined - particularly in relation to the cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and behavioral experiences of divorce that led to integrated or disintegrated spiritual practices.

Research Questions

The core of this study was a phenomenological exploration of the question, "What is the lived experience of divorce for Catholic women?" Three research questions, related to this overarching theme, were explored: (a) Did the participants experience spiritual trauma related to divorce; (b) Did the participants engage in religious coping strategies

related to divorce; and (c) What role did annulments play, if any, as a transformational pathway after divorce.

Data collection was designed to gain an understanding of the experience of divorce from both cognitive theory and sanctification theory perspectives. Thus, interview questions explored the cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and behavioral experience of divorce and assessments were administered to uncover spiritual trauma and spiritual coping related to divorce. During the interviews, a query of the participants' experiences of marriage, marital troubles, and divorce was conducted. An exploration of the participants' practice of the Catholic faith before, during, and after the marriage was also assessed to explore for approach and avoidant religious coping strategies. In addition, an exploration of whether or not participants sought an annulment was conducted and the emotional and spiritual experience of the annulment process was examined.

Population and Sample

The present research included a sample of nine Catholic women who have experienced divorce. Participants were recruited via a church bulletin in a large Catholic parish in a suburb of Seattle. Eligibility for participation was based on three criteria. Specifically, participants needed to be (a) divorced, (b) a former or current Catholic, and (c) a woman. There were no requirements for age or elapsed time following divorce. There was no limitation on the number of times married. Participants were contacted via email, phone, text, and in person. Phone and computer security-locking features were utilized to maintain confidentiality.

Data Collection Process and Procedures

Thirteen women responded to an advertisement that was posted for three weeks in the bulletin of a large Catholic parish in a suburb of Seattle. One woman did not follow up after an informed consent form was emailed to her. Another woman called and then was contacted via voice message but she did not call back. Two other women initially provided verbal agreement to the informed consent and then dropped out. A total of nine women were interviewed over the course of five weeks. Each participant was contacted approximately five weeks after the initial interviews to verify the accuracy of interview transcripts and paraphrased material.

Interviews took place at Northwest University in a private study room in the library or in a classroom building. Each participant was provided a brief introduction about the general purpose of the study. A verbal summary of the informed consent form was also provided. The women were assured that their responses were confidential, participation was voluntary, and they could discontinue at any time for any reason. The structured interviews lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. During that time, the women completed a questionnaire and two assessments including the Brief RCOPE and the SLDS.

Data collection. Signed consent forms were obtained before proceeding with data collection for each participant. Data collection included responses to questions in a structured interview, behavioral observations, and researcher field notes (see Appendix D). On the day of each interview the following steps transpired:

Informed consent. An informed consent form (see Appendix E) was presented to each participant. The interviewer briefly explained the purpose of the study and the

procedures. Participants were provided an opportunity to ask questions and they were assured that their identities would be protected. Each participant was assigned a code number to protect her identity. Participants were informed that the interview would be audio recorded and the researcher refrained from using her name or any identifying information during the interview to protect her identity. Concerns or questions about the study were addressed during the informed consent process.

Interview. A face-to-face, individual, structured interview was conducted. Instructions for the interviewer and the interview questions are included as Appendix D. The researcher played the role of the interviewer and note taker in this study. Interviews occurred at a time and place mutually agreed upon by the researcher and participants. Interviews lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and were audio recorded and included demographic questionnaires along with two psychological assessments (the SLDS and Brief RCOPE).

Sacred Loss and Desecration Scale. The SLDS is one of the most widely used instruments to measure religious and spiritual appraisals associated with spiritual trauma (Hawley & Mahoney, 2013; Pargament et al., 2005). The SLDS is a 28-item assessment developed by Pargament et al. (2005) to measure appraisals of sacred loss and desecration with regard to sanctified objects, such as marriage.

The Brief Religious Coping Scale. The Brief RCOPE is based on Pargament's (1997) theory of religious coping and is the most common instrument reported in literature on religious coping (Pargament et al., 2011). Pargament (1997) found that religion adds a unique aspect to the coping process apart from other non-religious coping methods. The Brief RCOPE is a 14-item, condensed version of the full 21-item Religious

Coping Scale assessment of religious coping methods, related to how people use religious coping to deal with stressful life situations. Each coping method is based on a key religious function, such as to gain comfort and closeness to God, to gain intimacy with others, to achieve a life transformation, to gain control, or to find meaning (Pargament et al., 2011). The Brief RCOPE is divided equally into positive and negative religious attitudes commonly experienced during a crisis.

Participants were offered a $10 gift card immediately following the interview.

Observations and field notes. During the interview, the interviewer noted any signs of discomfort, fatigue, or other nonverbal communication relevant to the study on an observation form (see Appendix D). Some advantages of recording behavioral observations included (a) verification of nonverbal communication for congruency with a verbal response and (b) the interviewer being empathically attuned to discomfort and thus able to offer a break or to discontinue. Some disadvantages included (a) potential unwelcome intrusiveness on the part of the interviewer and (b) inability to attune to observations accurately. In addition, an audit trail of the researcher's thoughts, feelings, and hunches were recorded on field notes forms (see Appendix D). The field notes reflected the researcher's role in the study. By recording personal reflections throughout the data collection phase, the researcher was able to investigate the participant's experience and, at the same time, recognize and acknowledge potential biases that could interfere with an accurate interpretation participant's point of view.

Follow-up. The member checking phase occurred about five weeks after the initial interviews were conducted. By that time, the interviews had been transcribed and the first phase of open coding was completed. Each participant was emailed a copy of her

interview transcript and asked to verify highlighted paraphrases for meaning and accuracy.

The main objectives of this study were to (a) determine whether or not divorce for Catholic women was experienced as spiritual trauma in the form of sacred loss and desecration (Pargament et al., 2005), (b) explore approach and avoidant religious coping strategies in response to divorce (Exline & Rose, 2013), and (c) discover the role of annulment as a transformational pathway after divorce (Pargament, 2010). In other words, those who experience a sacred loss or desecration may also tend to respond with positive or negative religious coping strategies, by seeking or not seeking an annulment, or engaging or not engaging in ordinary Catholic religious practices.

Data Analysis Process and Procedures

The focus of data analysis was an exploration of the meaning that the participants hold about their experience of divorce. Data analysis was continuous throughout the data collection process, such that themes uncovered early were explored with subsequent participants and in follow up interviews during the member checking phase. The components of data analysis included organizing and preparing the data for analysis; developing code categories, beginning with an initial examination of the documents of each participant (e.g., interview responses, field notes, and behavioral observations); and then searching for links between the emergent themes and data, with several subsequent readings of the documents (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2002).

Data was coded first with an inductive, back and forth process of reading and writing codes in the margins. Open and descriptive coding processes that involved labeling and defining categories with the actual language of participants was conducted

en route toward discovering predominant themes. An axial coding process that involved separating the data into component parts also occurred at this phase of analysis. Next, a deductive search of the material was done by looking back at the data and using the codes that were developed to discover links to other remarks and observations that fit each theme (Creswell, 2014).

Phenomenological analysis involves a search for the meaning and essence of the lived experience of a group of people. As such, the phenomenon of divorce was examined from the point of view of the participants in a nonjudgmental way by setting aside personal experience. The data was also examined with an open stance while refraining from imposing meaning before the data analysis was completed. During the coding and interpretation phases, bracketing (Husserl, 1931) ensued to suspend preconceptions, in which, bracketed data was examined from various angles and then synthesized for meaning (Patton, 2002).

Credibility, validity, and reliability. To ensure data was collected in a valid, reliable manner that was as free as possible from researcher bias, a structured interview format was used. Each participant was asked the same set of questions. The interview questions were open ended to allow participants to share their own experiences and allow for emerging themes. The questions were phrased in a way to avoid leading participants toward any specific conclusion. Follow up questions were minimal and used only for the purpose of gaining clarity on answers already provided.

In this study, data was organized question-by-question and analyzed for common themes using detailed and concrete descriptions, including quotes from the participants, to create a descriptive foundation for analysis and reporting that was both thick and rich

(Patton, 2002). These descriptions were maintained separate from any interpretation to retain accuracy of the participants' experiences of divorce that was free from attachment to any particular result. Data was also organized to describe important processes experienced by participants, such as what the decision-making processes were like for them with regard to divorce and annulment from both emotional and spiritual perspectives. Thus, a cross-case analysis framework was used to organize and manage the data, such that participants' answers for each question were grouped and analyzed together.

After all of the interviews and the inductive coding processes were completed, verification of participants' testimony was conducted to ensure that paraphrased testimony accurately represented the participants' lived experiences. During this member checking phase, each participant was emailed a copy of her interview transcript. Paraphrased material was highlighted for review and verification. This was done to ensure that the intended meaning of lengthy or choppy quotations was retained. Seven of nine participants provided email verification of their transcripts in writing and also answered some demographic questions that were not completed during the interviews. One participant preferred to engage in this process on the phone and one participant completed the member checking phase in person.

Reflexivity. I am a 55 year old Catholic woman who has been married and divorced. I have also experienced the Catholic marriage annulment process. At times, I have struggled with the teaching of the Church on marriage, divorce, and annulment. After years of study, prayer, and personal reflection, I can say with confidence that my Catholic faith has been, overall, a source of healing and comfort for me, particularly

when I was struggling in my relationships. I have attended weekly Mass all of my life, except for a few months in my early twenties while I was separated from my husband.

Protection of human subjects. There were minimal risks associated with participation in this research study, although some individuals may have been uncomfortable answering personal questions. To ensure protection of participants, this study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Northwest University.

Summary

This phenomenological qualitative research study of the lived experience of divorce for Catholic women relied on emerging methods and a constructivist worldview. The purpose was to explore the essential meaning of divorce for Catholic women from cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and behavioral perspectives. The presence of spiritual trauma, spiritual struggles, and spiritual coping was explored related to Pargament's (2010) model of spirituality, along with approach or avoidant coping strategies. Nine participants were recruited by way of a church bulletin notice and selection was based on three inclusion criteria, namely that participants were women, Catholic, and divorced. A structured interview format, observations, field notes, and follow-up interviews were used to ensure consistency and prevent bias. Prior to collecting any data, the purpose of the study was disclosed to participants and confidentiality was addressed in the form of a written informed consent agreement. Questions were open ended with the intention of gathering emerging themes and questions were phrased in a way to minimize leading responses. Data analysis was ongoing, first inductively and then deductively. Member checking helped to ensure the accuracy of the themes that emerged.

Chapter Three: Results

Data Analysis Process and Procedures

The focus of data analysis was an exploration of the participants' experience of divorce. Data analysis was continuous throughout the data collection process. The researcher transcribed, organized, and prepared the interview data for analysis using Trint transcriber software to create Microsoft Word documents, which were searched for keywords to discover potential themes and explore answers to interview questions from a cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and behavioral point of view (see Table 1). Eleven subthemes were explored. Each participant's interview transcript was uploaded to Atlas.ti qualitative analysis software for analysis. The meaning of participants' responses was verified in follow-up interviews during the member checking phase.

Open coding. Open and descriptive coding ensued; this involved labeling and defining themes with the actual language of participants, using direct quotations or paraphrases to discover predominant themes with an inductive, back and forth process of reading and writing codes. Codes in relation to cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and behavioral experiences of divorce for Catholic women were created in the open coding phase. Links between the themes and the data were explored with several subsequent readings of the documents (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2002).

Member checking. Paraphrases were confirmed or revised by each participant during the member checking phase to ensure accuracy. An axial coding process also occurred at this phase of analysis, which involved separating the data into component parts and a deductive search of the material conducted by looking back at the data to discover links to other remarks and observations that fit each theme (Creswell, 2014).

Table 1

Themes and Subthemes

Theme and Subtheme	Number of Quotations	Number of Participants	Description of Interview Question or Subtheme
Cognitive			
Contemplate divorce	61	9	What was it like for you to contemplate divorce?
Reframe	12	6	Other people helped reframe the situation
Emotional			
Experience of divorce	84	9	What was divorce like for you emotionally?
Tears	27	8	Participant cried during the interview
Same as death	6	4	Participant compared divorce to death of spouse
Felt Excluded	13	5	Participant felt excluded after divorce
Spiritual			
Experience of divorce	43	9	What was divorce like for you spiritually?
Spirituality - counseling	13	9	Was spirituality discussed in counseling?
Annulment experience	48	4	What was annulment like emotionally/spiritually?
Behavioral			
Sought help	57	9	Did you seek help from a counselor or priest?
Tried to fix marriage	34	9	Participant tried to fix marriage
Support from others	22	9	Family or friends provided support
Unsupported by others	13	6	Family or friends were unsupportive
Support from church	28	7	Support received from church or priest
Unsupported by church	24	7	Church or priest were unsupportive
Confession	18	6	Participant spoke about her experience of confession
Catholic counselor	7	4	Participant sought a Catholic counselor

Note. "Number of participants" denotes the number of participants who responded to the question or mentioned the subtheme.

