Religion in the meaning-making and coping experiences of Christian female divorcées

ME Pienaar

iD orcid.org 0000-0002-1548-1834

Mini-dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree *Master of Arts in Positive Psychology* at the North-West University

Supervisor: Dr EK van der Merwe

Graduation ceremony: April 2019

Student number: 21009635

Permission to submit

Higher Degrees Administration

SOLEMN DECLARATION AND PERMISSION TO SUBMIT

1. Solemn declaration by student

I, **Maria Elizabeth Pienaar**

declare herewith that the thesis/dissertation/mini-dissertation/article entitled (**exactly as registered/approved title**),

Religion in the meaning-making and coping experiences of Christian female divorcees

which I herewith submit to the North-West University is in compliance/partial compliance with the requirements set for the degree:

Masters of Arts in Positive Psychology

is my own work, has been text-edited in accordance with the requirements and has not already been submitted to any other university.

LATE SUBMISSION: If a thesis/dissertation/mini-dissertation/article of a student is submitted after the deadline for submission, the period available for examination is limited. No guarantee can therefore be given that (should the examiner reports be positive) the degree will be conferred at the next applicable graduation ceremony. It may also imply that the student would have to re-register for the following academic year.

Signature of Student

Maria E Pienaar
Digitally signed by Maria E Pienaar
Date: 2018.11.13 10:10:46 +02'00'

University Number 21009635

Signed on this 12 day of November of 20 18

2. Permission to submit and solemn declaration by supervisor/promoter

The undersigned declares that the thesis/dissertation/mini-dissertation complies with the specifications set out by the NWU and that:

- the student is hereby granted permission to submit his/her mini-dissertation/ dissertation/thesis:
  ● Yes   ○ No

- that the student's work has been checked by me for plagiarism (by making use of TurnItIn software for example) and a satisfactory report has been obtained:
  ● Yes   ○ No

Signature of Supervisor/Promoter

E. Karen van der Merwe
Digitally signed by E. Karen van der Merwe
DN: cn=E. Karen van der Merwe, o=NWU, ou=Psychology, email=karen.vandermerwe@nwu.ac.za, c=ZA
Date: 2018.11.19 09:08:54 +02'00'

Date 2018/11/19

Declaration

I, Maria Elizabeth Pienaar, declare that "Religion in the meaning-making coping of female Christian divorcées" is my own work and that the views and opinions expressed in this work are my own and based on relevant literature references as shown in the reference list.

I also declare that the citations of participants were written in their mother tongue, Afrikaans, in order to voice their real life experience as they relived it and as way of validating the truthfulness of their narratives.

I further affirm that the content of this research will not be submitted for any other qualification(s) at any other institutions.

Maria Elizabeth Pienaar   **November 2018**

Language Certificate

Leunis van Rooyen T/A

Joziwordsmith • Woordeman

• Language Consultant • Translator / Editor • Copy Writer

woordeman@gmail.com • joziwordsmith@gmail.com

Cell. 060 344 2405   52 Putney Road Brixton   Johannesburg 2092

---

8 November 2018.

Heil die Leser,

Hiermee sertifiseer ek, die ondergetekende, dat ek u student, Me. Maria Elizabeth Pienaar se MA Dissertasie getitel: Religion in the meaning-making and coping experiences of middle-aged Christian female divorcées, se taalversorging gedoen en na die beste van my professionale vermoëns afgehandel het.

Die uwe,

Leunis van Rooyen

MA (Klassieke Tale)

MA. (English Linguistics)

Fellow: ProLingua • Fellow: South African Translator's Institute • Fellow: Editors' Association South Africa

Ethics Certificate

NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
YUNIBESITI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT

Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom,
South Africa, 2520

Tel: (018) 299-4900
Faks: (018) 299-4910
Web: http://www.nwu.ac.za

Institutional Research Ethics Regulatory Committee
Tel: +27 18 299 4849
Email: Ethics@nwu.ac.za

2016-09-12

ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE OF PROJECT

Based on approval by the **Humanities and Health Research Ethics Committee (HHREC)** after being reviewed at the meeting held on **31/08/2016**, the North-West University Institutional Research Ethics Regulatory Committee (NWU-IRERC) hereby **approves** your project as indicated below. This implies that the NWU-IRERC grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the project may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Project title: Religion in the meaning-making and coping experiences of Christian female divorcees.										
Project Leader/Supervisor: Dr EK van der Merwe										
Student: ME Pienaar										
Ethics number:	N	W	U	-	HS	-	2 0 1 6	-	0 0 6	7
		Institution			Project Number		Year			Status

Status: S = Submission; R = Re-Submission, P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation

Application Type: N/A

Commencement date: 2016-09-12   **Expiry date:** 2019-09-12   **Risk:** Medium

Special conditions of the approval (if applicable):

- Translation of the informed consent document to the languages applicable to the study participants should be submitted to the HHREC (if applicable).
- Any research at governmental or private institutions, permission must still be obtained from relevant authorities and provided to the HHREC. Ethics approval is required BEFORE approval can be obtained from these authorities.

General conditions:

While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, please note the following:

- *The project leader (principle investigator) must report in the prescribed format to the NWU-IRERC via HHREC:*
  - *annually (or as otherwise requested) on the progress of the project, and upon completion of the project*
  - *without any delay in case of any adverse event (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the project.*
  - *Annually a number of projects may be randomly selected for an external audit.*
- *The approval applies strictly to the protocol as stipulated in the application form. Would any changes to the protocol be deemed necessary during the course of the project, the project leader must apply for approval of these changes at the HHREC. Would there be deviated from the project protocol without the necessary approval of such changes, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.*
- *The date of approval indicates the first date that the project may be started. Would the project have to continue after the expiry date, a new application must be made to the NWU-IRERC via HHREC and new approval received before or on the expiry date.*
- *In the interest of ethical responsibility the NWU-IRERC and HHREC retains the right to:*
  - *request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the project;*
  - *to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process.*
  - *withdraw or postpone approval if:*
    - *any unethical principles or practices of the project are revealed or suspected,*
    - *it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the HHREC or that information has been false or misrepresented,*
    - *the required annual report and reporting of adverse events was not done timely and accurately,*
    - *new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.*
- *HHREC can be contacted for further information via Daleen.Claasens@nwu.ac.za or 018 210 3441*

The IRERC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your project. Please do not hesitate to contact the IRERC or HHREC for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely

Prof LA Du Plessis
Digitally signed by
Prof LA Du Plessis
Date: 2016.09.13
09:12:15 +02'00'

Prof Linda du Plessis
Chair NWU Institutional Research Ethics Regulatory Committee (IRERC)

Acknowledgements

Dedication

I enter the MAPP journey just after getting divorced and it took me on a path of self-discovery, far beyond my wildest imagination. I discovered a new me – someone with inner resilience, overcoming more challenges than expected; someone with perseverance, holding on and bearing forward one step at a time; someone with grid and a striving to become the person God created me to be. This has been a journey which has enriched me spiritually, personally and intellectually. I stood strong, gain mastery over my life again, and completed my mini-dissertation, but this would not have become reality without the guidance, support and encouragement of the following:

- Jesus Christ who truly gave me the grace, strength, wisdom and insight to complete this study

- My family thank you for your prayers, and support. I have been able to count on you throughout my studies.

- My children. Thank you for your love, your prayers, your encouragement and the multiple times that you have helped me out when technology was getting the better of me. I love you with all of my heart.

Table of Content

List of Addenda

List of Figures

Abstract

Religion in the meaning-making coping of Christian female divorcées

This study was motivated by limited literature available on the role of religion in coping and meaning-making post-divorce. This interpretive –phenomenological study focused on the role of religion in the processes mid-life aged women employ to overcome the impact of their divorce that was caused by spousal infidelity. The meaning-making coping model of Park and Folkman, (1997) was central to the study. Seven Afrikaans speaking Christian divorcees were recruited. These participants grew up in a culture characterised by patriarchy and conservative religious values. In-depth interviews provided rich data which were analysed according to interpretive phenomenological analytic (IPA) principles. Findings highlight the salient role of religion in the participants' adjustment post-divorce. Participants' religious and cultural beliefs were fundamentally shaken by their divorce and findings describe their challenging journey of adjusting their beliefs and finding new meaning in life.

KEY WORDS:

Religion, coping, meaning-making, late-life divorce, adjustment post-divorce

CHAPTER 1

RELIGION IN THE MEANING-MAKING COPING EXPERIENCES OF

CHRISTIAN FEMALE DIVORCEES

Introduction

I know many religious women who get divorced and struggle to adjust. As a result, I came to contemplate the role of religion as meaning system in coping with life post-divorce, but could not find literature to inform me. This hiatus in the literature motivated me to embark on this study. The focus of the research is the role of religion in the meaning-making and coping experiences of Christian female divorcees

In Chapter 1 I contextualise the study by providing information on the prevalence of cases of divorce. Thereafter I review the literature on the role of religion in meaning-making of, and coping with divorce. In this discussion I emphasise the importance of religion as philosophical orienting system in the lives of Christian individuals, and provide an explanation of positive religious appraisals, negative religious appraisals, religious struggles and post-divorce adjustment. The meaning-making coping model of Park and Folkman (1997) was used as framework for this study.

1.1 Background and Rationale

Traditions, values and religious belief systems within a globalising post-modern context seem to be in flux. Personal and social expectations with regard to marriage have concomitantly changed. Christians living their lives according to religious principles are not exempt from the *zeitgeist* and the resulting relationship challenges and marital breakdown. Historically the trend has been that many divorces occur during the middle age (40-60 years) period of life (Uhlenberg, Cooney, & Boyd, 1990).

Divorce has been recognised as one of the most prevalent social phenomena of the last few decades (Sailor, 2013). Research has indicated an increase in the divorce rate over the last few decades, and that the divorce experience itself differs from that of the 1960s ― 1990s (Canham, Mahmood, Stott, Sixsmith, & O'Rourke, 2014).

Indications are that women's increased educational accomplishments and their entering the labour market are major contributors to the rising in divorce rates because women can now end unhappy marriages without enduring financial hardship (Brown & Lin, 2012; Canham et al., 2014). However, there still are many divorced women who experience financial difficulties due to a lack of market related skills or being unable to find self-sustaining employment after divorce.

Information shows that in South Africa the divorce rate has increased, as it has in the rest of the world.

1.1.1. Trends in divorce prevalence in South Africa (2003 – 2016).

The Annual Report of the Department of Justice released by Statistics South Africa (2017) showed an increase of 0.3 % in the divorce rate from 2015 (25 260) – 2016 (25 326). Wood (2013) attributes divorce to financial stress, social and media (Internet) influences; marital infidelity (physical/emotional betrayal, cybersex and pornography), addiction and a lack of communication. Statistics show that 44.4% of marriage in 2016, lasted less than 10 years, and ended in divorce. On average, most marriages lasted between four to nine years.

Although a significant proportion of male divorcées and female divorcées did not specify the type of occupation that they were engaged in at the time of divorce, 17.3 % of males and 24.1 % of females were not engaged in the labour market. Of those individuals who stated their occupation, 13.7% males were employed as managers and administrators, and 9.5 % were employed in professional, semi-professional and technical occupations, while female divorcées were engaged in clerical and sales positions (12.8 %) as well as

4

professional, semi-professional and technical occupations 12.3 %. The peak age of female divorcées amongst the Indian/Asian and White population groups was 30 – 34, while the peak age of white male divorcées was between 45 – 49 years of age.

Divorce is a growing social phenomenon which affects all segments of the married population and has potentially devastating social and emotional consequences. Divorce also affects religion oriented people. This study explores the divorce experience of Afrikaans Christian female individuals between the ages of 40 and 60 years who divorced as a result of the betrayal/adultery/infidelity of their spouse.

1.2 Problem Statement

Religion provides structure and directs the behavior of traumatised individuals who are confronted with a hopeless situation that cannot be amended. Religion may also serve as a backdrop for more benign re-appraisal of adverse circumstances and enables individuals to transform personal tragedy into victory, or to identify possible benefits resulting from negative situations (Fitness, 2001; Krumrei, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2009; Malhotra & Chebiyan, 2016; Pargament, 2002; Park, 2011).