Themes. During the interview and coding phases of data collection and analysis, common responses were recognized and then defined as hunches or themes. After all of the interviews were transcribed, the transcriptions and field notes were explored for these initial themes and more were added. Quotations were also coded for sub-themes related to the main themes of the cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and behavioral experience of divorce. Key sections of this paper are outlined according to main themes beginning on page 43 and a list of themes is provided in Table 1.

Bracketing. Phenomenological analysis involved a search for the meaning and essence of the lived experience of this group of Catholic women. Thus, the phenomenon of divorce was studied from the point of view of the participants in a nonjudgmental way by setting aside personal experience, examining the data with an open stance, and refraining from imposing meaning until after the data analysis was complete. During the coding, member checking, and interpretation phases, bracketing (Husserl, 1931) was used to suspend preconceptions by bracketing material as follows: (a) the data was examined for key phrases that spoke directly about the phenomenon; (b) when direct quotes were too lengthy or choppy, the meaning of the phrase was interpreted and paraphrased; (c) the meaning of paraphrases were verified with each of the participants during the member checking phase; (d) the meaning with regard to the recurrent themes was examined; and (e) the essence of the phenomenon was summarized (Patton, 2002). The bracketed data was examined by looking at it from various angles and then synthesized for meaning in contexts that were both textural (e.g., underlying feelings about the divorce experience) and structural (e.g., how and what participants experienced of divorce) (Patton, 2002).

Inter-rater reliability. Code reliability was verified by means of an inter-rater process. A recent graduate with a doctorate in counseling psychology coded participant interviews a second time to substantiate the degree of consistency among different raters. The second rater learned the codes and then independently coded participant interview transcripts. Afterward, the raters discussed inconsistencies, which led to assigning some codes to data while other codes were removed. The result of the inter-rater process was 82.1% observed agreement for code assignment and substantial agreement after accounting for agreement by chance (Kappa = 0.61).

Demographics

All nine participants were divorced Catholic women and thus met the criteria for inclusion in this study. All were Caucasian with an average age of 62.1 years (range 47-75 years, median 60 years; see Table 2). One participant was currently married. The other eight participants were single.

Age and religion at wedding. At the time of their weddings, the average age of participants was 23.7 years (range 19-29 years, median 22.5 years) and their husbands' average age was 26.2 years (range 21-39 years, median 24.5 years). All of the participants were Catholic at the time of the wedding but the husbands' religions varied. Four of the husbands were Catholic on the wedding day (4/10, 40%). One of them was raised with no religion and converted to Catholicism for the wedding. The other six husbands were raised Lutheran (10%), Mormon (10%), Presbyterian (10%), Christian (10%), and Methodist (20%). The majority of the husbands did not practice any formal religion during the marriage (6/10, 60%).

Table 2

Demographics and Background

Participant	Current Age	Length of marriage (Years)	Length of dating (Years)[a]	Years since divorce	Bride's age at wedding	Groom's age at wedding
436	57	20	0.25	9	28	29
437	60	24.5	2	7	29	29
438	59	27	3	8	24	24
439a	73	[c]	1	[d]	19	21
439b	[b]	38	0.58	11	22	23
440	47	14	2.50	5	28	28
441	75	30	1.75	22	21	23
442	57	16	1	18	23	25
443	70	20	1	27	21	21
444	61	9	1.67	30	22	39
Average	**62.11**	**22.1**	**1.48**	**15.2**	**23.7**	**26.2**
Range	47 - 75	9 - 38	.25 - 2.50	5 – 30	19 - 29	21 - 39
Median	60	20	1.34	11	22.5	24.5

Note[a]. Length of time dated before deciding to marry.

Note[b]. Participant reported two marriages that ended in divorce.

Note[c]. Calculation excludes outlier: 1st marriage for this participant lasted 10 months.

Note[d]. Calculation excludes outlier: 1st marriage for this participant ended 53 years ago.

Background

Reservations prior to marriage. Seven of nine participants (78%) reported reservations about the marriage on or before their wedding day. Reservations included (a) husband told her that he said the vows but was not thinking about the words; (b) fear husband would not arrive on time because he was deceptive about his activities; (c) concern about liking different activities; (d) concern that "I don't really know this person well enough to spend the rest of my life with him" (441); (e) feeling too young to settle down; (f) having cold feet (e.g., "the gravity of the situation hit me" [443]); and (g) "he was somewhat manipulative" (444).

Two of nine participants (22%) reported no reservations prior to the wedding day and thought marriage would last forever: "I thought love would conquer all. I thought God had drawn us together. I was so happy that day and leading up to it. I just didn't think it would be as hard as it was" (437).

Length of marriage. The average length of marriage prior to divorce was 22.1 years (range 9-38 years, median 20 years; Table 2). The average number of years since divorce was 15.2 years (range 5-30 years, median 11 years).

Reasons for divorce. Based on nine participants and ten marriages that ended in divorce (e.g., participant 439 was married and divorced twice), the most common reasons for divorce were abuse (60%), financial difficulty or difference (60%), lack of commitment by one partner (50%), and estrangement (50%). Types of abuse included emotional (60%), verbal (50%), psychological (20%), sexual (20%), and physical (10%). Other reasons for divorce included abuse to children, attachment issues, bad communication, male weakness, disagreement about having children, control of money, lies, inability to follow through, irresponsibility and danger with children, and talking in circles.

Catholic Marriage Context

Pre-marital preparation. Eight of the nine participants attended some form of pre-marital preparation prior to their wedding. Five attended classes and three met only with a priest. Participant 442 was living with her fiancé and "did not want to attend classes" (442). Participants who met only with a priest described the pre-marital preparation experience as (a) "an uneventful formality" (436); (b) "Contrived. He didn't

know how to coach couples who were getting married" (438); and (c) "The priest gave [my fiancé] a book" (441).

Participants who attended pre-marital classes described their experiences as fine, good, no surprises, and "stupid" (443; e.g., in an auditorium with 300 couples). Others expanded on their experience in hindsight of their divorce and described some of their reservations to marry. One woman said, "It felt like I was trying to justify my feelings of love for him. I wish I would have listened to feelings of red flags and others" (437). Another woman (444) considered pre-marital classes to be a deciding factor for marriage. She said, "he was somewhat of a renegade and I didn't know if he was going to go. It was one of the deciding factors" (444).

Catholic wedding. All of the participants were married in a Catholic wedding ceremony with two anomalies. Participant 442 was initially married in a Christian church and later convalidated (see Appendix A) her marriage in a Catholic ceremony on her 10th anniversary. Participant 439 was married in a Catholic ceremony for her first, 10-month long marriage, but her second wedding was not held in a Catholic church. She experienced her second divorce 38 years later. Information about both marriages and divorces was provided. Participant 444 married a second time and is still married to her second husband. She only provided information for her first marriage that ended in divorce and not for her second marriage since she is still married.

Theme 1: Cognitive Experience of Divorce for Catholic Women

The cognitive experience of divorce for the Catholic women in this study became clearer by reviewing two sets of coded quotations: (a) their responses to a question about contemplating divorce and (b) the sub-theme of reframing.

Contemplating divorce. When asked what it was like to contemplate divorce, three participants reported that they never contemplated divorce (33%); seven participants said they did not want a divorce (78%); and five said they do not believe in divorce (56%). Participants said (a) "As a Catholic I was bound and determined to make it work" (441); (b) "When the counselor suggested separation, I felt crushed. I was devastated because I tried everything to keep us together" (443); and (c) "Divorce was never in my mind. I don't come from a family of divorce" (438). Several women expressed going to some lengths to avoid the possibility of divorce, even in the midst of infidelity and abandonment: "At what point do I stop resisting because I forgave him and held on to hope for some time" (440).

Another woman reported, "in my Catholic faith I believe you find ways to work through it and I wasn't finding ways" (444) when her husband's anger and drinking made her afraid for her life. She said, "I was trying to be patient . . . but after separating for a couple months, I realized this is how abuse is . . . and knew I should not go back. It would not fix anything in our marriage" (444).

Infidelity. Four participants (40%) reported that infidelity was a reason for their divorce. The thought processes for each experience of infidelity varied greatly. Even so, three of the four women reported thoughts of openness to reconciliation after an affair. For instance, one woman said that infidelity was an absolute deal breaker and "a ticket straight to divorce court" (439), while the others reported they wanted to reconcile but the ex-husbands either refused to try or "found another girlfriend" (442).

Reframing. Six of nine participants (67%) received counsel from a therapist or priest that influenced their thinking and helped them reframe their impression of the

situation. One woman (437) reported that she felt a counselor empowered her husband to ask for a divorce. Another woman (443) said that a counselor suggested separation, which led to two and a half years of living apart before divorce with no counseling during the separation.

Four participants received counsel from a priest, which helped them understand their marital troubles were influenced by their husbands' actions and were outside of their control. These statements often helped the women move forward. For instance, a priest said to one of the women, "This isn't a marriage. This is a company he is running" (436). A priest told another woman (438) that her husband did not give her anything during the marriage and he was not going to give anything during the divorce. Participant 440 said, "During these conversations with my spiritual advisor [a priest] he said, 'what you have is no longer a marriage. He's already gone. His heart is somewhere else. You have tried everything that you can to save it and he is not participating in that.' And so he helped me get my heart being okay with going through this process even though it wasn't what I wanted." Participant 444 was in an abusive marriage for nine years before seeking counsel from a priest and she said, "I told the priest [about his anger and the guns] and he said, 'Get out.' I thought he was going to say stay in the marriage and he said, 'Get out. Your life is worth more than this.' And suddenly I realized he understood how much danger I was in. There were about 150 guns in the house."

In summary, the essence of the cognitive experience of divorce for the Catholic women in this study included thoughts about not wanting a divorce (78%) and most of the women (67%) were encouraged by others to reframe their thinking about their situation. The cognitive experience of divorce also included thoughts about trying to save

their marriage and seeking help from others and the Church, which are explained in more detail in the section on the behavioral experience of divorce.

Theme 2: Emotional Experience of Divorce for Catholic Women

All of the participants in this study experienced their divorce as an intensely negative emotional event. Negative emotional language was scattered throughout the interviews resulting in nearly one fifth (19%) of all quotations that were coded. In other words, the category of emotion words or phrases accounted for most of the quotations of any category in this study. The most common words used by participants to describe the emotional experience of their divorce included devastating, hard, lonely, deserted, hurt, nightmare, painful, horrific, confusing, and difficult. Some of the participants (44%) compared their emotional experience of divorce to people who have experienced the death of a spouse. Five participants (56%) reported that they felt excluded by others after their divorce. Six of nine participants (67%) also cried when asked what the divorce was like for them emotionally and eight of nine participants (89%) cried during the course of the interview. The participant who did not cry reported during the member-checking phase that "I wasn't sure how I would feel, if the interview would muster up old feelings and sadness about the marriage ending or the choices he made that impacted me and our children. But it didn't, it felt very factual and not emotional" (440).

The emotional experience of divorce varied greatly even though all of the women expressed intense negative feelings. Several of the women described feeling devastated, overwhelmed, and lonely: "It was a lonely time. Physically, I was so exhausted" (436). Other women said, "I beat myself up over it" (437) and "felt so stupid and embarrassed" (439). One expressed how hard it was to accept that her husband's "well intentions are

for someone else now" (440). Two of the women described feeling "like somebody stuck a knife in my heart" (442 & 443). One woman was in a psychologically abusive marriage for nine years and explained that she was "so tangled up" (444). For her, divorce was both frightening and freeing. Table 3 provides further context to these emotional experiences of divorce.