Although many Christians turn to their religious beliefs to help them find meaning and to cope with spousal betrayal and divorce, it seems that there is a limited number of publications on the role of religion as a framework for meaning related strategies in divorce (Krumrei, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2011). Religious aspects of divorce are understudied, Krumrei et al., (2009) could only find three empirical studies involving religion's role in divorce. Pargament, Ensing, Falgout, Olsen, Reilly, and Van Haitsma (1990) and Park (2005) agree that there is a need for more research regarding the role of religion in coping.

In an attempt to obtain the most recent publications on the topic under investigation, I undertook an extensive search using the keywords religion, coping, meaning-making,

divorce, adversity, resilience and post-traumatic growth. Sources dated from 2011-2017 were sought using EBSCOHost: (Academic Search Premier; Master Search Premier; PsycArticles; PsycInfo; SocIndex; Atla Religion Data) as well as SAe Publications; ProQuest and Nexus. Only a few usable or fairly related articles were found. The foci of the publications found were on meaning-making of personal loss (Malhotra & Chebiyan, 2016); living with traumatic bereavement (Jayasinghe, 2016); religious and spiritual coping in African-American women suffering from hypertension (Greer & Able, 2017); religion as existential resource in trauma, death and suffering (Van Uden & Zondag, 2014); Pargament's Theory of religious coping in sensitive social work practice (Xu, 2016); parental stress and coping strategies used by parents of children with autism (Mahamed-Abudllahi, 2018); personal resilience and coping among US military veterans (Rice & Liu, 2016); post-traumatic growth: positive changes following adversity, self-compassion: post-traumatic growth – cognitive processes as mediators (Wong & Yeung, 2017); children of divorced parents (Du Plooy & Van Rensburg, 2015; Stambaugh, Hector, & Carr, 2011); how individuals displayed religious coping in times of natural disasters (Chan & Rhodes, 2013; Fletcher et al., 2013; Bentzen, 2015); religious coping with cancer (Boyle, Stygal, Keshtgar, Davidson, & Newman, 2011; Gaston-Johansson, Haisfield-Wolfe, Reddick, Goldstein, & Lawal, 2013); mental disorders (Amjad & Bokkharey, 2014; Hefti, 2011; Pargament, 2013) and sexual transgressions (Bryant-Davis, Ullman, Tsong, & Gobin, 2013). Although the publications found were published since 2011, the authors of most of these publications made use of sources dating back to1990-2010.

Only eight articles dating from 2012-2017 could be found. Therefore, it is clear that although the importance of religious coping as source of meaning has been recognised in the field of psychology, a definite gap exists in literature with regard to the possible role of religion in the meaning-making coping process of divorced individuals.

1.3 Aim of the study and Research Question

The aim of this study was to explore the role of religion in meaning-making coping as exhibited by middle-aged, Afrikaans female Christian divorcées who divorced as a direct result of betrayal by their spouses.

The research was guided by the following question: How does religion inform middle aged Afrikaans Christian divorcées' post-divorce coping?

1.4 Clarification of Concepts

The following concepts relate to the study and are clarified thus:

Relational Betrayal: People involved in committed relationships have the expectation of emotional and physical exclusivity with their partner. Any violation of these expectations is called relationship betrayal (Laaser, 2011).

Late-life divorce: The rising trend of divorce in mid-life is referred to as grey divorce and entails marriage dissolution among adults older than 50 years of age after being married for 20 years or more (Canham et al., 2014).

Traumatic event: A traumatic event is stressful occurrence that significantly challenges an individual's core schemas, beliefs, goals as well as the ability to manage emotional distress. It is seen as an event that disrupts the individual's ability to understand, predict or control his/her life (Joseph & Lindley, 2008; Laaser, 2011).

Coping: Coping refers to cognitive and behavioural efforts made to restore emotional balance and resolve problems caused by a severely stressful event such as divorce. Positive outcomes of coping include finding new meaning and purpose in life (Laaser, 2011; Sakraida, 2008).

Religion: Pargament (1997, p. 32) defines religion as "a search for significance in ways related to the sacred". Religion as meaning system provides ways by which to

understand or explain ordinary everyday occurrences and extraordinary events in acceptable ways (Park, 2005).

Meaning-making: Meaning within the coping process entails the re-evaluation of the event, creating more positive explanations for the occurrence of the event, the identification of ways in which life changed because of the event and verbalising the extent to which one has made sense of or found meaning in the event (Park & Folkman, 1997).

1.5 Literature Overview

Relational betrayal of a spouse may have a profound emotional impact on women and men but because the study's focus is on women, their experiences will be highlighted. Due to the expectation in marriage that certain emotional and physical needs will be met by the spouse exclusively, the impact of betrayal may be devastating (Laaser, 2011; Wishman & Wagners, 2005). Marriage implies trust and openness towards each other. The betrayal of trust potentially intensifies the severity of the experience due to a sense of humiliation and intense rejection (Fitness, 2001; Sailor, 2013).

Betrayal and the associated lying is traumatic and associated with feelings of shock, hurt, anger, devastation, humiliation, jealousy, and loss of self-esteem (Laaser, 2011; Schneider, 2003). People think that they have control over their lives; including their relationships, and that the world is reasonably fair and benevolent. Religious people believe that God is good and in control, and protects them, therefore, and when something as traumatic as betrayal is discovered their whole assumptive world is shattered (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Van Uden & Zondag, 2014; Wong & Yeung, 2017). Betrayal by a spouse has a severe impact on the emotional, physical, sexual and spiritual well-being of the individual (Steffens & Rennie, 2006; Laaser, 2011; Whisman & Wager, 2005).

1.5.1 Impact of divorce.

Divorce during mid-life (grey divorce) is a disruptive event that may serve as catalyst for change and re-adjustment on the psychological, social, spiritual and economic terrains of a person's life (Amato, 2000; Wong, 2008; Sakraida, 2008; Sbarra, Hasselmo, & Bourassa, 2015). Grey divorce is associated with higher levels of fear, anxiety and enhances individuals' vulnerability to psychological disorders (Sakraida, 2008; Lloyd, Sailor, & Carney, 2014). While some individuals may rapidly adapt to the divorce transition, others remain vulnerable for longer periods of time. Women, especially those in mid-life, compare divorce to a unique type of death where they grieve the loss of a spouse and a way of life (Jenkins, 2010; Perrig-Chiello, Hutchison, & Morselli, 2014; Pieper Webb, Ellison, McFarland, Lee, Morton & Walters, 2010; Sakraida, 2005).

1.5.2 Negative effects of divorce.

Psychological trauma occurs when an event is so traumatic and severe that it overwhelms the individual's ability to cope and cause the individual to feel emotionally, cognitively and physically depleted (Giller, 1999; Perrig-Chiello, et al., 2014).

Divorce is a transitional process which alters assumptions, relationships, accustomed roles and priorities (Perrig-Chiello et al., 2014; Sakraida, 2005). When divorced, those involved may experience the loss of a sense of belonging and meaning that a family offers. It is especially difficult for women who are still emotionally attached to their ex-spouses to adapt as they may experience feelings of preoccupation and hostility toward their ex-spouses. Other negatives include loss of self-identity, and social identity, lowered self-esteem, reduced interpersonal trust, and poorer physical health (Malhotra & Chebiyan, 2016; Lloyd et al., 2014; Perrig-Chiello et al., 2014). Although these symptoms are not only experienced by midlife divorcées, indications are that the frequency, intensity and duration of these problems are more severe among midlife female divorcées (Bogolub, 1991; Sakraida, 2008).

One of the most serious consequences of divorce in later life, particularly for women, is a decline in financial stability and in living standards (Brown & Lin, 2012). This, together with the fact that most women become the primary caregivers of their minor children, contribute to the vulnerability of divorced mothers and their children (Pieper Webb, 2008). Having less time to prepare financially for old age and retirement may cause severe stress and anxiety, which may negatively impact the well-being of female divorcees (Amato, 2000; Lloyd et al., 2014).

1.5.3 Processing and coping with divorce and its effects.

When confronted with the shock and trauma of betrayal and divorce individuals automatically make cognitive appraisals of their situation. These initial situational appraisals are influenced significantly by their philosophy of life (global meaning) that encapsulates their values, beliefs, goals, and assumptive world (Park & Folkman, 1997; Pieper Webb, 2008). Individuals' philosophy of life can be viewed as the framework within which they create meaning. This meaning system that is constructed early in life and adjusted through life experiences, guides a person's thoughts, actions and emotional responses (Park, 2010). Through their appraisal of the stressful event divorcées cognitively work through the event and try to integrate its meaning into their pre-existing worldview. However, it may be necessary for them to adjust their view of the world in order to accommodate the traumatic experience (Silver & Updegraff, 2013).

Appraising a situation as stressful is a unique process, and not all individuals will experience divorce in a like way. Some individuals who were unhappily married may feel liberated after divorce (Sakraida, 2005). The impact of the stressor depends on an individual's cognitive appraisal of the stressor, its significance to the individual, how controllable the stressful situation is and the individual's ability to respond to the threat. The appraisal and meaning attached to the antecedents and actual divorce will shape future coping

10

behaviours used to regulate the distress. The post-divorce coping behaviours determine positive re-adjustment or maladjustment. Turning to religion in response to divorce seems to be a natural coping response for those who interpret life events through a religious lens (Krumrei et al., 2011).

For religious individuals religion as meaning system thus seems to be paramount in the coping process following divorce. The theory of Park and Folkman (1997) that is used as theoretical framework for this study will be discussed below by way of gaining an understanding of how religious coping impacts meaning-making through constant cognitive reappraisals. This theory also has very distinct concepts that will be explained for greater clarity.

1.6 Meaning-making and coping theory of Park and Folkman (1997).

The influential meaning-making coping theory of Park and Folkman (1997), which has been cited in 1 225 publications and which is used as theoretical framework for this research study, was recently extended to encompass the full spectrum of beliefs as well as the cognitive processes involved in the understanding of stressful events such as betrayal and divorce (Park & Folkman, 1997; Pieper Webb, 2008).

The meaning-making coping model proposes two distinct but interrelated meaning systems, relevant to the initial appraisal process, namely global meaning, and situational meaning (Park, 2013; Pieper Webb, 2008).

1.6.1 Global meaning.

Global meaning refers to individual's orienting system (Pargament, 1997) or philosophy of life, which is an overarching framework of beliefs, goals and sense of purpose. Through this framework (core schemas) people structure their lives and assign meaning to their experiences of the world, the self, and the self in the world (Janoff-Bulman & Frantz,

1997; Park & Edmondson, 2011). This orienting system comprises global beliefs and global goals and has an affective component (Park & Folkman, 1997; Pieper Webb, 2008).

Global beliefs are assumptions that people make about their own nature, their understanding of other people and the world, and encompass broad domains such as fairness, control, benevolence, and personal vulnerability (Emmons, 2003; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Park, 2008; Park & Edmondson, 2011; Park & Folkman, 1997). Global goals refer to people's motivation for living, and include their ideals, and objectives, such as maintaining relationships and striving towards wealth, knowledge and achievement (Emmons, 2003; Park & Edmondson, 2011). Global goals are infused with affect related to a person's subjective sense of meaning, purpose or direction in life, which results from goal directed behaviour (Frankl, 1963; Park & Edmondson, 2011; Steger, 2009).

1.6.2 Situational meaning.

Situational meaning involves an initial appraisal of a life event in the light of one's philosophy of life (global orienting system) and thus refers to a person's understanding of the event in terms of its relevance to their personal well-being. Situational meaning involves three components, namely appraised meaning, the coping process and meaning-making (Park, 2011; Park & Folkman, 1997; Pieper Webb, 2008).

1.6.3 Appraised Meaning.

Appraised meaning refers to the initial situational appraisal of the event, which is a subjective and cognitive appraisal through which a person evaluates the meaning of a specific event with respect to its personal significance or impact on their well-being (Krumrei et al., 2011; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Pieper Webb, 2008). The appraisals are based on prior knowledge of and beliefs about such events and their possible consequences for well-being, and are activated in response to minimal cues (Lazarus, 1991; Smith, 1991; Tunis, 1991).

Perceived incongruence or a misfit between the appraised meaning of an event and a person's global beliefs is a source of severe psychological distress (Krumrei et al., 2011; Pieper Webb, 2008), and may result in a sense of loss of control (Park, 2008). Situational appraisals can, however, be discrepant with more than just beliefs (Lazarus, 1991). The event may be incompatible with an individual's global goals, which may result in a loss of sense of purpose (Krumrei et al., 2011; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Park 2010; Park & Edmondson, 2011).

The meaning-making coping model posits that the disruptive state that individuals experience due to the incongruence, initiates attempts to reduce the discrepancy (Krumrei et al., 2011; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Park 2010). Plaks, Grant, and Dweck (2005) have demonstrated that discrepancies between beliefs, behaviour and expectation not only create severe distress, but also powerful motivation to reduce the discrepancy in order to alleviate distress by coping.

1.7 Coping Process

The coping process includes people's search for meaning once an event is appraised as stressful (Park & Folkman, 1997; Park, 2011). Meaning-making coping is the core component that distinguishes the model of Park and Folkman (1997) from other models of coping in that it involves approach-orientated intra-psychic efforts to reduce the discrepancy between appraised and global meaning that creates distress. Coping is referred to as cognitive or behavioural efforts made to comprehend, manage or reduce personal and situational demands in life (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Pargament, 1990; Park, 2011; Park, 2013), as well as efforts to regulate emotions (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004).

Coping efforts following the adverse event are important as they impact future adjustment or maladjustment (Krumrei et al., 2011).

The restoration of equilibrium in a situation such as divorce, where dearly held values, beliefs and expectations are fundamentally shaken or even shattered, requires the transformation of meaning structures (Wong, 2008). This process will necessitate the adjustment to a new reality and includes the need to understand the reasons for the break-up, accepting the loss of the relationship, and the necessity to forge a new identity as a divorced individual (Kressel, 1986), as well as creating new meaning in life (Thompson & Janigian, 1988). Searching for meaning as part of the coping process involves seeking a more acceptable understanding of the event and its consequences and therefore may include creating of positive re-appraisals of the situation (Park, 2011, Park 2013).

Various studies accentuate the necessity of finding meaning as a coping tool in the face of adversity (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Joseph & Lindley, 2008; McIntosh, Silver, & Wortman, 1993).

1.8 Meaning-making

Meaning-making refers to the meaning made in the aftermath of a stressful event (Park & Folkman, 1997), and involves efforts to restore shattered aspects of global meaning (Park, 2013). In this sense making meaning is regarded as an outcome of coping (Joseph & Lindley, 2008; Malhotra & Chebiyan, 2016; Park, 2010; Park, 2013). Meaning-making involves a new way of understanding the traumatic situation in the light of an adjusted philosophy of life. A new sense of consistency between the meaning of the traumatic situation and one's philosophy of life is created (Davis, Wortman, Lehman, & Silver, 2000; Park, 2011).

Finding meaning and regaining some sense of stability and control, entails cognitive and emotional processing (Park, 2010; Park, 2011). This may include thoughtful reflection, discussion of the events, getting in touch with emotions related to the event, and accepting

that a new future needs to be created (Bower, Kemeny, Taylor, & Fahey, 1998; Park, 2010; Wong & Yeung, 2017). Finding meaning is a very important aspect of being human; it entails an understanding of where one has been, where one is and where one is going (Steger, 2009). Individuals experience an urge to understand their experience and to feel that their life has significance and purpose (Frankl, 1963; Park & Edmondson, 2011). Divorcées who eventually are able to tell their story after adversity and who are able to find meaning through reflecting upon and growing from their suffering adjust better post-divorce (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002). The content of such meaning will be unique to the individual because of differing life schemas, cultures and life experiences which are at the core of a person's philosophy of life or global meaning system.

1.9 Finding meaning

Finding meaning refers to a certain level of sense-making, or coming to terms with the traumatic event, feeling that there was a reason for the adversity (divorce) (Park, 2010; Park & Folkman, 1997). Finding meaning in negative life experiences is a powerful coping tool (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; McIntosh et al., 1993). Individuals who make sense of their circumstances or find meaning after a traumatic event are better able to return to more positive levels of functioning (Davis et al., 2002; King, Hicks, Krull, & Del Gaiso, 2006).

Finding meaning can, however, only be adaptive to the extent that satisfactory meanings are formed (Park & Edmondson, 2011); in other words, meaning that is successful in reducing the discrepancy and associated distress (Michael & Snyder, 2005). The meanings made should over time be related to better adjustment to the divorce experience (Davis et al., 2000), but continued unsuccessful attempts to reduce the discrepancy between global meaning and appraised meaning might result in intrusive thoughts of the event, and long-term distress (Park, 2010).

Ways in which meaning can be made include changing the appraised meaning of the stressful event to align with the existing global meaning through assimilation, (seeing the event as less debilitating or in a more positive light), or accommodation, which entails the changing of existing beliefs or goals in order to accommodate the divorce experience (accepting that one does not have total control over what happened to them). Developing a deeper appreciation for life, increased appreciation of family and friends and greater self-awareness are aspects of meaning-making (Park & Edmondson, 2011; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

In situations of low control that are unlikely to be repaired (or where reconciliation is not an option), the search for and finding of meaning becomes more relevant. It is in these situations that religious coping helps individuals to restore their fundamental assumptions and beliefs about the world (Brown & Lin, 2012; Park, 2005; Park, 2013).

Individuals' philosophy of life (global meaning) provides ways to interpret and understand stressful life events (Newton & McIntosh, 2013; Pieper Webb, 2008). When an event is appraised as severely stressful people display religious coping due to religion's ability to decrease emotional distress and to increase well-being over time (Newton & McIntosh, 2013; Krumrei et al., 2011). Research indicates that individuals cope with the aid of those means most accessible to them, and should religion be part of a person's meaning system prior to the stressful event it is most likely to be integrated in the coping process. Religion as part of an individual's global meaning usually provides solace and support and helps individuals to obtain a certain sense of control (Pargament, 1997; Park, 2005; Pieper Webb, 2008; Krumrei et al., 2011).

1.10 Religion as Philosophical Orienting System

For religious people religion as meaning system often plays an important role throughout the meaning-making coping process. It provides individuals with ways to understand or explain ordinary everyday experiences and extraordinary events in acceptable ways (Park, 2005; Van Uden & Zondag, 2016). Religion as part of a person's philosophy of life informs their understanding of God, the world, other people and the self (Pargament, 1997; Park & Edmondson, 2011), and therefore also informs their understanding of human suffering and adversity. Religion makes reality and negative life experiences more bearable and comprehensible (Pargament, 1997; Park, 2011; Van Uden & Zondag, 2016).

Traditionally, religion is regarded as a source of comfort in stressful times as Christians turn to God for support. Religion is regarded as a sense of connectedness with God or a Higher Being (Pieper Webb, 2008). Positive religious coping strategies include *inter alia* prayer, benevolent religious appraisals, religious reappraisals, forgiveness, seeking of religious support, worship, relying on God's guidance or seeing the adverse event as God's plan, or as an event that strengthens their bond with God, and provides a deeper understanding of God (Krumrei et al., 2011; Park, 2005; Park, 2011; Pargament, 2002).

Religious functioning includes both intrinsic religion (the framework individuals used to structure their lives) and extrinsic religion (religious means used to achieve social support from others) (Allport, 1966), which play a very important role in Christians management of stress (divorce) (Harris, Erbes, Engdahl, Ogden, Olson, & Winskowski, 2012; Pieper Webb et al., 2010; Wong, 2008).

1.10.1 Positive religious appraisals and reappraisals.

The extent to which religion is involved in coping with traumatic experiences is determined by the degree to which it is integrated in an individual's life as well as the

individual's religious perspective (Krumrei et al., 2011). Appraised meanings of stressors are commonly influenced by religion as a result of religion's involvement in the causal attributions following a traumatic event (Pargament, 1997). Religious appraisals might offer meaningful explanations for adverse events such as marital dissolution (Pargament et al., 1990; Van Uden & Zondag, 2016). Some individuals may positively reappraise their divorce as being God's will or argue that God is trying to communicate something to them, while some individuals may believe that God will not harm them or visit upon them more than they can handle (Park, 2013; Park & Cohen, 1993). Pargament (1997) describes the power of religion to change the meaning of negative events positively when he states:

> When the sacred is seen working its will in life's events, what first seems
>
> random, nonsensical and tragic is changed into something else – an
>
> opportunity to appreciate life more fully, a chance to be with God, a challenge
>
> to help others grow, or a loving act meant to prevent something worse from
>
> taking place. (p. 233)

Not all religious coping strategies are positive; some individuals may experience difficulty holding onto their beliefs in a loving and almighty God when affected by a severely negative occurrence such as divorce (Pargament, 1997; Park & Edmondson, 2011).

1.10.2 Negative religious appraisal.

For some individuals the divorce experience might initiate a severe struggle with God, it may affect their relationship with God negatively and may create severe distress when they experience God as distant and unresponsive to their appeals (Pieper Webb, 2008). Some individuals may assign a sacred value to their marriage and see it as an institution of God. Getting divorced may then be regarded as an immoral act. Shattered assumptions about something that was viewed as a manifestation of God or invested with sacred qualities may cause severe emotional distress (Krumrei et al., 2011). They may, therefore, redefine

18

their situation as a punishment from God, doubt God's ability to influence the outcome of divorce, experience guilt and confusion or even redefine their situation as being the work of the devil (Krumrei et al., 2011; Mahoney, Krumrei, & Pargament, 2008; Pargament, Koenig, & Perez, 2000; Pieper Webb et al., 2010).

Religious struggles may become acute during the coping process (Pieper Webb, 2008; Pieper Webb et al., 2010) and cause individuals to mistrust God. They may experience feelings of anger, hurt and disappointment and may even turn away from God or question His existence. Some people may see the adverse experience as God's punishment for being sinful and less devout (Park & Edmondson, 2011; Pieper Webb et al., 2010). An inability to realign global beliefs and goals with the situational appraisal of an event may result in negative religious coping, which is associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms and poorer psychological adjustment over time (Krumrei et al., 2009; Pieper Webb et al., 2010).

Research suggests that the impact of religion on adjustment may depend on the time frame involved since the occurrence of the adverse event. In the initial stages of coping individuals may find it difficult to understand the negative event that contradicts their religious beliefs of God as being kind and loving (Krumrei et al., 2009; Pieper Webb, 2008; Van Uden & Zondag, 2016).

1.11. Post-divorce Adjustment

Successful adjustment after divorce is described as a process of transition beginning with mourning the loss of marriage and adjusting to life as an independent individual with a new lifestyle, a new sense of identity and a social support network (Amato, 2000, Jenkins, 2010; Lloyd et al., 2014; Sakraida, 2008; Sbarra et al., 2015).

Personal growth after trauma should not be viewed as resulting from the traumatic event itself, but rather as an outcome of the individual's struggle with the traumatic event in

order to overcome adversity (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Fazio and Fazio (2005) believe that although many individuals claim that "time heals all wounds" it is not time itself that contributes towards healing but rather the resources that individuals are using, such as social support from others, and personal virtues such as optimism, hardiness, resilience, and a sense of humour that leads to healing after adversity.

Conclusion

In this chapter I highlighted the importance of religious coping post-divorce and how various meaning-making coping efforts contributed to adjustment and meaning making after divorce. This study accentuates marital dissolution as a severely disrupting experience. Divorce was also identified as a process of transition that encompass the shattering of religious and cultural beliefs, profound struggles, applying religion as coping strategy, working through divorce by overcoming developmental challenges, the changing of one's philosophy of life (global meaning) and, eventually, adjustment; implicating a process of starting over and adapting as an independent individual.

In Chapter 2 the focus will be on research methodology. The choice of a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological approach will be explained. This methodological approach guided me through the research process. I also describe the procedures of participant selection, data collection and analysis I followed.

CHAPTER 2

In Chapter 1 I discussed literature pertaining to how midlife female divorcées cope, and how religion as meaning-making coping strategy may either contribute to adjustment or maladjustment post-divorce. In Chapter 2 I will provide details of my strategy to answer the research question: "How does religion inform middle aged Afrikaans Christian female divorcées' post-divorce coping"?

I wanted to understand the lived experiences of coping and meaning-making post-divorce. Therefore, I will declare my positioning in this chapter because as researcher I acknowledge the important role that I play in the co-construction of the findings. Thereafter I will set out details of my approach and the research process.