Table 3

Emotional Experience of Divorce

Emotional Experience	Participant Number	Quote
Angry, hurt, and alone	436	It was horrific. There's so much anger. There's so much hurt. My world just got turned upside down. I didn't know where we were financially. I didn't know anything.
	441	It was difficult. I didn't know if I had the coping mechanisms to follow what needed to be done . . . I felt like I was out there in the wilderness with nobody to show me the way.
Blamed self	437	Through all the problems I never would have left. I kind of beat myself up over it. There were things I probably could have done but then I think to myself but he probably would have left me anyway . . . It just hurt me so much that I had failed in my marriage.
Embarrassed	439	I just felt so stupid and embarrassed that my friends and family would think how dumb I was that I didn't know this [affair] had been going on for seven years. I took it upon myself, putting no blame on him or her.
Nobody cares	439	Nobody seems to care. This is not a big deal to get a divorce. That was my takeaway from the divorce day in court. It just amazed me that it was no big deal because to me it was the end of the world. It was the absolute ultimate.
Hard to accept	440	I don't believe in divorce. I believe that you pick the person and you stay with them and you work through things. And I never thought that he would do something like that. His best wishes and well intentions are for someone else now. And so that was hard to just accept and figure out how to I move on from here. I'm alone.

Like a knife in my heart	442	I was thinking he was just going to be like falling on his knees asking me for forgiveness [after I discovered his affair]. And then he didn't. And then he said, you know what, I want a divorce. And that was like [gesture - knife to the heart].
	443	And when the counselor [suggested separation] I felt crushed. You know, I was devastated. [Then, after I discovered that he moved out], it was like somebody stuck a knife in my heart. It was . . . [tears]. Yeah, that was not a good day.
Frightened and tangled up	444	And so when he said, you know, I'll kill you if you leave. I knew that that was going to happen . . . At first I thought I was going to die when I was living with my sister. My older sister said, "you look so old" when she saw me, because I just had been so tangled up. Suddenly it was just like this freedom.

Feelings comparable to death of a spouse. Four of nine participants (44%) correlated divorce with feelings of loss from the death of a spouse (see Table 4). Some of the women spoke about how they were treated by others after their divorce and compared it to the experience of a widow in the sense that a widow receives support and sympathy but divorced people do not.

Table 4

Feelings Comparable to Death of a Spouse

Feelings Comparable to Death of a Spouse	Participant Number	Quote
Can you hear that silence?	436	When you lose a spouse, the church is there for you and gives you some grief counseling. They walk beside you. But when it's divorce . . . can you hear that silence? That's what it's like.
Our losses were identical	439	A dear cousin lost his wife of the same amount of years that I had lost my husband. Our losses were identical. What he was feeling and what I was feeling were the same except he had an ending that was sweet. My ending was very sad.

Divorce is more painful than death	442	What people seem to forget is divorce is almost more painful than death because when someone dies everybody feels sorry for you and helps you out and remembers it. And they feel bad for you at the holidays. But when you're divorced they forget about you.

Feeling excluded. Five participants (56%) shared that they felt excluded after their divorce. Some of the women reported that they felt forgotten, shunned, and like lepers. Others spoke about how they lost friendships after their divorce and they are no longer invited to social functions. Some also expressed how divorced people lack a sense of community. For instance, participant 436 said, "I feel like I wear a scarlet letter like they used to do in the old days. But it's a D. And you know when people talk about gathering. Oh, well, you don't get invited because you don't have a spouse any longer. So it's always a reminder." Participant 443 said she feels like "the odd man out" at social functions and "even in church we had couples that we hung out with, but once I was divorced I lost those friends too" (443). Participant 437 described how she feels that the church does not provide social support for divorced people when she said, "It's lovely how [the church] supports families and married people. But there are so many people that are single. So many people who are alone. When I'd go to Mass I'd look around and I'd think of all of them and how there's nothing for us except just the love of Jesus and the traditions that the Church gives us. But no community" (443).

Theme 3: Spiritual Experience of Divorce for Catholic Women

This section is divided into two parts. First, the results of a questionnaire on frequency of participation in Catholic practices are displayed. The results of assessments on religious coping and spiritual trauma are also included in this section. Second,

responses to interview questions are provided with regard to (a) the spiritual experience of divorce, (b) whether spirituality was discussed in counseling, and (c) the emotional and spiritual experience of annulment. Participants also provided their definition of an annulment and those responses are included in this section as well.

Part 1: Questionnaires and spirituality assessments. When comparing Mass attendance during the marriage and after divorce, most participants (89%) either maintained a similar pattern of weekly Mass or increased to weekly Mass (see Table 5). Most of the participants struggled to provide an estimate of their Mass attendance during their marriage. Therefore, their responses should be treated as rough estimates. The participants explained that their attendance varied over their relatively long-term marriages, which ranged from nine to thirty-eight years. Changes in their level of devotion or spirituality were the most common reasons provided for the variance in attendance. For instance, one participant left the Catholic Church after her first divorce in 1964 and did not attend Mass at all during her second, 38-year-long marriage. She returned to weekly Mass (on average) in 2007 in the midst of her second divorce. The other eight participants reported an average Mass attendance of 50 times per year (i.e., weekly) after divorce. Five of nine participants (56%) increased their frequency of confession after divorce to an average of six times per year from an average of four times per year during the marriage. In summary, at the time of the interviews, all of the participants (9/9, 100%) engaged in ordinary Catholic practices of weekly Mass attendance on average and most go to confession at least once per year (7/9, 78%).

Table 5

Frequency of Participation in Mass and Confession

	Mass Attendance (per year)			Confession Attendance (per year)		
Participant	Before Marriage	During Marriage	After Divorce	Before Marriage	During Marriage	After Divorce
436	1	52	52	0	17	10
437	25	45	50	1	3	10
438	52	52	52	0	0	Once
439	52	0	42	12	0	Once
440	52	52	52	12	12	12
441	52	35	50	2	1	1
442	2	52	52	0	0	1
443	40	52	52	2	2	2
444	50	46	52	0.50	0	7
Average	36	43	50	3	4	6
Range	1 - 52	0 - 52	42 - 52	.5 - 12	0 - 17	Once - 12
Median	50	52	52	1	1	7

Brief Religious Coping Scale. The Brief RCOPE consists of fourteen questions related to how people use religion to cope with stressful life situations (Pargament, Koenig, & Perez, 2000). Each coping method is based on a key religious function, such as to gain comfort and closeness to God, to gain intimacy with others, to achieve a life transformation, to gain control, or to find meaning (Pargament et al., 2011). The Brief RCOPE is divided equally into positive and negative religious attitudes commonly experienced during a crisis.

Positive religious coping. In this study, the participants endorsed more positive than negative religious coping strategies on the Brief RCOPE. Some of the participants (44%) engaged in all seven positive religious coping methods from the Brief RCOPE.

Seven of the nine participants (78%) endorsed the following:

- "Looked for a stronger connection with God."

- "Sought help from God in letting go of my anger."

Six of nine (67%) agreed with the following statements:

- "Sought God's love and care."
- "Tried to see how God might be trying to strengthen me in this situation."
- "Asked forgiveness for my sins."

Five of nine (56%) stated that they:

- "Tried to put my plans into action together with God."
- "Focused on religion to stop worrying about my problems."

Negative religious coping. The majority of participants endorsed two of the seven negative religious coping strategies with regard to feeling abandoned by God and the Church. The other five negative religious coping styles on the Brief RCOPE were acknowledged by 44% or less of participants.

Six of nine (67%) participants:

- "Wondered whether my church had abandoned me."

Five of nine (56%) participants:

- "Wondered whether God had abandoned me."

In summary, eight of nine participants (89%) engaged in positive religious coping on the Brief RCOPE with an average score of nineteen (range: 7-25, *SD* = 6.88). Eight of nine participants (89%) reported negative religious coping with an average score of thirteen (range: 7-23, *SD* = 5.32). Possible scores on the Brief RCOPE for each section (e.g., positive or negative) on religious coping range from seven ("not at all") to 28 ("a great deal").

Sacred Loss and Desecration Scale. The SLDS is a 28-item assessment. Items one through 14 measured the appraisal of sacred loss as a result of divorce and items 15 through 28 measured the appraisal of desecration (Hawley & Mahoney, 2013; Pargament et al., 2005). Eight women (89%) experienced their divorce as both a sacred loss and a desecration and one participant (11%) did not appraise her divorce in terms of either. Of the eight participants who reported spiritual trauma, seven (88%) scored higher on desecration than sacred loss, yet all seven reported the existence of both.

With regard to their divorce, participants appraised more items of desecration (*M* = 38, range: 14-68, *SD* = 17.61) than sacred loss *(M* = 29, range: 14-51, *SD* = 12.02). The most common items chosen by participants from each category of desecration and sacred loss on the SLDS are listed below.

Desecration. Eighty-nine percent of participants endorsed the following:

- "Something sacred that came from God was dishonored."
- "This event ruined a blessing from God."
- "Something that was sacred to me was destroyed."

Seventy-eight percent of participants endorsed the following desecration items:

- "This event was both an offense against me and against God."
- "This event was an immoral act against something I value."
- "The event was a sinful act involving something meaningful in my life."
- "Something evil ruined a blessing in my life."
- "This event was a transgression of something sacred."

Sacred loss. Seventy-eight percent of participants endorsed the following:

- "I lost something I thought God wanted for me."

Sixty-seven percent of participants acknowledged the following sacred loss item:

- "Part of the pain of this event involved the loss of a blessing."

In summary, all of the participants (100%) in this study engaged in ordinary Catholic practices of Mass and confession. Most participants (89%) appraised their divorce as a spiritual trauma in the form of a sacred loss or desecration on the SLDS and most (89%) engaged in positive religious coping strategies. This is comparable with a study of 100 divorcees conducted by Krumrei, Mahoney, and Pargament (2009) that found "most appraised their divorce as a sacred loss or desecration (74%) and engaged in adaptive spiritual coping (88%)" (p. 373).

Part II: Interview responses. Three interview questions were related to the spiritual experience of divorce: the first question asked what the divorce experience was like spiritually; the second asked if spirituality was discussed during counseling; and the third asked about the emotional and spiritual experience of annulment. All of the participants answered the first and second questions, since they all experienced divorce and engaged in counseling related to their divorce. Some of the participants did not complete an annulment and were not asked the third question. However, all of the participants shared their thoughts and feelings about the annulment process and all of the participants provided their definition of annulment.

Interview Response 1: Spiritual experience of divorce. The women in this study responded to a question about the spiritual experience of divorce by describing a variety of spiritual coping strategies (see Table 6). Most of the women (56%) cried when

answering this question. Some of the women said that they turned away from religion or a close connection with God. These women reported that they were "not in any frame of mind to talk to God" (439), stopped going to the Catholic Church altogether (439a & 438), or were simply "going through the motions" (443) of attending weekly Mass.

Most of the participants turned toward God and the Church. Some of the women described their spiritual experience of divorce in terms of closeness with God and the comfort they received from reading Scripture. One woman contemplated suicide after her divorce. She turned toward the Church and "found what [she] was looking for" (439b). Another woman was confused as she struggled "to understand God's plan" (440) for her. Participant 442 was grateful for her faith. Participant 441 reported that her husband used to "poo poo when I was going to church and going to confession" (441) and that going to church was her escape, a place where she could be herself and be with God. Participant 444 essentially hid her divorce after she remarried. She raised her children in the Church and took them to Mass. Many years later she became distressed after learning that she was not allowed to receive Communion. Table 6 provides further context to these spiritual experiences of divorce.

Table 6

Spiritual Experience of Divorce

Spiritual Experience	Participant Number	Quote
Reading scripture	436	I actually got very close to God because He always was there when I needed him. [Reading scripture] helped me know He was there. There were so many miraculous things that happened that I believe His hand was always there. I felt my faith really grew. But it was still a long lonely walk.

Reading scripture (continued)	437	It was a financial blow. Everything emotional. I felt so insecure. I felt so physically unsafe. And I started reading the Psalms. And God just cradled me with his word and that was such a comfort.
Gut wrenching and humbling	439	[After participant 439 revealed to a nurse practitioner that she was contemplating suicide she was referred to see a counselor immediately.] I didn't have a counselor but I found a church, a Catholic church. And I went once or twice and it was gut wrenching. Very humbling. And I knew I had found what I was looking for.
Confused about God's plan	440	When [my ex-husband] made this choice and told me he was leaving, I was really confused. Because I thought wait, this isn't God's plan. So that was very difficult for me to come to terms with. I have a spiritual adviser who's a priest and I talked to him about it. He said God may have a plan and that may have been God's plan but we still have free choice. So he's making a choice to not participate in that plan. That helped me but it was just very difficult.
Spiritually torn	444	I just I started going to Communion because I felt like more and more my faith was growing and I needed my Christian faith. I needed this as a way to help me through the divorce; as a way to help me through restarting my life. As a way to come closer to God . . . [After almost 30 years and remarriage] I felt torn. I cannot receive Communion anymore. And so I asked God for prayer to help me. How do I solve this problem? You know I need to hear your voice. How do I move beyond this?