2.1 Personal positioning

I believe that reality is socially constructed, subjective and embedded in socio-cultural contexts. I acknowledge that the only way of knowing the reality of others is by empathically exploring the meaning that they attach to their real life experiences. I acknowledge the interactive relationship between the participants and their social contexts and also between me and the participants (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delport, 2011; Maree, 2007). My insider status as divorced Christian woman enabled me to intuitively understand the experiences of other Christian divorcées. As such I was not a detached observer as I attempted to understand, interpret and reflect on the experiences of participants (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

The study confronted me with my own pain and adjustment. I managed to maintain perspective on my experiences by keeping a research diary and by frequent debriefing sessions with my study leader.

2.2 Qualitative Research

A qualitative study aims to establish participants' understanding related to the phenomenon of interest, and to its meaning (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research focuses on the meaning of people's lives, takes into consideration the context of these lives (Yin, 2011), and provides ideographic explanations (Babbie, 2016).

In the following section I shall present an exposition of Heidegger's phenomenology which informed my understanding of qualitative research, followed by Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), my chosen research design.

2.3 Phenomenology

The existential phenomenological approach that flows from the work of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), known as hermeneutic phenomenology, was used as framework for this study. This choice of option was motivated by my belief that in order to explore, understand, interpret and reflect on the phenomenon under investigation I should have experience and knowledge of the phenomenon being studied. Heidegger stated that the "interpretation of phenomena occurs within a background of preconceptions from which the interpreter can never be free" (Usher & Jackson, 2014, p. 185).

It is this awareness and prior understanding of phenomena that distinguishes the work of Heidegger from that of Husserl who suggested that the researcher should be free from any preconceived, taken-for-granted notions of the phenomena through the concept of bracketing in order to achieve a deeper understanding of the phenomena under investigation (Usher & Jackson, 2014).

2.3.1 Concepts in Heidegger's philosophy.

In 'Being and Time' (1962), Heidegger used the term *Dasein* to emphasise the uniqueness of human beings. '*Dasein*' indicates the human's ability to be aware of 'I am'. Each individual is a unique "… expression of "Being" (Spinelli, 2005, p. 107).

The term *Dasein* also translates to being in the world (*In-der-welt-sein*). To be human means to be embedded in and consumed by the day to day world (Hornsby, 2011; Steiner, 1978). According to Heidegger, we are thrown into the world without consent or prior knowledge *(Geworfenheit)* (Hornsby, 2011; Steiner, 1978). However, nobody is alone in the world. Even if a person is isolated from others, his or her actions and attitudes arise from the existential condition of 'being-with' (Spinelli, 2005).

Dasein (being-in-the-world) implies *Umwelt*, the *Mitwelt* and the *Eigenwelt* (Binswanger, 1963)*.*

The *Umwelt* can be described as the natural world with its physical and biological dimensions, the world into which we were thrown. Although some people are limited by innate biological constraints, we all have the ability to formulate unique meanings and interpretations of the world that we live in in. We might experience this physical dimension as a safe and secure place, or we may regard it as unfair and dangerous and experience feelings of anxiety and insecurity. Our attitudes towards different variables within the physical dimension (e.g., ecological variables) are regarded as valuable means with which to understand the concerns and meanings that participants attach to their experiences (Spinelli, 2005).

The concept *Mitwelt* focuses on inter-personal relations that we have on a daily basis with others in our world, as well as the assumptions that we hold about social categories like gender, social status and sexual orientation (male or female) (Spinelli, 2005).

The concept *Eigenwelt* refers to our intimate and exclusive relationship with us ourselves. It includes our view of the self, our level of self-confidence, self-acceptance, self-efficacy and our autonomy and uniqueness; how we interpret our interaction with significant people in our lives (Spinelli, 2005).

In addition, the concept *Uberwelt* as suggested by Deurzen-Smith (1988) has been added as a fourth dimension and refers to a person's connection with the abstract aspects of living, including their philosophy of life, or (global meaning) the beliefs, values and convictions that provide guidance and direction to their lives, and influence their interpretations of reality (Spinelli, 2005)

All people have unique ways of being-in-the-world, therefore all humans have specific worldviews that guide their conduct and that influence their interpretation of reality and their experiences of the world. The above categories informed my approach in this study. I was sensitive to the physical, social, psychological and philosophical worlds of the participants.

2.3.2 Hermeneutic Phenomenology.

Phenomenology is hermeneutic when it is "interpretive, rather than descriptive and aims to uncover reality, to discover meaning and to achieve understanding" (Rabie & Grieve, 2010, p. 37). The interpretive nature of hermeneutic phenomenology makes it possible to access the individual's inner world to gain in depth information of a participant's experiences as expressed in her own words (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999).

The product of hermeneutic phenomenological research is the creation of a rich interpretive phenomenological text of the meanings that participants attach to their own lived experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Osborn, 2002; Usher & Jackson, 2014).

2.4 Research design: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

I decided on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as research design because it offers ways for examining mental processes (Smith, 2004). I wanted to understand and interpret the ways in which participants cognitively and emotionally processed their divorce to gain understanding and, eventually, a sense of meaning. At its core, IPA is about the meaning that participants attach to experiences in their personal and social world (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Consistent with its phenomenological origins, IPA is concerned with understanding experience from the viewpoint of participants, but at the same time detailed IPA analysis involves asking critical questions of the data (transcripts) as obtained from participants. IPA thus is a combination of empathic and questioning hermeneutics (Smith & Osborn, 2008). This approach has the potential to generate new understandings of complex human phenomena such as how Christian female divorcées apply religion as a meaning-making coping strategy after divorce.

My choice of IPA forced me to reflect, consult and read extensively as I realised that as researcher I needed to be sensitive and very aware.

2.5 Research instrument

As research instrument, I was intent on a detailed exploration of the participants' life world in order to develop a more in depth understanding of their real life experiences by foregrounding the hidden meaning of experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

I realised that interpretation of participants' experiences would be influenced by my own taken-for-granted beliefs and experience. As insider I believe I had suitable "fore-meanings" (a sense of understanding or holistic picture of the situation in advance) (Conroy, 2003, p. 10) that were advantageous in my research endeavour.

I aimed at the creation of a rich interpretive phenomenological text of the meaning that participants attached to their own lived experiences (Kalfe, 2011; Smith et al., 2002; Usher & Jackson, 2014) through constant engagement with the text and a process of interpretation, personal reflection, and blending of my and participants' views (Rapport, 2005; Smith & Osborn, 2008).

2.6 Participants

Participants were chosen purposively on the grounds of their first-hand experience of the phenomenon being investigated. It was envisioned that 8 to 10 participants should be enough but the recruitment process continued until data saturation (Maree, 2007) was reached.

2.7 Sampling and recruitment

Following approval from the Ethical Board of the North-West University to proceed with the study (the Ethics number of this study is **NWU – HS – 2016 – 0067**), purposive sampling was conducted, and individuals were recruited based on their first-hand experience of the phenomena being investigated. A written advertisement was placed via electronic media on the Facebook page of a well-known Christian magazine as well as at a local church congregation. Permission was obtained beforehand from the editor of the magazine and the Reverend of the local congregation. The advertisements were displayed for a period of one month, but unfortunately no reaction was received.

The recruitment process was adapted and word of the study was spread through family, friends and colleagues who acted as locators to approach viable candidates. Once participants were recruited the study employed snowballing; a process whereby existing participants recommend other individuals whom they knew met the inclusion criteria. Snowballing is based on the notion that a connection exists between the initial sample and

26

others in the same population group (Christian female divorcées), thus allowing a series of recommendations to be made within a circle of acquaintances (Atkinson & Flint, 2001; Dragan & Isaic-Maniu, 2013).

A total of 12 prospective participants received a pamphlet stating inclusion and exclusion criteria. Participants were invited to screen themselves against the criteria, and to contact the locator if they adhered to the criteria and wanted to participate in the study. The locater provided them with an informed consent form and facilitated the signing of the form. Thereafter I made contact with the participant and arranged for an interview. Interviews of about 60 minutes in duration were conducted in the privacy of their own homes.

The *inclusion criteria* that participants needed to adhere to were the following:

a) Must be female;

b) Must self-identify as a Christian.

c) Must have been between 40 and 60 years of age (it is a difficult age to start over, since it is much closer to retirement and concerns about provision for retirement and old age might be very relevant);

d) Must have been married for at least 5 years (in order for them to have built a life together);

e) Must have divorced due to infidelity (physical/emotional betrayal which refers to the unfaithfulness and the betrayal of trust)

f) Must have divorced only once

g) Must have resided in Sasolburg, the Vaal Triangle or Johannesburg area

Exclusion criteria – Individuals were excluded if:

a) they were in therapy

Eventually, seven Afrikaans speaking Christian divorcées who fulfilled the selection criteria were interviewed. The study consisted of seven white female divorcées between the

ages of 50-60 years (*M=55)*. Only seven interviews were needed before data saturation was obtained. Participants came from a Christian background and shared similar religious and cultural values although they belonged to different church denominations. The participants and I grew up in the same era of Afrikaner Nationalism, which was characterised by patriarchy and conservative protestant values. I therefore had an intuitive understanding of their socio-cultural socialisation.

2.8 Data collection

Since the aim of IPA is to elicit rich, detailed and first-person accounts of the lived experiences of participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2008) one in depth, semi-structured, conversational interview was conducted with each participant. The questions below were used to guide the interview.

- What do you think was the effect of the trauma on your religious beliefs?
- How did the divorce experience affect your understanding of your role in your family and in society?
- How did the divorce experience influence your approach to life?
- How did coping with the trauma of divorce affect your understanding of adversity?

The conversational nature of the interview allowed participants to share experiences in their own words, while I was able to probe and clarify uncertainties to gain a thorough understanding of the phenomenon through attentive listening and constant reflection with the participant (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007).

Since the interviews were conducted in Afrikaans, all the interviews were transcribed in Afrikaans, which was the first language of the participants and me. Initial themes were identified in Afrikaans but the findings and my interpretations thereof were written in

English. Significant quotes are provided in Afrikaans. I transcribed and analysed each interview prior to conducting the following interview.

2.9 Data analysis.

Analysing the qualitative research material using the IPA framework, is a time consuming process that involves a detailed exploration of participants' lived experiences. I had to empathically envision myself in their shoes and note down their understanding of the phenomena, while simultaneously writing down my own thoughts and interpreting as well as making sense of their meaning-making (Smith & Osborn, 2008). I was able to take an insider perspective due to personal experience of the phenomenon under exploration.

Gaining access to the other's personal world depended on but was also complicated by my personal assumptions, pre-judgments and observations (Conroy, 2003; Smith et al., 1999). I had to be closely aware of and reflect on my own world view, preconceptions and understanding of the phenomenon. I kept a research journal for the purpose of noting down my own thoughts, reflections, emotions, assumptions and observations. I made notes after each interview of my impressions of the participant and the emotional quality of the interview and, finally, during data analysis notes were made of new insights and understandings that enriched the process of data analysis (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Rabie & Grieve, 2010; Rapport, 2005).

The IPA process of analysis as described by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) provided a set of flexible and adaptable guidelines that I used as method of analysis. Throughout the study I made use of a co-coder (study leader) as way of enhancing the trustworthiness and the quality of the study.

Summarised, the method of analysis as adopted by IPA is a cyclical process where I proceeded through several iterative stages.

- Stage 1: first encounter with the text – (reading and re-reading of text and) transcribing

- Stage 2: identifying emerging themes – (transforming notes into emergent themes)

- Stage 3: grouping themes together as clusters – (seeking relationships between themes and clustering themes)

- Stage 4: tabulating themes in a summary table – (producing a table with coherently ordered themes, and indicating the frequency of themes) (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Pietkiewicz & Smith 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2008).

2.9.1 Stage 1 - first encounter with the text close read and re-reading of text.

I read attentively through each transcript a number of times to become familiar with the content, as each new transcript was likely to come up with a new insight (Priest, 2002; Smith et al., 1999). The aim was to make sense of the participant's words and to gain a preliminary understanding of the text. I made notes of my observations, reflections and exploratory notes about the interview on the transcript by way of getting familiar with the text. This was followed by a more comprehensive and detailed note-taking process as I gained new insight (Smith et al., 2002).

2.9.1.1 Process of coding and strategy of case by case analysis.

Since it was important to mention where in the original transcript the themes were to be found I carefully numbered each transcript, paragraph, each sentence as well as the page on which the themes were to be found in the transcript. By doing so I was able to use only key codes as indication of where the themes can be found in the original transcript. (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Having a number of individual transcripts, I used the master-theme list from the first interview as guideline to begin analysis of the other transcripts. Being aware of what

emerged from the first transcript made it easier to identify new emerging themes in subsequent transcripts. Analysis is a cyclical process, which means that new themes emerging from other transcripts could be tested against earlier transcripts. New themes identified could inform, modify or even become superordinate or subordinate to previously identified themes (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). It was important to acknowledge new emerging issues but also to respect ways in which the participants' accounts were similar. In summary, therefore, the IPA is a cyclical process where I proceeded through several iterative stages until the final stage where I have to reflect on the findings of the research study (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

2.9.2 Stage 2 - identifying emerging themes.

After the initial noting process, I returned to the beginning of the transcript but worked with my notes that closely reflected the source material. At this stage the aim was to transform preliminary notes into concise phrases at a more abstract level that necessitated psychological terminology which captured the essence of participants' experience (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Usher & Jackson, 2014). I carefully examined all sections of the transcript while simultaneously reflecting on my own acquired insights from the data (Cooper, Fleischer, & Cotton, 2012). The transformation of initial notes into themes continued until all the transcripts were thoroughly analysed. In instances where similar themes emerged, the same theme title was repeated (Smith et al., 2002). The themes not only reflected the participants' original thoughts but also my interpretation of the data (Cooper et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2002).

2.9.3 Stage 3 - seeking relationships and grouping themes together as clusters.

This stage involved looking for connections between emerging themes, grouping them together as clusters and labelling each cluster (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The identified themes of one transcript at a time were listed on a new page in chronological order as they came up in the transcript. The themes were then categorised

more analytically as I searched for relationships between emerging themes. Some of the themes emerged as superordinate themes and others as sub-themes (Pietkiewics & Smith, 2014). I constantly referred back to the original transcript to validate the process (Smith et al., 2002). This form of analysis is iterative. I ensured that I closely interacted with text in my attempt to create order from all the concepts and ideas extracted from the participants' responses (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). Through the process of interpretation I attempted to make sense of what the participant was saying while constantly checking my own sense-making against that of the participant.

2.9.4 Stage 4 - tabulating a master list of themes.

During this stage I produced coherently ordered table of themes (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). The clusters as identified in the previous step were labelled and these represented the superordinate themes (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). In the master list I listed the sub-themes that supported the superordinate themes (Smith et al., 1999; Smith et al., 2002).

After analysis of all seven transcripts, the coherent master list of themes (stage 4) of all the participants were integrated into one final master list, including the superordinate and subordinate themes. It was at this stage that those themes that did not fit in with the emerging structure or that were not providing enough evidence were dropped from the final master list of themes (Smith et al., 2002). All my analysis decisions were informed by my research question. I ordered themes according to the frequency of their appearance. Identified themes were, however, not chosen purely on the basis of their occurrence within the data set; I needed to take into consideration the richness of certain passages which highlighted the themes as well as how certain themes helped explain other aspects of the account. This was a very challenging step and required of me to prioritise the data in order to start reducing it (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2008).

2.9.5 Writing up of findings.

The report writing part of data analysis is most important since this is where the reader will be introduced to the interpretations of the analysed scripts (Smith et al., 1999). This process refers to integrating, capturing and reporting on the complexities of the phenomenon being studied in such a way that others can comprehend and relate to it clearly without confusion. The report-writing phase is seen as an expansion of the analysis phase in the sense that themes will be explained, illustrated and translated into a narrative account (Usher & Jackson, 2014).

The table of themes, which were seen as the participants' responses, formed the basis of my arguments. Extracts from the transcripts were used to support my arguments (Smith et al., 1999; Usher & Jackson, 2014).

2.10 Quality assurance

I made sure that no misinterpretation of the participants' views and comments occurred. An audit trail documenting the steps taken from the start of the research process to the development and reporting of findings is available. These records explain what was done from beginning till end (Simon & Goes, 2011).

I attempted to maintain closeness and faithfulness to the participants' accounts through constant cross-checking interpretations with the original transcripts, thus grounding interpretations in the data. This method for maintaining authenticity was proposed by Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). IPA allowed me to provide an accurate, interpretative reflection of the real life experiences of participants, especially of the meaning that they attached to their experiences (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008).

Consistency and truthfulness in the research was assured by making use of a co-coder to compare oral text against written text (Conroy, 2003; Tracey, 2010). My study leader

acted as co-coder in order to ensure that the experiences of participants and the interpretation thereof were legitimate and contributed to the quality and trustworthiness of the study.

Analytical rigor refers to methods employed to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. Throughout the study I attempted to be aware of my prejudices that might have influenced the findings of the study. I paid deliberate attention to not making any assumptions about the data during hermeneutic analysis. In other words, all information and every theme that arose was treated with the same dedication, care and attention, whether it was relevant or not (Kalfe, 2011).

I kept a reflective journal to document all my thought processes and subsequent interpretations and prejudices (Noble & Smith, 2015).

In the final report, I attempted to understand, gain insight in and accurately reflected upon and capture the meaning that participants attached to their experiences. Rich verbatim extracts of participants' experiences were included to support my research findings (Kafle, 2011; Noble & Smith, 2015).

2.11 Research Ethics

As researcher, I acknowledged the human rights of every participant, and therefore conducted the study with the utmost care in order to respect and protect the well-being of participants. My intention was to uphold the best interest of participants. The study was assessed by the Ethics Committee as being of medium risk. I made arrangements with a registered social worker and psychologist to provide a free debriefing session should talking about their divorce experience cause some participants to become emotionally overwhelmed. I ensured that recruiting was done ethically by having locators facilitate informed consent. No participant was pressured into participating in the study. Participants were aware of their rights and gave written consent before participation. I respected the viewpoints of

participants and was sensitive to the fact that their beliefs and values would in some respects

differ from my own. Information gained from participants was also treated with the utmost

confidentiality. The transcripts of interviews were filed under pseudonyms.

Conclusion

In this chapter I motivated my choice of approach to answer my research question. I

described IPA and the methods of participant recruitment, and the data analysis procedures I

followed. Finally, I demonstrated that I endeavoured to assure the quality of the research

process by employing various strategies. In Chapter 3 I will present the findings in a rich

description of participants' experiences in falling back on their religion in coping and for

meaning-making after divorce.

CHAPTER 3

In this chapter the findings of the research are presented. Initially, the cultural background of the participants will be sketched to provide a detailed backdrop against which the themes of the findings will be described. The aim of this study was to explore the role of religion in meaning-making coping exhibited by middle-aged, female Christian divorcées who divorced as a direct result of betrayal by their spouses. In order to describe and interpret the participants' meaning-making coping sensitively, their experience of divorce will be described initially, and thereafter their coping processes.

3.1 Contextualisation: Religious upbringing and background of participants

The participants in this study grew up in the 1960s and 1970s, in a time of Apartheid and strong Afrikaner nationalism. A particular brand of Calvinism formed the foundation of Apartheid, and was dominant in the Afrikaans culture that was characterised by patriarchy. In their families of origin, women (mothers) were responsible for taking care of the home, raising their children and maintaining good relationships (nurturing and caring). Women were mainly responsible for domestic chores, and responsible for the smooth running of the home. Men (fathers) were responsible for providing financially for their family. They were not necessarily highly educated but they were the breadwinners of their family and fulfilled a more independent role. They were also responsible for the spiritual guidance of their family. The fathers were thus indisputably in positions of power in the family. Women in this study were socialised in accordance with these different gender roles. As an insider of this community, I had an intuitive understanding of the participants' background and therefore was able to discern the positioning of the participants. This, however, also posed a challenge because I had to ensure that I listened carefully to the voices of the participants, and accordingly own my personal contribution to the socially constructed account of the findings.

3.2 Traditional views of marriage

Traditional conservative Christian values endorse the superiority of the male (Maisiri, 2005). The participants accepted the Biblical dictum of Ephesians 5:22-23: "Wives submit to your own husbands as to the Lord for the husband is the head of the wife…" (Bible Gateway, 2011) as norm for their marriage, accepting the inequality of power in their relationship. Initially, as young brides, participants settled for their gender role as mother, wife and caregiver in line with the cultural expectation according to which they were raised. Due to their gender-role as wife and mother they accepted role prescriptions to respect their spouse and be caring, loving and emotionally sensitive. Living according to socialised norms set the stage for them to serve at the cost of neglecting themselves, with them eventually feeling that they have lost themselves in their marriage.

> *Ek het besef hoe ek myself eintlik in my huwelik verloor het. Hoe ek soos 'n marionet aan 'n tou was, hoe ek my man en kinders se vloerlap was, hoe my behoeftes nooit regtig bevredig is nie, hoe alles net om my man en sy behoeftes en wat hy wou doen en hê, gedraai het. Ek het my wys gemaak ek is gelukkig getroud; maar ek dink nie ek was ooit nie* (P2).
>
> *Dit het vir my gevoel ek is almal se bediende, ek doen alles vir hulle, dis sy drome en sy ideale, ek word misbruik, ek word afgebreek. Niks het ooit oor my of my geluk gegaan nie… ek was te bang om ooit my mond oop te maak, ek het nie drome of ideale gehad nie* (P1).

Participants' global meaning systems were framed by inflexible religious and cultural beliefs to the extent that they did not stand up for themselves in their family relationships. They were not happy but could go on because of their belief that they were fulfilling the ordained function of serving their spouse and children. Their religious beliefs in God as loving father, omnipresent, caring and protective of their needs, on some level gave them

37

hope that they and their marriage would be protected from harm. *'n Mens het altyd gedink, nee dit sal nie met my gebeur nie, met my gaan dit goed en God is mos agter my* (P4).

However, this childlike belief was fundamentally challenged by their marital problems and for them to be confronted with adultery and divorce, shook the unquestioned aspects of their global meaning structure (Park, 2010).

> *Weet jy, mens het groot geword met die idee daar is 'n God wat jou beskerm, so dit het vir my gevoel, die Here het my 'gedrop'* (P3).
>
> *Maar dit was nie altyd maklik nie. Ek het gevoel ek roep tot God, ek huil, Hy sien my trane, Hy hoor my smeekgebede. Ek kry al die beloftes uit Sy woord dat Hy sal sorg, en tog beleef en ervaar ek net doodse stilte, sien ek nie sy sorg nie, voel ek nie sy nabyheid nie* (P2).
>
> *Mens het gevoel die Here het jou verlaat, jy het gevoel jy staan alleen in hierdie hele wêreld en dit was vir my verskriklik traumaties gewees* (P3).

3.3 Divorce - a disrupting experience

An event such as divorce is referred to as a traumatic event due to its ability to severely disrupt people's ability to understand, predict or control their life. The more pervasive the implications for one's life are, the more traumatic divorce seems to be. Participants' view of marriage was informed by the vow of commitment till 'death do us part'. Divorce violated their dreams for and expectations of marriage, severely changing their assumptions about the course of their life.

> *Jy weet dit was vir my verskriklik gewees om vir die eerste keer op vorms te moet skryf ek is geskei, ek het so gehuil daaroor, ek het nie getrou om eendag te skei nie, my ma en my pa se huwelik, dit is vir my so inspirerend, ek het nie gedink ek wil skei eendag nie* (P3).

Participants' emotional turmoil resulting from divorce after a long marriage was characterised by emotions such as hurt, anger, anxiety, loneliness, emotional vulnerability, humiliation and shame, resentment and confusion.

Ek was platgeslaan, emosioneel gedreineer, verneder (P2*)*.

Jy sit met soveel wraak en haat en onduidelikheid en goeters (P1).

Although most (66%) of the participants were experiencing tension in their marriage and felt as if they had lost themselves in their marriage, the rest regarded their marriage as happy and were severely disillusioned and shocked when confronted with the initial betrayal. As one of the participants said: *Ek het getrou tot die dood ons skei ... ontrouheid en egskeiding was nie eens deel van my woordeskat nie* (P8). *Ek het nie getrou om eendag te skei nie ... daai verwerping is verskriklik (P3).*

3.3.1 Mourning.

Participants experienced intense periods of mourning for the loss of their spouse and their life as they knew it. The mourning process after divorce was complicated when women were confronted by recurrent thoughts and images of the ex-spouse and a preoccupation with the daily life of an ex-spouse and wanting to find out more about the ex-spouse.