Interview Response 2: Spirituality in counseling. The women were asked and all responded to a second interview question related to spirituality: "Did spirituality come up in conversations with a counselor or a priest?" Most participants (67%) reported that spirituality was not discussed in any of those conversations and seven of nine participants (78%) reported that spirituality was not addressed in individual therapy.

Participant 436 reported that her priest prayed for her in the midst of her marital problems. She also had a counselor that she saw every day, but spirituality was not

addressed during those conversations. Participant 438 attended spiritually-based marriage encounters and counseling groups with her husband. Participant 440 knew her spirituality would play a big role in helping her through the divorce process. She interviewed several counselors prior to choosing one who understood the importance of spirituality in her treatment but was unable to find a counselor who really understood Catholic marriage. Participant 440 said, "Faith is a very important part of my life and I knew that it would be a big part of what would get me through this process . . . My counselor was a woman of faith but not the same practice as me so some of those deeper meaningful things for me that define Catholicism and with respect to marriage . . . I would have loved to talk through some of those things with a counselor."

Interview Response 3: Emotional and spiritual experience of annulment. Four of nine participants completed an annulment and were asked, and responded to, the interview question: "What was the annulment experience like for you emotionally and spiritually?" Participants that did not complete an annulment also contributed their thoughts and feelings about the process. The following statements from participants about the emotional and spiritual experience of annulment are listed based on the perspective of (a) completing an annulment, (b) seeking but not completing an annulment, and (c) not seeking an annulment.

Annulment completed. Four participants (44%) completed an annulment and their experiences varied (see Table 7). Most of these women indicated that the process was both difficult and healing. For instance, one women described the annulment experience as hard to find the energy to "relive all of it" (436) after her divorce, but the annulment process was also cleansing, important, and healing. Participant 440 said it was tough to

think about the marriage as being invalid from the beginning because she did not have any red flags before the wedding day. She also said that the annulment process provided her with some closure and hope for the future. Participant 443 described the process as hard and painful, as well as freeing and a learning experience. Only participant 437 said the process was easy and she attributed her longtime friendship with her annulment advocate, who also counseled the couple during the marriage, for the ease of the process. Other words used by this group of women to describe their annulment experience included reassuring, in-depth, intensive, hard, painful, freeing, and the right thing to do.

Table 7

Emotional and Spiritual Experience of Annulment

Emotional and Spiritual Experience of Annulment	Participant Number	Quote
Wanted to understand what happened and be right with the church	437	I think it was also healing. And it was so reassuring that I was doing everything I could to remain in the Catholic Church and remain in good standing . . . I love the church. And I wanted to understand what happened. And I wanted to be right with the church and with the Lord. And if I'm ever lucky enough to meet someone, I want to be able to marry.
Second guessed myself	440	It was tough figuring out what was before the marriage that existed because I didn't have any red flags before we got married or even during the marriage until much later in it. So it was tough going through it and thinking about it in that way. And gosh, did I miss something or did I not? Did I make the wrong choice in marrying him? And you kind of second guess all those things.
Cleansing, closure, and revealing	436	It was very cleansing for me. And it kind of shut that chapter in certain ways. And I actually saw a lot that I didn't see during the divorce I saw during the annulment. Things started coming out that were important to come out.

Closure, acceptance, and hope for the future	440	I think it felt like it gave me some closure. And I think it made me like spiritually OK. I can start to accept this now. You know, not like it was finalized but it gave me a sense of, I'm working through this, and you know its hope for the future I guess.
Learning experience	443	I didn't realize it until, I don't know, probably after the annulment and I got a better idea of what he was going through. But all the anger and abandonment issues and everything that he has stuffed ever since he was a kid. And then [his mother] dies and he has nowhere to put this [except on me].
Forgiveness	443	It was part of my going through forgiveness of him. To see that he's not the 70 year old dad that you're seeing; he's that 8 year old kid that's broken.

Annulment sought and not completed. Two participants (22%) sought an annulment but did not complete it. Participant 438 explained that someone told her an annulment would invalidate her children, her friends also told her that she did not need an annulment, and she felt it was too much work when there was already too much to do. Participant 444 felt it was absurd to ask her to contact her abusive ex-husband and "not worth my life" (444). She said, "when I started dating a man, I [sought an annulment] and I had explained [e.g., his anger, his threats, and the guns] to the priests and they said you have to go back. You have to get his signature in agreement otherwise we just have your word. That was the most heartbreaking, stunning shock. I would have to have a signature on this history to get an annulment. And so I walked out and said I can't do that. Yeah it's not worth my life" (444).

No annulment sought. Three participants (33%) did not seek an annulment. Two participants said they do not need an annulment since they do not want to marry again or do not need it until they find someone to marry, which is true. Annulments are only necessary if you remarry. Participant 442 said she would have filed for an annulment if

someone had encouraged her right after divorce, but now, she does not want to "dredge all that stuff up again" (442) and "what God really wants us to do is forgive and I have forgiven my ex-husband" (442). Participant 442 also said, "It's just another bureaucratic way for the church to get their nose into your bedroom, as far as I'm concerned."

Participant 439 did not seek an annulment and said, "I had this idea in my head that once I was divorced from my first husband I knew that I was excommunicated from the church. We're talking back in the medieval days of the 60s. So I know I was excommunicated and I got mad at God. And I thought for a long time. OK. If you don't want me to come in your church then I won't. I was mad at God for throwing me out of church. Not at myself for doing it to myself but I was very angry at God. Therefore, I quit going to church totally. For a long time I was mad at God" (439. Then, after her second divorce many years later, she returned to church and said that if she were to marry again, she would want her husband to share in the religion. She did not say anything about petitioning for an annulment if she were to remarry.

Definition of annulment. An annulment is a declaration of nullity, rendered by a Catholic Church tribunal, which states that a marriage was invalid from the beginning. The process typically includes an investigation based on testimony from each spouse and several witnesses. Unlike no fault divorce, there is no guarantee an annulment will be approved since the decision depends on factors, such as, each spouse's understanding of the vows and their state of mind on the wedding day. Participants in this study were asked to provide their definition of annulment. Most participants (67%) mentioned or implied that an annulment was needed if they wanted to date or remarry. All of the participants understood that an annulment was a decision made by the Church.

Annulment defined by participants with a completed annulment. The four participants (44%) who completed an annulment, defined an annulment as "the decision from the Church whether or not your marriage was sacramental" (436); "a way of freeing you from the past, recognizing your failures, understanding what marriage should be [and] repair the sacrament" (437); "proving that something existed before you got married that basically makes the marriage invalid" (440); and "the sacrament was not valid at the time that you got married" (443). Two of the women spontaneously said that they did not understand what an annulment was until after they engaged in the process.

Annulment defined by participants with no annulment. Responses varied from the five participants (56%) who did not receive an annulment. Participant 444 said, "there were things that were not known going into the marriage [and an annulment] would annul the marriage as not a marriage so that I could marry in the Catholic Church in the future." Other responses included faulty definitions, such as an annulment is: "Having permission from the Catholic Church to discontinue the marriage sacrament" (438); "Your behavior is excused and you are allowed back into the church so you can receive the sacraments again" (439); "It's the church's divorce basically . . . to kind of wipe the slate" (441); and "an annulment doesn't mean that you hated your ex husband or he is not a good person. What it means is – that's not the person that God wanted you to be with" (442).

Theme 4: Behavioral Experience of Divorce for Catholic Women

In addition to describing their experience of divorce from cognitive, emotional, and spiritual perspectives, participants also talked about the behavioral actions they took when they realized that their marriages were in trouble or they were going through the divorce process. Participants spoke about the resources they turned to for help, which

resulted in codes that reflected behavioral themes from three perspectives: (a) self-initiated resources, (b) church resources, and (c) other resources.

Self-initiated resources. Two themes emerged in the self-initiated behavioral category including efforts the women made to fix their marriage and cope spiritually.

Trying to fix marriage. All nine participants (100%) described efforts they made to save their marriage or support their husbands (see Table 8). Even those who initiated the divorce made efforts or tried again at some point (6/7, 86%). They spoke about how they fought, sacrificed, tried again, read books, took classes, prayed, engaged in individual and marital counseling, quit drinking to support an alcoholic husband, and tried to find ways to make it work.

Table 8

Trying to Fix Marriage

Trying to Fix Marriage	Participant Number	Quote
Looked for answers	437	I read books. We went to a marriage encounter. We took classes and counseling. I prayed. We tried to pray together.
	438	During counseling, I was trying to figure out what was going on. 'Am I losing my mind?' I wasn't thinking narcissism until a counselor finally mentioned it.
	440	Then he wanted to move out. In the beginning I offered to do counseling together to figure it out and help him get to a place where he's happy. [He refused].
Made sacrifices	439	He was an alcoholic and I dealt with that for many years. When he quit drinking, I out of respect for him also quit . . . he's out screwing around having a great time and here I am thinking I'm being noble; a good wife kind of thing.
	436	Even though the marriage was hard, I didn't expect it to end. I fought. I tried. To be abandoned like that when I had sacrificed so much was devastating.

Made sacrifices (continued)	443	When the counselor suggested separation, I felt crushed. I was devastated because I tried everything to keep us together.
Bound and determined	441	As a Catholic I was bound and determined to make it work. Plus I didn't want people to think I made the worst mistake of my life.
	442	We spent a year of trying to get back together. But he was just so dependent and needy and whiny. Then he found another girlfriend.
	444	I had a very hard time because in my Catholic faith I believe you find ways to work through it [e.g., his anger, drinking, and abuse] and I wasn't finding ways. I was trying to be patient.

Spiritual self-initiation. From a behavioral and religious standpoint, all of the women either increased or maintained their weekly practice of Mass and Communion. Each participant also went to confession at least once since her divorce (see Table 5). Four participants completed the annulment process (See "Church Resources"). Results of the Brief RCOPE showed that most participants (89%) engaged in positive religious coping strategies, such as "[I] looked for a stronger connection with God" or "sought help from God in letting go of anger" (Pargament et al., 2011, p. 57). In addition, 67% of participants also "sought God's love and care" and "asked forgiveness for sins" (Pargament et al., 2011, p. 57). The majority (56%) also "tried to put their plans into action together with God" and "focused on religion to stop worrying about their problems" (Pargament et al., 2011, p. 57).

Church resources. Participant 441 summed up the experience of many of the women when she said, "when I first got divorced I was looking for something in the church. But I didn't know what. I mean . . . You look where you expect to find some answers." Some participants joined women's groups, divorce support groups, or Bible study groups. Some participants talked to a priest or spiritual advisor. Confession,

Communion, and annulment are three practices that are unique to Catholicism. Annulment was covered in the section of spiritual experience of divorce. The practices of confession and Communion, in relation to Catholic women's experience of divorce, are addressed in this section.

Support from church or priest. Seven of the women (78%) felt supported by the church and priests. Support from priests included personal prayer, advise, and absolution in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Priests also helped four of the women (44%) reframe their impression of their marriage (see "Cognitive"). Consequently, these women were better able to understand the reality of their situation and move forward. The Church, in general, provided Communion, which was described as "a big thing" (439) and "a way to help me through the divorce, restart my life, [and] get closer to God" (444). The Church provided divorce support groups but not everyone who searched for a divorce group found one (see "Unsupported by church or priest"). Even so, some of the women in this study felt supported in women's groups and Bible study groups at their church.

Although there were not any specific questions in the interview related Communion after divorce, four of nine participants (44%) made unsolicited comments about the importance of and their desire to receive Communion. Six participants (67%) also spoke about going to confession after divorce. As mentioned above, all of the participants attended the Sacrament of Reconciliation at least once since their divorce and all of the participants attend Mass and receive Communion weekly on average. Even though some of following quotations have been cited already, the women's desire for Communion and the importance of confession can best be understood when presented together (see Table 9). One of the goals of this study was to present the religious coping

strategies of Catholic women after divorce. Communion and confession were two important coping strategies for all of the women in this study that are uniquely Catholic.

Table 9

Communion and Confession

Communion and Confession	Participant Number	Quote
Communion	439b	By this time I knew that you are not excommunicated if you are divorced. So I thought, Okay. I need to get rid of mortal sins on my soul so I can go to Communion. This was a big thing for me to go to Communion. So I called up this priest in this church. I made an appointment to go to confession, for the first time in 43 years, to get rid of mortal sins on my soul so I could go to Communion. He blessed me and forgave me so I could go to Communion. And that's what I really wanted.
	442	I had a harder time during my single period in my 40s . . . And I wasn't really the best Catholic in the world during that period of time. So there was definitely a period where I wasn't feeling good going to Communion.
	443	At that time [early 1990's] the women that were divorced were not allowed to go to Communion because they thought it was a sin but it's not. It's if you get remarried or you fool around outside of marriage. So there was a lot of misinformation.
	444	I just started going to Communion because I felt like more and more my faith was growing and I needed my Christian faith. I needed this as a way to help me through the divorce; as a way to help me through restarting my life; as a way to come closer to God.
Confession	437	Soon after separating, I went to confession . . . as soon as I could actually talk because it was hard to even just talk about it without breaking down. It just hurt me so much that I had failed in my marriage. It was so hard. I mean, I've been to confession and I know God loves me and forgives me for the things that I did or didn't do that made my marriage fail.

Confession (continued)	441	After the divorce, I thought, finally, I can really be a Catholic. He used to poo poo when I was going to confession.
	442	So I finally went to confession. To confess my sins of my original single years, which was a huge load off my mind and I felt very sort of cleansed and renewed after that.
	443	I went back to reconciliation. And got myself back onto the right road and for the right reason.
	444	I went to my second confession in 37 years, and the priest was so supportive and non-judgmental. I felt God's mercy and open arms when he said, 'Welcome back. The Prodigal child has returned!'

Lack of support from church or priest. Seven participants (78%) reported that they felt unsupported by the Church (see Table 10). Some of these women felt abandoned, forgotten, or shunned. Some of them said the Church had nothing to offer and there were no support groups or community for divorced people. One woman described an experience in confession when she felt the priest "practically yelled" (444) at her for going to Communion without an annulment after remarriage.

Table 10

Lack of Church Support

Lack of Church Support	Participant Number	Quote
Felt abandoned by the church	436	When you lose your husband to death, the church is right beside you. It's the divorce. It is a bit of an abandonment not only from your spouse but by the church as well. I didn't feel that camaraderie. I felt like I was on my own totally.
No community	437	It's lovely how [the church] supports families and married people. But there are so many people that are single. So many people who are alone. When I'd go to Mass I'd look around and I'd think of all of them and how there's nothing for us except just the love of Jesus and the traditions that the church gives us, but no community.

No community (continued)	439	The divorce community is more or less forgotten. Probably a better word would be shunned. Like they are lepers.
Lack of divorce support	441	I felt like I was out there in the wilderness with nobody to show me the way. And I really feel that the church doesn't offer much in the way of divorce counsel.
	441	When I first got divorced I was looking for something in the church. But I didn't know what. I mean . . . You look where you expect to find some answers. Yeah, they really don't have [anything].
	442	If you're a single woman or especially a divorced woman and not a widow then you're really not . . . There was really nothing for me here necessarily.
	436	There is a missing link in what is being done for the divorced families.
Lack of divorce support groups	439	We've got groups for anything you can imagine young or old anything in between. Studying the Bible and gardening. But there's no group for supporting divorced men and women.
	439	One thing that I found after I was divorced I knew I needed to have a support group. And having moved to a new town I knew no one. So I thought there's got to be somebody out there. Some groups of people but there was nothing.
	441	There is the young adult group, there's the bereavement group, there's the senior group, but divorced people are like shunned. And that's what I was feeling. And I tried you know.
Did not seek help from church	442	I did not seek a lot of help from the church because I guess I've never really felt like the church . . . and relationships or marriages and stuff . . . I know it sounds weird but that's not the place I would go for [help about that].
	442	The last person I would talk to about being divorced is a Catholic priest. He's a celibate man that could not possibly understand my viewpoint. I wouldn't talk to any man [Paraphrased].
Priest practically yelled	444	That first priest who practically yelled at me in the confessional, "You can't do that!" [e.g., receive Communion when you are remarried] OK. Oh boy. No wonder I haven't gone to confession in 30 something years.

Other resources. All of the participants (100%) turned to counselors, family, or friends for help during or after their divorce. Most of the participants (78%) engaged in counseling during their marriage and eight of nine (89%) engaged in counseling after the divorce. Four participants sought a Catholic counselor but only one received counseling from a Catholic counselor. All of the participants (100%) referred to support they received from family or friends and six participants (67%) reported that they felt unsupported by others.

Counseling. All of the participants sought counseling and their experiences varied (see Table 11). They described how marriage counseling provided a third party to give weight to what they said; empowered their husband to ask for a divorce; "was just ridiculous because he talks his way into and out of whatever he wants to talk his way into" (438); helped them agree on how to tell the children about the divorce; helped them talk about whether or not to have children; or was painful because they realized they did not really know their husband and the counselor suggested separation.

Participant 436 said that her husband used individual counseling as a way to try to fix her and he also used the information from counseling against her. Others said counseling provided someone to talk to, helped with depression, and was wonderful, helpful, not cheap, and needed. Participant 437 described counseling as her attempt to become "more loving when I wasn't feeling very loving" (437). Participant 438 was trying to figure out what was happening and her counselor suggested that she look into narcissism. Participant 441 said she went to counseling because she looking for some definitive answers. Participant 444 sought counseling from a friend who was also a

counselor but the experience was brief because she was afraid her husband would find out that she was talking about his alcohol use, anger and abuse.

Table 11

Experience in Counseling

Experience in Counseling	Participant Number	Quote
Blindsided	437	My husband said I want a divorce. So it was like this whole time he's with this man [in couple to couple counseling], who is to be leading us toward solving our problems, had been empowering him. That's what I felt like.
	443	When the counselor suggested separation we said you know . . . I tried everything to keep this together. And when the counselor said that . . . I felt crushed. You know I was devastated.
Husband used counseling against wife or to fix wife	436	We found a spiritual woman who wanted to meet with me every day and he turned that on me. But he asked me to go meet with this woman every day to fix me.
	438	So counseling was not new but we never got anything out of counseling. It was just ridiculous because he talks his way into and out of whatever he wants to talk his way in to. I think he thought he was doing it for me because I was having a problem and he was going to help me help the therapist help me.
Looking for answers	438	[After several years of counseling], one of the therapists told me that her thoughts were that he was a narcissist [and] to be looking into narcissism. I wish someone had said that sooner.
	441	[I was looking] for some definitive answers. I believe in the power of prayer but it can only go so far.
	443	When we got back [from Hawaii] and that is when I said, I need to go to counseling because there's something wrong with our marriage. If he's picking work over a trip like that with his wife you know.

Support from family, friends, and others. All of the participants spoke about support they received from family, friends, and others during their divorce. One of the most striking examples called attention to the importance of suicide assessment after

divorce. Participant 439 reported that a nurse practitioner noticed she had been prescribed tranquilizers and inquired if she was thinking about suicide, which turned out to be the case. The nurse practitioner recommended immediate counseling and provided referrals. Participant 439 said that she did not have a counselor but she went to a Catholic Church after being away for 43 years and she found what she was looking for. She made an appointment with a priest who heard her confession. This example is consistent with a study by Lawler-Row (2010) who found links between forgiveness and positive health benefits in older adults.

Other examples included help received from family, friends, and co-workers (e.g., rides to the airport, places to stay, recommendations for counselors, and time off from work). Some of the women also mentioned spiritual encouragement they received from family and friends including, "I sought out women of my faith to stand with me during that hard time" (436); "These incredible Catholic friends; they were like come back to the Catholic Church. So I started going and just sitting in adoration" (438); and "I really didn't plan on getting into [the Bible study] but the person that was running it happened to catch me after Mass and I couldn't give her any excuses why I couldn't. So I said sure, you know" (443).

Unsupported by others. Six participants also shared about how they felt unsupported by others in terms of feeling judged, lack of resources to help with divorce or abuse, or other divorced people perpetuating the shame of divorce. Some of the comments included "there is a missing link in what is being done for the divorced families" (436); people felt awkward and did not know how to relate to her after divorce (437); "some people will guilt you if you get divorced" (438); the policeman did not have

any help to offer after her husband hit her (439a); only one person supported the marriage and told her husband he was making a mistake (442): people are unduly ashamed of their divorce status (442); other people do not want divorced people around or think divorce is contagious (442); and loss of friends after divorce (443).

Summary

The phenomenon of divorce for the nine Catholic women in this qualitative research study was examined in terms of their cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and behavioral experience of divorce to gain an understanding of the essence of their experience.

From a cognitive perspective, most participants reported that they did not want a divorce or do not believe in divorce. After talking to a counselor or a priest, several women reframed their thinking about their marriage or divorce. For instance, some women learned to accept that their marriage was over after other people pointed out or emphasized that their husbands were no longer participating in the marriage (e.g., "this isn't a marriage" [436] and "he is already gone" [440]).

Emotionally, the women used powerful negative feeling words throughout the interviews to describe their experience of divorce. Some participants also compared their emotional experience to the death of a spouse. Some women felt excluded and reported feeling shunned, forgotten, like a leper, or the odd man out. Most of the women cried during the interviews, primarily when they were asked about their emotional experience, and secondarily, when they were asked about their spiritual experience of divorce.

Spiritually, participants reported that they either increased or maintained their Catholic practices of Mass, Communion, and confession since their divorce. Most of the

participants experienced their divorce as a sacred loss or desecration and engaged in adaptive spiritual coping strategies, such as "looking for a stronger connection with God" and "seeking help from God in letting go of anger" (Pargament et al., 2011, p. 57). On the other hand, many of the participants also "wondered whether God [or the Church] had abandoned them" (Pargament et al., 2011, p. 57) as a result of their divorce.

The spiritual experience of divorce varied for each participant. For instance, participants reported reading scripture comforted them or helped them get closer to God; their faith grew; they were grateful for their faith and God's presence; they went back to church or they left the church; church was an escape; they were too overwhelmed to turn to their faith; or they were just going through the motions of attending church. Despite the variety of spiritual experiences, many of the participants shared a desire to receive Communion and they took steps, such as attending the sacrament of Reconciliation, to ensure they could receive Communion in good standing.

With regard to spirituality and counseling, most of the participants reported that spirituality was not addressed in individual counseling. Some of the women attended divorce support groups that were spiritually based and some women reported that they looked for, but could not find, such groups.

Four of the participants completed an annulment and found the annulment experience to both difficult and healing. The other participants, who did not complete an annulment, reported false ideas such as how an annulment would invalidate their children. Other thoughts that may or may not be true included the annulment would be too much work, or that safety would be compromised by contacting an abusive ex-husband, or that it was not needed until planning to remarry. Definitions of annulment also varied based

on whether or not an annulment was completed. Definitions provided by those who completed an annulment matched the true definition (that the marriage was invalid from the beginning) more closely than the other participants' definitions, which included incorrect responses such as how an annulment is permission to discontinue the marriage sacrament, a way to excuse your behavior, or the church's divorce.

Behavioral themes were examined from three perspectives: self-initiated resources, church resources, and other resources. Self-initiated resources included efforts to fix their marriage, such as sacrificing, looking for answers, and initiating individual and marital counseling. Participants also self-initiated spiritual behaviors including Mass attendance, going to confession, seeking an annulment, as well as items highlighted on the Brief RCOPE such as "looking for a stronger connection with God," "seeking help from God in letting go of anger," "focusing on religion to stop worrying about problems," or "trying to put their plans into action together with God" (Pargament et al., 2011).

All of the participants sought support from the Church. The resources they received varied and included prayer, counsel from a priest, divorce support groups, women's groups, and Bible study groups. Most of the participants also mentioned feeling unsupported by the Church. For instance, they spoke about feeling abandoned, totally on their own, no community for divorced people, inability to find divorce support groups, feeling forgotten, shunned, and being "practically yelled at in the confessional" (444) for going to Communion without an annulment after remarriage.