Ek raak nou nog emosioneel as ek sy stem hoor, of hom êrens raakloop. Ek

sal seker altyd vir hom lief wees. Ek probeer hom vermy, dis nie vir my goed

om hom te sien nie. Ek mis hom, ek verlang, maar ek het aanvaar dis verby

(P3).

Realising that the ex-spouse was inaccessible caused feelings of severe emptiness, loneliness and even severe rage towards the ex-spouse whom they felt had abandoned them. These feelings are corroborated by Weiss, 1976 (as cited by Yarben, 2010).

Divorced parents stay connected to each other through their children. Having to relate to their ex-husband in a different manner proved very difficult for participants. Their children now became part of a new family from which they were excluded. *Dit voel vir jou, jou man het jou gesin gekaap. Jy voel verwerp en uitgesluit, maar ter wille van jou kinders moet jy kontak behou, dit maak dit bitter moeilik* (P8).

Regardless of what the quality of their marriage relationship prior to their separation had been, the divorce experience was severely traumatic.

Ek het in 'n baie diep depressie gegaan (P3).

Ek het my hoop totaal verloor. Ek het in 'n hoekie gesit, wat dit vir jou voel jy weet nie wat om te doen om van die pyn ontslae te raak nie, dit voel letterlik asof jy gaan oopbars van die pyn hier binne, dan sit jy in die hoekie opgekrul in 'n fetus posisie (P5).

3.3.2 Rejection.

Loss of self-image stemmed from their husbands' rejection. They regarded themselves as inadequate, and not worthy of love. Apart from feeling humiliated and ashamed, they also felt worthless due to their perceived inability to be a good wife and mother. Appraising their apparent failure as mother and wife, and their rejection in marriage in the light of their religiously and culturally informed global meaning system, was devastating. They had invested their lives in being good mothers and wives on which their sense of self was built. These internalisations that resulted from being rejected by their spouse caused extreme pain, especially since it is someone who knows you intimately. The conclusion follows easily: I'm undeserving of their love and fundamentally unlovable.

Dit het vir my gevoel 'n mens is nie goed genoeg nie; daai verwerping is verskriklik (P3).

Dit het vir my gevoel ek beteken niks. Ek is nie goed genoeg nie, ek is nie 'n goeie ma nie, ek is nie goed genoeg vir 'n man nie. Hy het ook vir my gesê ek is te sleg (P1).

Ek kon nie meer my kinders beskerm nie, ek was moeg, ek was opgebruik, ek was gedaan, ek het my net onttrek van alles en almal (P5).

Being rejected aggravated feelings of failure and inadequacy and caused severe feelings of vulnerability (Thompson & Janigian, 1988; Krumrei et al., 2011).

3.3.3 Loss of Social Support.

All participants experienced a painful loss of social support. Not only did they lose their spouse, but they also experienced a decline in support from mutual friends, and their previously shared faith community.

Ek weet nie of mense doodgewoon net nie omgegee het nie en of hul nie betrokke wou raak nie, maar daar was geen ondersteuning van my vorige kerk of vriende nie. Nie eens 'n enkele sms nie. Ek het my dus totaal en al van almal gedistansieer (P8).

Participants expressed their intense feelings of loneliness. Their changed status made them extremely vulnerable and socially awkward. *Ek is eensaam* (P3); *Ek het my heeltemal van die samelewing onttrek, ek is eensaam* (P5), and P8 stated: *ek het geen sosiale lewe nie.*

They had no or few friends to go out with. Lack of support seems to be a widespread experience of divorcées (Thomas & Ryan, 2008). Menaghan and Lieberman (1986) found that long-term divorcees have fewer valued friends in whom they can confide. Women in this study could rely on support from their children, a few close friends, their parents and counsellors. However, five of the seven participants lived in relative isolation post-divorce and found it very difficult to

establish new social networks. What complicated matters for the participants, was that they did not want to intrude on their married friends' family time. *Ek wil nie by gesinne indring nie, jy weet soos my vriendinne, ek gaan kuier nie so baie nie, ek voel ek maak inbreuk op hulle gesinstyd* (P3).

The relationship with married friends also changed. Participants perceived their married friends to be possessive of their husbands and jealous should their husband pay caring attention to the divorcee, even if his intentions were innocent, and purely motivated by kindness. *Vriendinne raak jaloers op jou en besitlik omdat jy nou alleen is en haar man gesels met jou en hy probeer jou ondersteun en net vriendelik wees* (P4).

3.3.4 Financial Difficulty.

Financial difficulty seemed to be more prevalent in the lives of four participants who devoted themselves to home making, raising their family and supporting their husband. These participants' social standing was eroded by their sudden but dramatic financial woes. Due to them not being employed during the period of their marriage (26 years on average), they did not have market related skills. This situation exacerbated feelings of failure and low self-esteem, resonating with messages of their spouse who replaced them with someone more desirable and worthy of love.

Being solely responsible for their own financial situation was severely stressful for five of the seven participants. Hilton and Anderson (2009) emphasise that the longer the marriage lasted the higher the financial cost associated with divorce. Older divorced women may never recover and be financially independent.

> *Dit plaas ongelooflik baie spanning en stres op jou… Wat baie sleg was is*
> *die verlaagde lewens standaard, ewe skielik is daar nie geld nie, die kerk, jou*
> *ouers vriende moet vir jou sorg. Jy leef basies onder die broodlyn, somtyds*

gaan daar weke verby wat jy nie eens brood en melk geld het nie. Jy ly en jou

kinders ly saam (P8).

Financial hardship also resulted in a decrease in their standard of living. Participants with limited skills had limited choices and needed to take on any job to survive. P5 became a domestic worker: *Ek bedoel op hierdie stadium doen ek 'domestic work' om vir my blyplek en kos te betaal.* Even those participants who were employed struggled to make ends meet. The divorce forced them to survive on only their income and to make financial decisions on their own. They had not necessarily participated in family financial decisions due to their acceptance of the traditional role of a wife. Having to make financial decisions that affected their and their children's lives was daunting.

> *Dit het my laat besef dat daar 'n yslike verantwoordelikheid op my skouers*
>
> *rus. Ek is soos my vinger alleen in die wêreld, as daar 'n probleem is, is dit*
>
> *my probleem, as my finansies nie uitwerk nie, as daar onvoorsiene uitgawes*
>
> *op my pad kom, is dit my probleem, daar is niemand wat finansieel help of*
>
> *raadgee nie. Daar is nie 'n tweede inkomste om op terug te val nie* (P2).

The precariousness of their financial positions contributed substantially to their social isolation. Sudden poverty in a materialistic society where your value as person is frequently determined by your financial status is devastating. *Ek het my totaal en al van almal gedistansieer. My lewe het baie klein geword, geen uiteet of fliek meer, deels omdat daar nie geld is nie ... (P8)*

3.3.5 Stigmatisation.

Although divorce is a rapidly growing phenomenon there is still an underlying notion, probably based on religious teachings, that divorce is a deviance from the norm and therefore unacceptable, resulting in the stigmatisation of divorcées.

Jy voel verneder, almal staar, almal praat agter jou rug, 'n stigma kleef aan

jou. Jy voel om jouself van alles en almal te onttrek (P2).

Ek dink die samelewing is wreed; mense 'label' jou, jy word gestigmatiseer,

mense skinder sonder om regtig agter die waarheid te kom (P8).

However, there may be elements of self-stigmatisation when individuals internalise perceived prejudices and consequently develop negative feelings about themselves (Latalova, Kamaradova, & Prasko, 2014). Participants tended to struggle with their own self-judgement in the light of their culturally and religiously influenced global orienting system (Neculaesei, 2015). These internal judgements and concomitant feelings of guilt and disappointment may have been unconsciously projected onto others.

Dit het vir my gevoel almal kyk jou aan want jy is nou geskei, en hoe kan jy

skei en die ander vrou loop met jou man weg? So jy was sleg, jy was nie goed

genoeg nie (P1).

Partykeer, ja, het ek gestigmatiseer gevoel, het dit vir my so gevoel, maar

niemand het dit ooit gesê nie. Mens moet baie versigtig wees om nie te

veralgemeen nie en te dink dit is hoe hulle voel nie, want mens weet nie wat

ander mense dink nie (P4).

3.3.6 Adapting to society as single individual.

Re-establishing one-self in society, as single individual with an active social network of friends, is a very difficult step in the post-divorce transition process. Some participants were still struggling to adapt to society as single divorcees. They experienced difficulty committing themselves to new relationships due to their inability to trust. Their hesitance to trust constrained the development of new social relationships, especially with male friends.

Ek het meer 'cautious' geword, ek vertrou nie meer so maklik nie. Ek sukkel

om nuwe vriendskappe aan te knoop (P8).

Ek glo nie ek sal ooit weer in 'n verhouding ingaan nie soos ek vir jou sê ek

vertrou nie, ek is ontsaglik bang vir 'n verhouding (P5).

All participants explained that another reason for their reticence regarding new relationships with males was their inner growth and maturity. They had learned to be more comfortable within themselves, and to find peace and joy in a simpler lifestyle.

3.3.7 Divorce - a liberating experience.

Not everyone experience divorce as negative. Participant 7 view it as an escape from her severely critical spouse (a religious leader) who undermined her sense of self and inhibited her to do things that she feels passionate about. After divorce she felt happy, free and able to reinvent herself. This experience corresponds with the literature (Sakraida, 2005; Tashiro & Frazier, 2003).

Dit was vir my 'n verskriklike bevrydende ding, ek het terwyl ek getroud was

nie menswaardig gevoel nie. Ek het meer menswaardig gevoel in God toe ek

skei… dis vir my lekker om net myself te kan wees (P7).

3.4 Religious struggles

Religious struggles, is defined as a sign of a religious orienting system under stress; and represent efforts to maintain or transform religious beliefs, values and goals that have been disrupted (Pargament, Desai, & McConnel, 2006).

Apart from experiencing fear of the unknown, pain at the loss of a spouse and family life and shame due to being a failure at marriage, participants also appraised divorce as a threat to existing religious convictions and cultural values (marriage is an institution of God). They experienced it as severely stressful (Krumrei et al., 2011 & Park, 2005). Turning to religion was a way of reducing emotional distress, relying on God's ability to intervene and restore a sense of control over their situation. However, this process of turning to God was

not simple and smooth because naive assumptions about God shielding his children from danger and pain were challenged and even nullified: *Mens het groot geword met die idee daar is 'n God wat jou beskerm, so dit het vir my gevoel, die Here het my gedrop* (P3), and P1 said with incredulity: *Jy wonder hoekom gebeur dit met jou; jy wonder hoekom laat die Here dit toe?* This caused distress, confusion, anger, doubt in faith, and even temporary loss of faith. *Ek het op 'n stadium gevoel God bestaan glad nie... ek het my geloof heeltemal verloor* (P5). Doubting God's attributes as loving, caring and protecting, caused three participants to rebel against God; they stopped praying, reading their Bible and going to church and even doubt own faith. *Ek het glad nie gebid nie en ek het nie meer bybel gelees nie (P5). Hoewel ek glo, was daar tye dat ek getwyfel het of my geloof eg was, of ek werklik 'n kind van God was* (P2).

Some individuals began to grapple with their religious assumptions and beliefs by a process of questioning and reappraisal, as reflected in (Pieper Webb et al., 2010). The reappraisal facilitated adjustment of their religious understanding to accommodate a view of God who allows things such as divorce to happen to His child, but with the understanding that God will never leave or forsake you. *Mens moet weet dit kan met enigiemand gebeur, dit maak nie saak hoe ryk of arm jy is en of jy 'n christen is en of jy nie 'n christen is nie, die dinge kan gebeur* (P4).

3.5 Religious Coping

Coping is necessitated by stressful or traumatic experiences and is aimed at the restoration of emotional balance. Religious coping is a specific type of coping that is "inherently derived from religious beliefs, practices, experiences and emotions or relationships" (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2015, p. 25). Participants employed religious coping in their efforts to successfully deal with their divorce and to regain control of their

lives. Religious coping came naturally for the participants and stemmed from their

Christianity-infused global meaning system. Their belief in and experience of being in a

relationship with God was a primary source of meaning-making. Relationships with

Christian friends and family members also proved to be a valuable as sources of strength.