Behavioral actions taken by the participants that are unique to Catholicism included attending the sacraments of Reconciliation and Communion. These actions were not addressed directly in the interview questions; however, many participants made

unsolicited remarks about the importance of both in relation to their experience of divorce.

Other resources sought by participants included counselors, family, and friends. Marriage counseling experiences varied. On the one hand, participants described marriage counseling as helpful for giving weight to what they said to their husbands, to agreeing on how to tell the children about divorce, or to talk about whether or not to have children. On the other hand, marriage counseling was also described as ridiculous because of an ex-husband's narcissistic tendencies, or that it progressed toward unwanted decisions to divorce or separate. Individual counseling was described, in part, as helpful to have someone to talk to, a search for answers, helpful for depression, wonderful, not cheap, and needed.

Participants described the support they received from family and friends as sympathetic or encouraging (e.g., to return to church or to join a Bible study). They also received support in the form of a ride to the airport, a place to stay, or time off from work. Friends also recommended a church or a good counselor. Some participants reported that they felt unsupported in the following ways: "there is a missing link in what is being done for the divorced families" (436), friends were awkward and did not know how to relate to a divorced woman, "some people will guilt you" (438), police had no help to offer, or loss of friendships after divorce.

In summary, the essence of the lived experience of divorce for the Catholic women in this qualitative study was examined from cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and behavioral perspectives. Elements that distinguish the experience of divorce for the Catholic women in this study include their belief in the permanence of marriage that is

governed by the Church, as well as a desire to be in good standing with the Church and to receive Communion after divorce. Even though the ordinary practices of Mass, Communion, and Reconciliation were a comfort, many of the participants also expressed a sense of loneliness, a desire for community, and the Church's lack of resources to support divorced individuals and families.

Chapter Four: Discussion

Catholic marriage is intended to be a lifelong union. According to Catholic teaching, divorce is not an option when a man and woman have freely consented to marriage and the Rite of Marriage has been validly established in a Catholic Church. The Catholic women in this study experienced divorce despite their beliefs in the indissolubility of marriage and their efforts to stay married. Their stories were gathered and analyzed with both cognitive theory and sanctification theory in mind with the intent to advance our understanding of the experience of divorce for Catholic women. This research included an exploration of the cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and behavioral experience of divorce particularly as they related to spiritual trauma, religious coping practices, and transformational pathways. The two main goals of this study were to (a) gain an understanding of the experience of divorce for Catholic women and (b) explore religious coping strategies including annulment, which is uniquely Catholic.

Research Question 1: Was divorce experienced as a spiritual trauma?

Spiritual trauma. From emotional and spiritual standpoints, the Catholic women in this study experienced spiritual trauma related to their divorce as evidenced by their scores on the SLDS (Pargament et al., 2005). In essence, they viewed their divorce as an unexpected, devastating, and stressful life event associated with the sacred loss or desecration of their marriage that shattered their worldview about the permanence of marriage. Pargament et al. (2005) claimed that spiritual trauma disrupts the foundations of a person's sense of identity, stability, and consistency. Likewise, the women in this study described the disruption of (a) their sense of identity as married Catholic women, (b) the stability of their Catholic ideals, and (c) the consistency of their spirituality. One

woman described how friends did not know how to relate to her as a divorced woman. Another woman was confused because she could not understand how divorce could be part of God's plan for her since she does not belief in divorce. Many of the women worried about whether they were allowed to receive Communion.

Sanctification theory. The spiritual foundations of these women were shattered and needed to be reconstructed in light of their new and, for the most part, unwanted divorce status (Janoff-Bulman, 1989; Pargament at al., 2005). The theory of sanctification provided a framework from which to examine the process of reconstruction. According to Pargament and Mahoney (2011), sanctification includes (a) the discovery of sanctified objects, (b) conservation of sanctified objects, and (c) transformation associated with spiritual struggle.

The focus of discussion will be mainly on the third, transformational phase. However, it would be important to first recognize that the women had discovered marriage as a sacred object and made efforts to conserve it. They described their conservation efforts in terms of two of the four tenants of the theory by (a) investing more in their marriage and (b) preserving and protecting it (Pargament & Mahoney, 2011). During the interviews, they spoke about sacrifices they made and how they were "bound and determined" (441) to make their marriages work despite their husbands' choices to leave or betray them. In addition to investing in and protecting their marriages, they suffered more from the loss of their marriage – another tenant of sanctification theory (Pargament & Mahoney, 2011). Even though this study did not include a comparison of Catholic divorce to other divorcees, one could argue that the women suffered more from the loss of their marriage because they also lost their sense of identity

(e.g., their marital standing in the Church) and many wondered if God and the Church had abandoned them, too.

Marriage was not the only sacred object identified in this study. Communion also emerged as an important sanctified object for this group of Catholic women. Catholics believe that Eucharist or Holy Communion is the true Body and Blood of Jesus and those who receive it are united to Jesus in a special way. Any Catholic who is conscious of grave sin should go to sacramental confession prior to receiving Communion and many of the women worried that they would not be able to receive Communion as a result of their divorce. According to Pargament (2010), people tend to turn to various religious coping strategies when something sacred is threatened to be lost. For each of these women, a primary coping strategy was to attend the sacrament of Reconciliation or confession with a priest. Confession and forgiveness (Bonach & Sales, 2002; Moreira-Almeida, Lotufo Neto, & Koenig, 2006) were important processes that alleviated their concerns and reassured them that they could continue to receive Communion in good standing (e.g., "This was a big thing for me to go to Communion," Participant 439).

Research Question 2: Did Participants Engage in Religious Coping Strategies?

Religious coping. Pargament's (1997, 2010) theory of religious coping emphasizes multiple functions and modalities that are likely to change over time and lead to either helpful or harmful results depending on the context and situation. In this study, all of the women engaged in approach coping strategies as they turned to the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist but, otherwise, the dynamic process of religious coping varied for each participant. The women's thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and spiritual pursuits related to their divorce revealed their religious coping strategies, which included

reconstructing the meaning of their marriage, divorce, and relationships with family and friends. They also made efforts to conserve other sacred objects such as Mass and Communion (Pargament, Koenig, & Perez, 2000).

For instance, one woman described how she had thoughts of giving up in the midst of a two-year child custody battle in which her husband turned their children against her. She was able to manage her overwhelming sadness, anger, fear, and anxiety with prayer and scriptural reading. She described how God provided scripture verses that let her know He understood the battle she was facing and that He was there for her. She was enormously comforted by these "miraculous" (436) encounters and expressed that her faith grew and she became very close to God during that time.

In contrast, another woman was disengaged from her faith for over 40 years after her first divorce. She thought she had been excommunicated and was very angry with God. She "closed the door on religion and God" (439) until many years later when she experienced another devastating divorce and was contemplating suicide. She did not have a counselor at that time but she found a Catholic Church. After a few "gut wrenching" (439) visits she made an appointment to attend the sacrament of Reconciliation with a priest. She cried when she said, "The priest blessed me and forgave me so I could go to Communion. That's what I really wanted" (439). She said she needed Jesus. She needed someone to talk to and be with and watch over her and help her, so she made it her "business to search out a church and get back into the religion" (439). After 40 years of anger with God, she loves church now and seldom misses Mass because she enjoys it. Mass gives her peace, comfort, and calm.

These examples provide a glimpse into the complex and individual spiritual journeys of divorce for Catholic women. Religious coping styles can vary dramatically and lead to either helpful or harmful results even within a very defined Christian sect such as Catholicism. For instance, positive forms of religious coping that predict well-being outcomes should be encouraged, while negative forms should be transformed (Simonič, & Klobučar, 2017). Along those lines, it is important for counselors to encourage Catholic clients to verify Church teaching when their beliefs cause them to be angry or distressed. For example, the belief that divorced Catholics are excommunicated is a myth that can lead to years of resentment and anger. Divorced Catholics are not excommunicated. Excommunication is rare and usually takes the form of a decree issued by a Church authority. It is true that Catholics must abide by the marital laws of the Church. For instance, remarriage while an ex-spouse is still alive is considered sinful but not a cause for ex-communication. According to Church teaching, remarriage is equivalent to the sin of adultery and remarried Catholics must complete an annulment to be in good standing to receive Communion. Otherwise, divorced Catholics who are not remarried and are not in a state of mortal sin can receive Communion, with or without an annulment. Divorced Catholics are encouraged to attend the sacrament of Reconciliation, as are all Catholics, in order to receive Communion without the stain of mortal sin.

Transformation. Spiritual struggle related to divorce for the women in this study also included a process of transformation. According to Pargament and Mahoney (2011), there are two transformational pathways for processing religious struggles. One pathway tends to lead to an integration of beliefs and the other to disengagement. For example, recall the woman who turned to scripture during her custody battle. She was integrating

her faith with scripture reading, which she found to be responsive to her situation. She also sought out women of faith to stand with her during that tumultuous time. The result was an integration of her beliefs that were stable and provided her with "a powerful guiding vision" (Pargament & Mahoney, 2011, p. 612).

Likewise, another woman in this study became disoriented and confused as she struggled to understand how divorce could be part of God's plan for her since she does not believe in divorce. She engaged in an approach coping strategy and turned to a priest in her search for meaning. The priest helped her understand that God's plan always includes free choice and her husband was choosing not to participate in God's plan for their marriage since he left to be with another woman. She said that the priest helped her realize she no longer had a marriage because of his choices. This advice helped her reorient so she could stop resisting and move forward through the divorce process, even though she neither believes in nor wanted divorce.

In contrast, the spiritual struggles of some of the other women led to avoidant strategies or disengagement from religion. Pargament (2010) hypothesized that some spiritual struggles lead to unsatisfactory answers and to disengagement from the search for the sacred. Disengagement is often temporary but could be permanent.

In this study, there were several examples of temporary disengagement after a period of disorienting spiritual struggle. For some of the women, religiosity led to feelings of guilt and negative thoughts (Hale & Clark, 2013). Recall the woman who thought she was excommunicated and then disengaged from God and the Church for over forty years. Another woman appeared to be engaged in her faith and attended Mass every week but, in reality, she was just going through the motions for ten years after her divorce.

For her, a much more meaningful integration of her beliefs came after she was invited to a Bible study where she reengaged in the search for meaning. She sobbed as she recounted the discovery of "this thread that binds [the Old Testament through the New] all together . . . and then the light went on and it became true" (443). This pivotal moment led her back to the sacrament of Reconciliation and a love for Jesus in the Eucharist. In other words, her faith became more real than ritual and she got "back on the right road for the right reasons" (443).

While many of the women turned to their faith to cope with their divorce, they did not all receive satisfactory assistance from the Church (Greeff & Merwe, 2004; Mahoney, Krumrei, & Pargament, 2008). Some of the women found a support group at a nearby parish and others went to a local Presbyterian divorce support group. However, most of the women spoke about how they looked for something in the church after their divorce "where you expect to find some answers" (441) but they could not find anything. One woman spoke at length about how the Church offers counsel and support through many rites of passage, such as funerals after the death of a spouse - "But when it's divorce . . . can you hear that silence. That's what it's like" (436).

The best spiritual pathways are able to meet the challenges and demands of life events (Pargament & Mahoney, 2011). The Church offers Reconciliation, Communion, prayer, and priestly advice. However, Catholicism lacks scriptural stories and rituals directly related to healing after divorce, which may account, in part, for the women's inability to find sufficient communal support and counsel from the Church or other factors may exist that were not a subject of this study (Mahoney, Krumrei, & Pargament, 2008; Smith & Smith, 2000). Therefore, even though the women in this study, for the

most part, turned to their Catholic faith as an important resource to cope with their divorce, they tended not to receive suitable assistance (Greeff & Merwe, 2004; Mahoney et al., 2008; Pargament, 2010). The Catholic Church does offer an annulment process, but annulments are typically evoked only when someone is considering remarriage and not necessarily as a pathway for healing after divorce.

Research Question 3: Was Annulment a Transformational Pathway?

Annulment. An annulment is unique aspect of the Catholic faith that relates specifically to divorce. For some of the women in this study, the annulment process was a transformational pathway that restored beliefs about the permanence of marriage after divorce by declaring their marriage invalid from the beginning. However, for some of the women in this study the annulment process was not flexible enough to meet their needs. For example, one of the women considered an annulment but then decided not to pursue it. She felt the requirement to contact her abusive ex-husband was absurd since it would put her at risk. She walked away thinking "it's not worth my life" (444). She ultimately decided to marry her second husband outside of the Church and, for almost two decades, she hid her past marriage while she raised her children in the Catholic faith. For her, the inflexibility of the annulment process to provide a reasonable pathway for remarriage was a source of great distress, especially after she realized that she was not supposed to receive Communion.