3.5.1 Religious teachings and rituals enable coping.

To be in a relationship with God, to experience the transcendent and to live according

to a set of religious values are goals of most religious traditions (Pargament, 2002). For the

participants, religious coping meant a secure relationship with God, a belief that there is

meaning to be found in their circumstances, a deeper awareness of the Holy Spirit being

resident in their hearts, and a sense of spiritual connectedness with God.

> *Elke keer as jy gevoel het ek kan nie aangaan nie, het die Heilige Gees jou*
>
> *kom vul en Hy het jou deurgedra. Hoe sou jy dit gedoen het as die Heilige*
>
> *Gees nie daar was nie?* (P1).
>
> *Ek dink my geloof was my versekering dat God by my is, dat Hy met sy Gees*
>
> *in my woon en my daagliks die krag sal gee om op te staan en voort te gaan*
>
> (P2).
>
> *Ek het somtyds gebid en baie alleen gevoel dan het ek myself getroos dat God*
>
> *met sy Gees in my woon al kan ek hom nie op daardie oomblik sien of voel nie*
>
> (P8).

For the participants God was not an abstract entity; He was real, he was a

trusted member of their intimate network, a secure attachment figure always available

to guide, comfort and support them (Pieper Webb et al., 2010).

Participants' faith was their anchor; it was their connection with God. Faith was their

way of showing trust in God, allowing Him to strengthen them and enabled them to go on

when they were unsure of how to cope. Their faith in an imminent God effectively supported

47

them in times of loneliness and isolation: *Ek dink my geloof het my daar deur gedra elke liewe dag. Dit het vir my gevoel jy is nie alleen nie, daar is darem iemand wat verstaan, iemand wat help* (P1). Intimacy with God created a calming influence and a detachment from difficult emotions of the trauma (Gossett & Kenyon, 1981; Laaser, 2011; Mattis, 2002). Through faith they improved their coping, they experienced God's protection, and guidance and it gave participants hope.

> *Ek dink my geloof het my hoop gegee. Ek het rustig gevoel in die wete dat*
>
> *God in beheer is, dat ek in hom rus kan vind en my nie hoef te vermoei oor*
>
> *dinge waaraan ek niks kan doen nie* (P8).

Prayer is a powerful ritual providing an opportunity to talk to a loving, caring God in person. It offered a way of expressing grief, and it provided opportunity for emotional release (Van der Merwe, Van Eeden, & Van Deventer, 2010). Prayer was also a way of confiding in God, asking for answers to life's existential questions, and gaining peace of mind when they experienced a flood of God's peace in their heart and mind. Prayer was the one strategy that was a source of strength for all participants. P1 referred to prayer as her last resort:

> *As jy nie kan bid vanaand nie waarnatoe val jy terug? As jy nie kan vra 'Here*
>
> *help', en as jy vir die Here gevra het 'help my' en jy huil, en jy kry weer daai*
>
> *bevestiging ...*

It was interesting to note that although there are other coping strategies, five participants primarily turned to their religion during their divorce struggles. Seeking God, reading the Scriptures and believing in the promises in God's word became very important coping mechanisms. Participants all strongly held onto religious beliefs that were entrenched in their global meaning system. Having been confronted with an immoral act such as divorce that challenged their belief system and moral values, their most common reaction was to turn to God and the Bible for guidance on how to live morally in the midst of adversity. Abu-

48

Raiya and Pargament (2015) state that people tend to turn to religion when they perceive it as the most viable option in the absence of economic and social resources, and also when facing more challenging circumstances. Reading the Scriptures and believing provided reassurance to participants that God's word is never void of fulfilment. Holding on to God's promises created an inner perseverance - in P1's words: *Jy kry daai hoop en die beloftes wat die Here vir jou gee dat jy moet aanhou en dat jy moet deurdruk,* and a knowing that God would never forsake them: *God het sy beloftes vir my kom waar maak, en dit dink ek het my net weereens laat besef dat Hy, God, met ons is* (P8).

Religion was often implicated in the decision to forgive (Krause & Ingersoll-Dayton, 2001). Participants turned to the Scriptures to educate themselves about what Jesus taught about forgiveness, which is a strong Christian theme.

Following the guidance as given in the Scriptures, participants were able to progressively forgive their unfaithful ex-spouses and to let go of anger, resentment and bitterness. Participants' decision to forgive was based in deeply grounded religious values into which they were socialised. Forgiveness provided a way in which to respond to their experience of being wronged.

> *As jy nie iemand kan vergewe nie dan plaas jy daai wond eintlik op jouself, want jy maak jouself seer, dis soos 'n sak aartappels wat jy met jou ronddra wat jy nie kan afskud en neersit nie, en jy kan net eenvoudig nie genees as jy dit nie kan doen nie* (P4).

> *As ek nie kon vergewe nie, sou ek nie kon heel word nie. Dit was vir my 'n bewustelike besluit om te vergewe, maar God het stil-stil dit in my hart ook kom bevestig ... vergifnis het die pyn en die seerkry wat met die egskeiding gepaard gaan kom wegneem* (P2).

Forgiveness enabled participants to adopt more positive and pro-social responses that were closely related to improved health and emotional states. Findings about forgiveness correspond to that of previous research (Krause & Ingersoll-Dayton, 2001; Schultz, Tallman, & Altmaier, 2010). Forgiveness by participants altered their response to the infidelity and following rejection and divorce.

Participants sought understanding of the adverse events and tried to cope with the accompanying distress, therefore they sought support from significant others, and friends who encouraged them by referring to religious principles and practices. *Dan bel ek my vriendin en dan huil ek, dan sê sy, dis oraait, jy hoef nie te bid nie, ons bid vir jou, ons tree vir jou in, in gebed* (P3).

Living life according to a specific set of religious principles caused five participants to seek help from Christian counsellors who shared their faith perspective and Christian values. *Ek het by christelike beraders uitgekom en dit het ook vir my baie gehelp* (P7). Christian counsellors share the assumptive world of the participants (Brown, 2014; Jenkins, 2010; Lloyd et al., 2014).

Making meaning of their painful experience entailed strengthened faith: *My verhouding met die Here is soveel sterker, dit het my nader aan Hom gebring* (P3). Most participants also developed a new understanding of their own value and strength.

> *Ek het geleer dat ek 'n innerlike veerkragtigheid het, ek kan baie meer hanteer*
> *as wat ek ooit gedink het moontlik is. Ek het baie dinge self leer doen, ek kan*
> *my eie besluite neem, ek het meer verantwoordelik geword, en my geloof het*
> *baie sterker geword* (P8).

Positive religious coping enabled four participants to accept God had a reason for permitting them to suffer: … *in my hart weet ek dat die Here dit toegelaat het met 'n doel* (P5).

However, three participants dealt with their confusion by blaming the Devil. *Jy besef dat dit nie die Here is wat dit op jou pad gebring het nie, dat dit die duiwel is* (P1)*.… dat die duiwel dit gebruik om God se kinders mee aan te val en te vernietig* (P2). This demonisation strategy (Joseph & Lindley, 2008; Krumrei et al., 2011) has strong Biblical roots (Leviticus 16). Blaming sins on a scapegoat (the Devil) is an age-old strategy. Participants who cognitively reappraised their experience as the work of Satan made sense of their suffering by attributing adversity to an evil force, while maintaining their belief in God as being benevolent. P1 explained her conclusion as follows… *dit nie die Here is wat dit op jou pad gebring het nie ... maar die Here gaan daar wees om jou te dra en jou op te bou en jou op die regte pad sterker te maak.*

Religious coping was successful in reducing distress and enabling the participants to grow and develop a new sense of self and deeper faith in God. In the process of struggling and coping they were empowered by lessons learnt from their divorce experience, and they accumulated a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives. Park (2010) describes a similar healing and growth process facilitated by religious coping. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) explain that religion has the potential to provide answers when individuals are not able to obtain answers to the question 'why'.

Religious struggles, urge participants to changed their religious convictions and beliefs to adjust their view of God as loving, caring and omnipresent in spite of bad things that happened to them. Cognitively working through their divorce experiences, fostered the realisation that God was protecting them and that He would never leave them in spite of their inability to perceive His presence and care in the midst of the chaos and anger. This realisation was a crucial turning point in their lives. Knowing that God is with them and that they are not alone in their struggles created the opportunity for healing and growth. Although

51

two participants were still in the initial stages of healing (at the time of the interviews) they had reached a point where they were able to take better control of their situation. The outcome of their struggles, therefore, was mostly adaptive. Cognitive processing was especially relevant in reverting to their value system and enabling them to reaffirm their global meaning system as mentioned in (Park, 2010).

3.6 Post-divorce adjustment and meaning.

After divorce some women adjusted to their new circumstances sooner than others. For participants the process of adjustment was preceded by cognitive appraisals, reappraisals, confrontation with self (*Eigenwelt*), the world (*Umwelt*) and others in the world (*Mitwelt*), introspection and questioning of their religious beliefs and cultural values (*Uberwelt*). They were able to change their values and assumptions of the world, the self and others to accommodate a new set of values and beliefs and in doing so the threat to their global meaning was decreased.

Participants in this study tended to change some aspects of their religious beliefs (such as their God-concept) in order to accommodate their divorce related experiences as set out in the discussion of how their assumptions of God were changed. Accommodation, according to Brandtstädter and Rothermund (2002) and Park (2010), is relatively common and more beneficial especially when confronted with irrevocable stressors. Accommodation allows a person to expand and adjust their 'schema' or cognitive framework, which encourages better adjustment.

They saw themselves as more fragile and vulnerable, and life as more frightening and unpredictable, due to not having control over what happened to them. Through cognitively confronting their trauma they were enabled to shift their thought processes from victim to victor. Each participant experienced her survival and growth process differently. Some

52

participants developed a greater appreciation of life. They came to realise that material things such as wealth and social standing were of less value, and could be lost easily. Participants' value orientation changed:

> *Jy besef aardse besittings beteken niks nie, dit kan alles in 'n oogwink verander, jy leer om jou vreugde te vind in die klein dingetjies, jou kinders, familie, vriende wat jou deurdra en ondersteun, 'n mooi sonsopkoms, die reën op 'n sink dak, jou gesondheid, jy waardeer dinge wat jy voorheen so as vanselfsprekend aanvaar het soveel meer … (P2).*

> *Ek het baie dankbaarheid en ek kan dit tasbaar wys, dis vir my lekker om net myself te kan wees, ... ek kan dankbaarheid uitleef in die sin van, ek kan by iets soos cupcakes for cancer betrokke raak (P7).*

The reappraisal processes that participants used reinforced their newfound global beliefs and values and enhanced the adjustment process post-divorce (Park & Folkman, 1997). On their journey of self-discovery some participants developed a new sense of self, they discover their own worth, and renewed faith in God; they regarded themselves as much stronger and more independent, and self-sufficient; they know what they wanted in life, and they realised that they had the ability to follow their dreams.

> *Ek het besef wie ek is, wat se goeie goed in my lê, en wat geloof is… ek het besef hoe sterk ek is dat ek alle dinge kon hanteer het (P1).*

> *Ek glo weer in myself, ek weet vandag ek is ook belangrik, my behoeftes is belangrik en behoort bevredig te word, ek mag ook ideale het, ek mag ook drome hê en die beste is ek kan dit verwesenlik, I am good enough, I am worthwhile (P2).*

Some participants had become more assertive and learned to set boundaries. They chose to surround themselves with positive things and people that contributed to building them up. They do not settle for less and they have learned to voice their concerns and, more importantly, to say no without explaining themselves:

Vandag kan ek in alle eerlikheid sê ek is 'n beter, sterker persoon ... ek doen net dinge, en omring my net met mense wat positief is, wat 'n positiewe bydrae maak ... ek het geleer om die dieper dinge in die lewe te waardeer (P8).

Post-divorce growth in late-life divorce is a well-documented phenomenon (Amato, 2000; Canham et al., 2014; Malhotra & Chebiyan, 2016; Thomas & Ryan, 2008).