Most of the women in this study sought an annulment and four annulments were granted. Most of those who did not seek an annulment reported that they either do not plan to remarry or they will apply for an annulment if they decide to marry in the future. It is true that annulments are only required for those Catholics who are remarried.

Nevertheless, the women who received an annulment benefited by engaging in the annulment process even though none of them ever remarried. The women who received an annulment described a lengthy, dichotomous process that was ultimately healing but somewhat of a torment to complete. On one hand, the annulment was described as healing, necessary, cleansing, closure, acceptance, helpful, easy, positive, freeing, reassuring, and a learning experience, as well as, "part of my . . . forgivingness of him" (443). On the other hand, it was also emotionally painful, hurtful, hard, and tough. Some of the women felt it was also very hard to find the energy to relive it all again and to gather witnesses who knew the inner workings of the family. One participant also said it was tough to think of marriage as being invalid from the beginning, especially since she had no reservations prior to her wedding - "I wondered, did I miss something?" (440). Even so, she recognized the value of succumbing to the arduous process because she wanted to be open to having a "Trinitarian union in a marriage again" (440).

Thus, annulment, for the most part, had value as a transformational pathway after divorce but it is often underutilized and misunderstood. Forty-four percent of the women in this study completed an annulment and 67% sought one, which is much higher than the national average of 7% and 15% respectively. Annulments could be underutilized for a variety of reasons including limited staff to assist in processing them, although that was not investigated here. In this study, the women who did not seek an annulment reported that they did not have the energy after divorce, no one suggested it, or they do not need one unless they were going to remarry. Even though this was true, misunderstanding also played a role in underutilization. For instance, those who did not complete an annulment provided several incorrect definitions for annulment in comparison to those who

completed an annulment, including that an annulment would invalidate children, it is the Church's divorce, or that it excuses your behavior. The stories of both groups of women in this study (i.e., those who completed an annulment and those who did not) provided insight into the idea of annulment as a transformational pathway for processing emotional and spiritual struggles related to divorce for Catholics, regardless of whether or not they remarry.

Clinical Implications

From a cognitive theory perspective, the women's religious beliefs about divorce and the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors associated with it, could have been a focus for therapy. However, most of the women said that spirituality was not discussed in individual therapy. Some women looked for a Catholic counselor but were unable to find one and others did not expect to address spirituality in counseling. A meta-analysis of 850 studies found links between positive cognitive processes and religious involvement, particularly when it comes to resilience and a sense of purpose (Moreira-Almeida, Lotufo Neto, & Koenig, 2006). This study supports other research findings that religious beliefs provide more comfort than strain (Exline, Yali, & Sanderson, 2000; Harris, Erbes, Engdahl, Olson, Winskowski, & McMahill, 2008; Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez, 1998).

Duba and Ponton (2012) recommended that counselors explore the meaning of divorce and the value of an annulment for Catholic clients. In this study, the women who completed the annulment process discovered that an annulment provided many cognitive, emotional, and spiritual benefits as it provided a way to be "right with the Church and with the Lord" (443), openness and hope for future marriage, spiritual healing, a learning

experience, and a pathway to forgiveness. Recall the woman who said she was just going through the motions of attending weekly Mass. She was spiritually disconnected and did not experience her divorce in term of either a sacred loss or desecration. However, despite her lack of spirituality in these areas, the annulment process helped her overcome years of anger toward her husband, particularly when she discovered how his background influenced his behavior. She said, "It was part of my going through . . . forgiveness of him" (443). Forgiveness has helped her to compassionately explain her ex-husband's actions to her children and was an important cognitive process that led to more positive adjustment and co-parenting after divorce (Bonach & Sales, 2002; Moreira-Almeida, Lotufo Neto, & Koenig, 2006). Thus, annulment can be an important pathway for transformation cognitively, emotionally, spiritually, and behaviorally, even for Catholics who are fundamentally disengaged from their spirituality.

Duba and Ponton (2012) also suggested several thoughts and emotions relevant to divorce for Catholic women, which could be processed in therapy. For instance, the women in this study experienced sadness, loss, and loneliness in relation to changes they experienced within the Church community as a result of their divorce. Most of the women cried during the interview, which indicated that they continue to experience profound pain when recalling and talking about their divorce despite an average of 16.5 years since divorce (range: 7-30 years, $M = 14.5$ years). They also reported doubts and fears about receiving Communion after divorce, going to confession after a long absence, and gathering witnesses during the annulment process. On the positive side, they experienced relief after confession and joy in receiving Communion again. One woman

expressed great joy to be free after years of abuse and another was just happy to be able to practice her religion without criticism from her husband.

One rationale for this study on divorce for Catholic women was related to Principle E of the *Ethical Principles for Psychologists and Code of Conduct* (APA, 2017), which states that psychologists should be aware of and respect cultural differences including those based on religion. Principle E also directs psychologists to consider religious factors when working with clients. According to Duba and Ponton (2012), individual therapy could include religious factors regarding reactions of family and friends to the divorce, the client's decision to seek an annulment or not, as well as any reservations about annulment including angst about notifying former spouses.

At a minimum, counselors should avoid perpetuating myths that cause confusion and distress for their Catholic clients even when their clients repeat them. Myths, such as divorced Catholics are excommunicated, annulments illegitimatize children, or women must remain in abusive marriages, should be directly refuted and clinicians can encourage their clients to seek accurate information. Catholic teachings are readily available on the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website (www.usccb.org), which contains helpful facts about Reconciliation, Eucharist, the Rite of Marriage, divorce and annulment, as well as how to recognize and assist victims of domestic abuse.

Limitations and Future Study

All nine participants described the cognitive experience of contemplating divorce. However, three participants (33%) said that they did not contemplate divorce and then later in the interview, provided their thoughts about the experience. Their initial response indicated a possible flaw in the question "What was it like for you to contemplate

divorce?" In other words, the intention was to find out what the participants were thinking when they knew that divorce was imminent. A better question may have been, "What was it like for you to think that you may be getting a divorce?"

Limitations of the study included the small sample size, the exclusion of Catholic men, and limited recruitment. This qualitative study provided an opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of the essence of divorce for a small group of Catholic women. However, the small sample size precludes the results from being accurately generalized to the larger Catholic population. Generalization of results could lead to erroneous stereotypes and should be avoided. Future studies should include Catholic men to gain a broader understanding of the experience of divorce for Catholics. Men were not included in this study to simplify analysis by eliminating the need to account for gender differences. Advertising was limited to a local parish bulletin to maximize the potential of recruiting Catholic women but it also limited the potential for enlisting former or disengaged Catholics. Future study should include disengaged Catholics to examine differences in spiritual struggles and religious coping strategies, and also to compare adjustment outcomes after divorce between the religiously engaged and disengaged groups.

Future study should also examine the effectiveness of religiously-based divorce resource materials to provide a foundation for the development of more evidence-based programs that promote healthy adjustment after divorce. Many of the women in this study would have liked to address spiritual concerns of divorce in individual counseling but they also seemed disappointed in the lack of divorce resources provided by the Church. In accordance with the Preamble of the *Ethical Principles for Psychologists and Code of*

Conduct (APA, 2017), psychologists are committed to use professional knowledge for the benefit of not only individuals but, also, in the larger context of organizations and society. Thus, psychologists should also advocate for and work with the Church to develop resource materials that take into account the intertwined psychological and spiritual aspects of divorce for Catholics.

Another area for future research should include an examination of whether or not spirituality is being addressed in counseling and how therapists can best integrate spirituality with other evidence-based interventions to promote symptom reduction and adjustment after stressful life events, such as divorce.

Conclusions

This qualitative research study on the lived experience of divorce for nine Catholic women included an exploration of the cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and behavioral experiences of divorce. In essence, most of the women in this study experienced spiritual trauma and struggles as a result of their divorce. They all engaged in religious coping strategies that are uniquely Catholic (e.g., Communion and Reconciliation), as well as a variety of others, which demonstrated the complexity and individuality of religious practices even within a well-defined sect of Christianity such as Catholicism. Some of the women temporarily disengaged from spirituality after divorce but most turned toward their religion. Those who completed an annulment found the process to be both difficult and healing. For them, annulment was an instrumental pathway for both emotional and spiritual healing after divorce. However, annulments were underutilized and often misunderstood by the other women in this study. All of the women received counseling at some point, either during their marital struggles or after

divorce. Some of the women sought counselors who could integrate spirituality in therapy and others did not. The majority of the women reported that spirituality was not addressed in counseling despite Principle E of the *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* (APA, 2017), which directs psychologists to consider religious factors when working with clients.

In conclusion, the essence of divorce for the Catholic women in this study highlighted a discrepancy between the support they needed and the support they received from both the church community and counselors. At a time when they were reeling from betrayal or abuse by their husbands, they also felt alone, deserted, and abandoned by the church community. Confession helped to alleviate concerns about receiving Communion after divorce. However, many of the women also looked for and could not find divorce support groups. Some of the women were able to find spiritual healing after receiving an annulment but many of the women did not understand the meaning of an annulment until after they participated in the process.

Counseling was an important part of the healing process for the women in this study. Even so, most of the women reported that spirituality was not addressed in therapy despite the prevalence of spiritual trauma and shattered core spiritual beliefs. A challenge for counselors will be to help Catholic clients find appropriate answers and resources as they sort out thoughts and feelings related to sacred beliefs, failure, confusion, and belonging.

In light of unwavering marriage laws in the Church, the Church faces the challenge of upholding the ideal of marriage permanence while graciously finding ways to be more inclusive of Catholics who have experienced civil divorce. At a minimum,

Church leaders can help divorced Catholics cope with feelings of confusion by making resources more readily available with regard to receiving Communion after divorce and explaining what an annulment is and is not. The Church could also go a step further to reach out to divorced Catholics to let them know they are not alone and that the Church community cares.

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Appendix A

Definitions

Annulment – "An annulment is a declaration by a Church tribunal (a Catholic church court) that a marriage thought to be valid according to Church law actually fell short of at least one of the essential elements required for a binding union" ("Annulment," 2018).

Church – For the purposes of this paper, the Church refers to the entity that encompasses the teaching of the Magisterium (i.e., the Pope and the bishops around the world in communion with him; Catholic Church, 1997, para. 2034) or a local Catholic Church community as opposed to a church building.

Convalidate – When a Catholic person has been married civilly, they can convalidate their marriage or make a new exchange of vows according to the Catholic form to make the civil union a valid, sacramental marriage (Grondin, 2018).

Marriage (Fanning, 1908) – Except in special cases (i.e., non-consummated Christian marriage and marriage of unbaptized persons), the matrimonial bond, once validly contracted, is indissoluble except by death. The State, the civil power, has no right whatever to grant divorces. It has the power to regulate marriages by license, registration, etc., but it has no authority to annul a valid marriage.

Eucharist (Catholic Church, 1997)

Paragraph 1406, Jesus said: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; . . . he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and . . . abides in me, and I in him" (John 6:51, 54, 56).

Paragraph 1407, The Eucharist is the heart and the summit of the Church's life, for in it Christ associates his Church and all her members with his sacrifice of praise and

thanksgiving offered once for all on the cross to his Father; by this sacrifice he pours out the graces of salvation on his Body which is the Church.

Appendix B

Grounds for Marriage Annulment: Code of Canon Law (1983)

Grounds for Marriage Annulment in the Catholic Church

There are very well defined canonical grounds for Marriage Annulment. Once these have been established marriage Annulment can proceed. It is important to understand the grounds for Marriage Annulment before making application, and if in doubt you should consult your local priest.

Insufficient use of reason (Canon 1095, 10)

You or your spouse did not know what was happening during the marriage ceremony because of insanity, mental illness, or a lack of consciousness.

Grave lack of discretionary judgment concerning essential matrimonial rights and duties (Canon 1095, 20)

You or your spouse was affected by some serious circumstances or factors that made you unable to judge or evaluate either the decision to marry or the ability to create a true marital relationship.

Psychic-natured incapacity to assume marital obligations (Canon 1095, 30)

You or your spouse, at the time of consent, was unable to fulfill the obligations of marriage because of a serious psychological disorder or other condition.

Ignorance about the nature of marriage (Canon 1096, sec. 1)

You or your spouse did not know that marriage is a permanent relationship between a man and a woman ordered toward the procreation of offspring by means of some sexual cooperation.

Error of person (Canon 1097, sec. 1) Reasons for Marriage Annulment

You or your spouse intended to marry a specific individual who was not the individual with whom marriage was celebrated. (For example, mail order brides; otherwise, this rarely occurs in the United States.)

Error about a quality of a person (Canon 1097, sec. 2)

You or your spouse intended to marry someone who either possessed or did not possess a certain quality, e.g., social status, marital status, education, religious conviction, freedom from disease, or arrest record. That quality must have been directly and principally intended.

Fraud (Canon 1098) Reasons for Marriage Annulment

You or your spouse was intentionally deceived about the presence or absence of a quality in the other. The reason for this deception was to obtain consent to marriage.

Total willful exclusion of marriage (Canon 1101, sec. 2)

You or your spouse did not intend to contract marriage as the law of the Catholic Church understands marriage. Rather, the ceremony was observed solely as a means of obtaining something other than marriage itself, e.g., to obtain legal status in the country or to legitimize a child.

Willful exclusion of children (Canon 1101, sec. 2)

You or your spouse married intending, either explicitly or implicitly, to deny the other's right to sexual acts open to procreation.

Willful exclusion of marital fidelity (Canon 1101, 12)

You or your spouse married intending, either explicitly or implicitly, not to remain faithful.

Willful exclusion of marital permanence (Canon 1101, sec. 2)

You or your spouse married intending, either explicitly or implicitly, not to create a permanent relationship, retaining an option to divorce.

Future condition (Canon 1102, sec. 2)

You or your spouse attached a future condition to your decision to marry, e.g., you will complete your education, your income will be at a certain level, you will remain in this area.

Past condition (Canon 1102, sec. 2)R

You or your spouse attached a past condition so your decision to marry and that condition did not exist; e.g., I will marry you provided that you have never been married before, I will marry you provided that you have graduated from college.

Present condition (Canon 1102, sec. 2)

You or your spouse attached a present condition to your decision to marry and that condition did not exist, e.g., I will marry you provided you don't have any debt.

Force (Canon 1103)

You or your spouse married because of an external physical or moral force that you could not resist.

Fear (1103)

You or your spouse chose to marry because of fear that was grave and inescapable and was caused by an outside source.

Error regarding marital unity that determined the will (1099)

You or your spouse married believing that marriage was not necessarily an exclusive relationship.

Error regarding marital indissolubility that determined the will (Canon 1099)

You or your spouse married believing that civil law had the power to dissolve marriage and that remarriage was acceptable after civil divorce.

Error regarding marital sacramental dignity that determined the will (Canon 1099)

You and your spouse married believing that marriage is not a religious or sacred relationship but merely a civil contract or arrangement.

Lack of new consent during convalidation (Canons 1157,1160)

After your civil marriage, you and your spouse participated in a Catholic ceremony and you or your spouse believed that (1) you were already married, (2) the Catholic ceremony was merely a blessing, and (3) the consent given during. the Catholic ceremony had no real effect.

Appendix C

Sacred Loss and Desecration Scale and Brief RCOPE

Brief RCOPE

The following items deal with ways you coped with your divorce. There are many ways to try to deal with situations such as divorce. These items ask what you did to cope. Obviously different people deal with things in different ways, but we are interested in how you tried to deal with it. Each item says something about a particular way of coping. We want to know to what extent you did what the item says. *How much or how frequently.*

Don't answer on the basis of what worked or not – just whether or not you did it. Use these response choices. Try to rate each item separately in your mind from the others. Make your answers as true FOR YOU as you can. Circle the answer that best applies to you.

1 – not at all
2 – somewhat
3 – quite a bit
4 – a great deal

l. Looked for a stronger connection with God.	1	2	3	4
2. Sought God's love and care.	1	2	3	4
3. Sought help from God in letting go of my anger.	1	2	3	4
4. Tried to put my plans into action together with God.	1	2	3	4
5. Tried to see how God might be trying to strengthen me in this situation.	1	2	3	4
6. Asked forgiveness for my sins.	1	2	3	4
7. Focused on religion to stop worrying about my problems.	1	2	3	4
8. Wondered whether God had abandoned me.	1	2	3	4
9. Felt punished by God for my lack of devotion.	1	2	3	4
10. Wondered what I did for God to punish me.	1	2	3	4
11. Questioned God's love for me.	1	2	3	4
12. Wondered whether my church had abandoned me.	1	2	3	4
13. Decided the devil made this happen.	1	2	3	4
14. Questioned the power of God.	1	2	3	4

Pargament, K. I., Koenig, H. G., & Perez, L. M. (2000). The many methods of religious coping: Development and initial validation of the RCOPE. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, *56*(4), 519–543. https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1097-4679(200004)56:4<519::AID-JCLP6>3.0.CO;2-1

Sacred Loss and Desecration Scale					
Please indicate how closely each statement describes your perception of your divorce.					
	Not at All				Very Much
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Something symbolic of God left my life.					
2. A part of my life in which I experienced God's love is now absent.					
3. My life lost something that once gave me a sense of spiritual fulfillment.					
4. This event involved losing a gift from God.					
5. Something that connected me to God is gone.					
6. Something that contained God is now empty.					
7. I lost something I thought God wanted for me.					
8. Something that gave sacred meaning to my life is now missing.					
9. Something of sacred importance in my life disappeared when this event took place.					
10. I suffered a loss of something that was given to me by God.					
11. Something I held sacred is no longer present in my life.					
12. A source of spirituality became absent in my life.					
13. In this event, something central to my spirituality was lost.					
14. Part of the pain of this event involved the loss of a blessing.					
15. Something from God was torn out of my life.					
16. A part of my life that God made sacred was attacked.					
17. The Divine in my life was intentionally harmed through this event.					

18. This event was both an offense against me and against God.					
19. Something sacred that came from God was dishonored.					
20. This event ruined a blessing from God.					
21. Something symbolic of God was purposely damaged.					
22. A violation of something spiritual to me occurred.					
23. This event was an immoral act against something I value.					
24. The event was a sinful act involving something meaningful in my life.					
25. Something evil ruined a blessing in my life.					
26. A sacred part of my life was violated.					
27. This event was a transgression of something sacred.					
28. Something that was sacred to me was destroyed.					
Pargament, K. I., Magyar, G. M., Benore, E., & Mahoney, A. (2005). Sacrilege: A Study of Sacred Loss and Desecration and Their Implications for Health and Well-Being in a Community Sample. Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 44(1), 59–78. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2005.00265.x					

Appendix D

Instructions for the Interviewer, Observation Form, and Field Notes Form

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEWER

"Thank you for meeting me today. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the experience of divorce for Catholic women."

"Let me show you this consent form that explains this research study." (Provide a copy of the consent form and keep a copy, then read or paraphrase contents explaining risks and benefits and the ability of the participant to withdraw at any time)

"Do you have any questions?"

"Would you be willing to sign?" (If yes, provide pen and collect the form after they sign)

"Do you have any questions before we begin?" (Answer questions and then begin)

☐ Marriage Query

1. How did you meet?
2. What went into your decision to marry?
3. How long was the engagement?
4. Did you live together before the wedding day?
5. How old were you when you got married?
6. Were you both Catholic at the time?
7. Did you participate in any premarital classes, assessments, or counseling? If so, what was that like for you?
8. Did you get married in a Catholic wedding ceremony? Why or why not?
9. Did you have any reservations about getting married? If so, tell me more about that?
10. Did you have any expectations about the marriage? If so, tell me more about that?

11. How long were you married?

☐ Marital Problem Query

1. How did you know your relationship was in trouble?
2. What did you do?
3. What was it like for you to contemplate divorce?
4. What was the divorce experience like for you emotionally?
5. What was the divorce experience like for you spiritually?
6. Did you seek help from a professional counselor or from the Church or both? What was that like for you?
7. Did spirituality come up in those conversations? If so, can you tell me more about that?
8. At what point in the relationship did you seek help?
9. What was the outcome of the counseling?

☐ Divorce and Annulment Query

1. Briefly describe the reasons for your divorce (provide list).

CHECK ALL THAT APPLY	
Infidelity	
Desertion	
Financial difficulty / difference	
Estrangement (i.e., grew apart)	
Too much arguing	
Lack of commitment by one partner	
Drug / alcohol use	
Incompatibility	
Child rearing difference	
Verbal, emotional, physical, sexual abuse	
Other (please list)	

2. How do you define an annulment?
3. Did you seek an annulment? Why or why not?

4. Was the annulment granted?
5. What was the annulment experience like for you emotionally and spiritually?
6. Administer Brief RCOPE and Sacred Loss and Desecration Scale (SLDS) [Earlier questions query for emerging data, these scales provide a prompt for deeper discussion of spiritual trauma, struggle, and coping related to marriage, divorce, and annulment for Catholic women]
7. Given your experience, do you have any recommendations for clergy?
8. Given your experience, do you have any recommendations for counselors?

(Clarifying questions may be used, such as "Could you tell me more about that?" and "Help me understand what you mean by…?")

RESEARCHER CHECKLIST					
Participant #	Interview date/time	Consent Form	Interview Questions & Notes	Field Notes Form	Observation Form

OBSERVATION FORM

Participant ID#: _____

Date/time: _____

Location: _____

QUESTION #	OBSERVATIONS	REFLECTIONS

FIELD NOTES

Researcher Name: _____

Date/time: _____

Location: _____

Did any thoughts or feelings come up? What was said? What might it mean?

Reflections

Hunches

QUESTION #	OBSERVATIONS	REFLECTIONS

Appendix E

CATHOLIC DIVORCE
Consent Form
Dissertation Research, Northwest University

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Ellen McMahon, graduate student in the doctoral program in Counseling Psychology at Northwest University. The study is being conducted for dissertation research. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the lived experience of Catholic women who experience divorce.

If you agree to participate in the study you will be asked to answer several questions about yourself, your marriage, and your divorce experience in an audio taped interview that will take approximately 45-60 minutes at a location and time that is convenient for you.

There are minimal risks associated with participation. Some individuals may be uncomfortable answering personal questions. Other risks may include possible embarrassment or recalling memories of painful experiences. The benefit of taking part in this study is the opportunity to participate in the research process as a research subject. You will also be offered a $10 gift card.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate in this study at any time and for any reason. You may refuse to answer any questions asked. There will not be any negative consequences for you if you refuse to participate. The national crisis line phone number and contact information for local counseling services are provided on the back of this form. During the audio-recorded interview, your responses will be confidential. The interviewer will refrain from using your name and no identifying information shared by you will be linked to the responses you share. By signing this consent form you are giving permission to use your responses in this research study. You may keep this consent form for your records.

The results from this study will be presented at a professional meeting prior to December 4, 2018 and published in a dissertation. All data forms will be destroyed by July 1, 2020. If you have any questions about this study, please contact Ellen McMahon at ellen.mcmahon13@northwestu.edu or 206-972-1788. If you have any further questions, please contact the faculty advisor Leihua Edstrom, Ph.D at leihua.edstrom@northwestu.edu or the Chair of the Northwest University IRB, Dr. Molly Quick, at molly.quick@northwestu.edu or 425-889-5327.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

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Doctoral Student in
Counseling Psychology
Northwest University

Leihua Edstrom, Ph.D.
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Associate Professor of Psychology
College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
Northwest University

Participant signature	**Ellen McMahon, MA signature**	**Witness signature**
Date	**Date**	**Date**

COUNSELING SERVICES

Meier Clinics
Christian counseling service in Bothell, Washington
Takes many insurance plans. Some sliding scale fees. Individual counseling and group counseling including Catalyst Day Program and other groups.

Address:	22232 17th Ave SE, Suite 302, Bothell, WA 98021
Website:	https://www.northwestu.edu/nuhope/
Email address:	nuhopeinfo@northwestu.edu
Phone:	(425) 487-1005
Hours:	Monday-Friday 8am-8pm

To find a therapist using filters for your insurance and specific therapy needs visit:
www.psychologytoday.com

The **National Crisis Line** at 1-800-273-8255 offers support to individuals in any type of crisis 24-hours, 7 days per week