One woman felt severely overwhelmed; taking responsibility for her own life was a very stressful process, as she did not know how to do certain things. She did, however, show courage and a willingness to learn. Learning to do new things for herself and mastering various skills resulted in a sense of self-empowerment and higher self-esteem and independence. This experience relates closely to a study done by Sakraida (2005). After battling with adversity, individuals tend to feel a greater sense of strength, and recognise their ability to handle future trauma more effectively (Malhotra & Chebiyan, 2016).

As teenspoed my nou weer moet tref, dink ek, ek sal dit presies dieselfde hanteer, in teendeel dalk beter, want ek het nou baie meer vaardighede ontwikkel, ek is nie meer so weerloos soos tydens die egskeiding nie (P8).

Redefining the self for some individuals meant becoming more intent on the well-being of their children. For each participant the well-being of their adolescent children was a very important aspect of their post-divorce focus. Their aim was to create a stable and loving environment for themselves and their

children, and help the children transit through the divorce process without unnecessary harm coming to them. Being there for their children's sake served a dual purpose – in attending to their children's needs they had less time to reminisce and remaining stuck in their own pain. Focusing on the well-being of their children was also a cognitive reappraisal strategy - compensatory self-enhancement. By compensating for the loss of their marriage and focusing all their attention on their capabilities and virtues as a mother were fore-grounded (Baumeister, 1982; Park & Folkman, 1997).

> *Ek het besef dat ek as ma vir my kinders daar moes wees, ek moes 'n standvastige, huislike omgewing skep, met genoeg roetine en dissipline om die oorgang vir hul so maklik as moontlik te maak* (P2).

> *Jy moet kan toneel speel as jou kinders nog jonk is en op skool om die rol van moeder en vader oor te neem en om sterk te staan is nie 'n maklike proses nie. Om toneel te speel in die dag en om vir hulle te wys ek is daar vir julle en in die aand dan maar jou trane te stort* (P4).

> *Dit was moeilik, want jy is nou 'n alleen ma, jou kinders is verwese en stukkend. Jy is self stukkend, maar moet sterk staan terwille van hulle.* (P8).

The divorce experience for five participants resulted in a greater sense of empathy for the suffering of others and a greater compassion for helping others. They experienced an urge to reach out to others while they themselves were going through adversity, for these women reaching out to others in need was part of their healing and meaning-making process.

> *Uit die ondervinding uit kon ek ook verskeie ander mense help, … dit het ook vir my genesing gebring deur te sien hoe ander mense moeiliker gehad het en swaarder gehad het as ek en dit het my bewus gemaak daarvan dat ek nie die*

enigste ene is wat swaarkry en wat deur beproewings en dinge gaan nie, en

dit het my ook genees om ander te kan help (P4).

The above experience represents downward comparison; a reappraisal strategy helps the individual to feel better about their own position (Gibbons & Gerhard, 1991; Park & Folkman, 1997).

Being able to help others was a significant part of the participants' meaningful outcome of their religious coping. P5 stated with wonder: *Dalk is dit die Here se plan vir my ... jare terug ook het ek die woord gekry terwyl ek besig was om 'n boek te lees, om hoop te gee vir vrouens wat nie meer hoop het nie*, and P1 stated with conviction: *Ek het besef ek kan daar wees vir ander mense, ek kan ander mense help en bystaan.*

True to their religious meaning-making, participants ascribed their healing and growth to God's grace.

Agterna kan ek tog ook nie keer om te dink dat God my 'n tweede kans gegee

het nie. So stukkend as wat ek was, het ek heel geword (P2).

Eintlik is dit beter dat dit met jou gebeur het. Jy sien wat 'n beter mens jy

uitgestap het en net die Here kon jou daardeur gedra het (P1).

The negative impact of religious struggles and divorce was only temporary, since women in this study adapted over time to their new life and changed circumstances. They achieved a new sense of equilibrium where they were experiencing a new, more intimate relationship with God. *My verhouding met die Here is soveel sterker, dit het my nader aan Hom gebring* (P3).

Religious coping allowed all participants to reappraise their values in terms of what they regarded as important, and to shed the baggage of the past: *Ek moes kon aanbeweeg sonder gister se bagasie* (P1).

Another cognitive reappraisal strategy that was employed in this study was to diminish the threat caused by her negative experience by focusing on the bigger picture and developing a long-term perspective (Moos & Schaefer, 1986; Park & Folkman, 1997). For some participants it represented a belief that God had a purpose with their struggles; that He was preparing them for something, or that God was using their experience for the greater good of all. Having a sense of purpose is a very powerful predictor of life adjustment (Park & Folkman, 1997).

3.7 Changed Global meaning

Participants experienced the shattering of global beliefs, values and assumptions as so severe that they had to engage in a prolonged process of rebuilding their belief system in line with their changed reality. They created a new philosophy of life that altered previously held assumptions and beliefs, providing them with new opportunities for self-development and growth that did not exist before divorce. Their new belief system accommodated the notion that although they experienced God's protection in their lives, good, Christian people are not exempt from adversity. *Mens moet weet dit kan met enige iemand gebeur, dit maak nie saak hoe ryk of arm jy is en of jy 'n christen is en of jy nie 'n christen is nie, die dinge kan gebeur* (P4).

Another changed value includes the idea that the adversity that they were confronted with was not the will of God. Although God did not intervene he is still a loving, caring and protecting God. The above realisation corresponds with research done by Pargament (2002). In order to maintain their view of God as a caring and loving God that would never leave them, they choose to rather blame adversity on the devil (Krumrei et al., 2011). By doing so they could confess that God's grace was enough for them, that God was with them all the way, and that God has healed them and was giving them a second chance.

They also nurture a more intimate and personal relationship with God. *God het sy beloftes vir my kom waar maak, en vandag kan ek in alle eerlikheid sê ek beleef God steeds as 'n ongelooflike werklikheid* (P8).
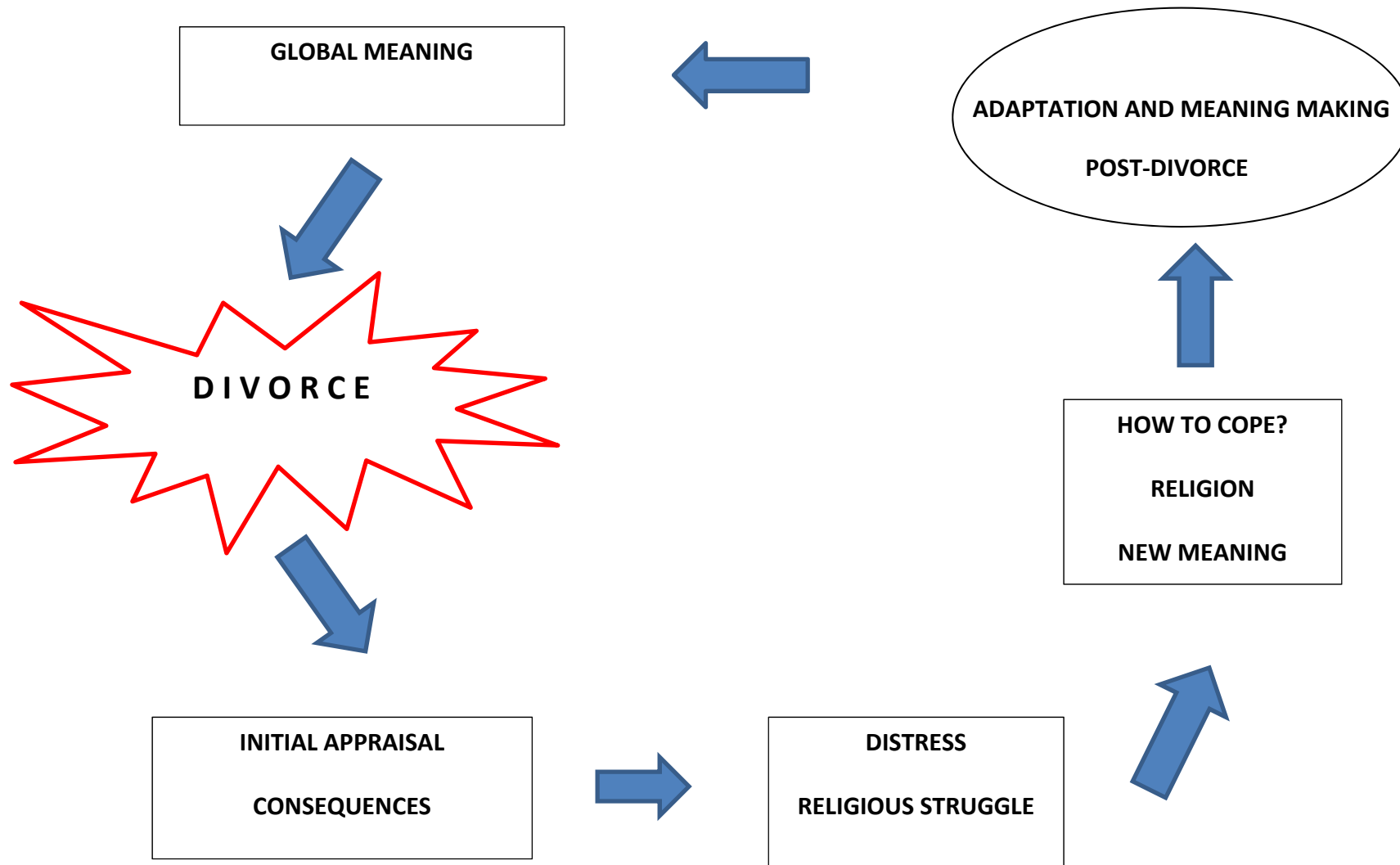
Their relationship with the self, had changed positively. Not feeling loved and cared for too long, made them realize that they needed love, and caring and, therefore, investing time in themselves became important:

> *En ek het geleer dat dit ook belangrik is om tyd met myself deur te bring, na te dink oor die lewe ... Ek glo weer in myself, ek weet vandag ek is ook belangrik, my behoeftes is belangrik en behoort bevredig te word* (P2).

An interesting process was their developing understanding that their spouses' views of them were not valid, thus reshaping some of their cultural and religious patriarchal beliefs: *Ek moes leer dat hoe hy my afgebreek het, mag hy nie gedoen het nie, want die Here laat nie mense afbreek nie* (P1). They laid claim to their independence and the right to be themselves: *Ek is gelukkig, ek is selfstandig, ek staan op vir myself, ek het geloof ... ek kan myself wees* (P2).

Figure 1 below represents the meaning-making coping process of participants in this study. Participants lived their lives according to cultural values and religious principles. The meanings that participants ascribed to their divorce were discrepant with their global meaning system, which caused them severe distress and resulted in religious struggles. The negative consequences of divorce forced them to employ religious coping as a way of alleviating their distress and to reduce the incongruence between their global and situational meanings. Religious coping provided a way of cognitively working through their divorce experiences and to eventually accept their divorce and adapt successfully to their status as single divorced individuals. Over time some participants managed to create new meaning and to developed higher levels of functioning.

58

Figure 1: Meaning making coping process of Christian female divorcées

GLOBAL MEANING

ADAPTATION AND MEANING MAKING

POST-DIVORCE

D I V O R C E

HOW TO COPE?

RELIGION

NEW MEANING

INITIAL APPRAISAL

CONSEQUENCES

DISTRESS

RELIGIOUS STRUGGLE

Conclusion

Participants in this study regarded their experiences as meaningful, because of them being able to reduce the discrepancy between their situational appraisal of the divorce and their global meaning system (Park & Folkman, 1997). Meaning-making entailed unconscious and automatic processes that were employed to reduce the discrepancy between their firmly held beliefs and their lived reality (Greenberg, 1995; Park, 2010). Reducing the discrepancy and restoring equilibrium enabled participants to adjust successfully post-divorce. This resulted in enduring changes in their religious beliefs, values and goals. These changes affected their philosophy of life, and global meaning, and can be referred to as existential changes. These changes are the outcome of adaptive forms of religious coping and were associated with personal growth and development in various domains of their life (Pieper Webb et al., 2010).

They grew into renewed faith in God, became more mature, discovered new priorities, and developed a deeper understanding and appreciation of life.

Findings provide evidence that participants had made new meaning by reducing the discrepancy, and restoring new equilibrium. The outcomes represent a triumph over adversity and included a greater sense of understanding and acceptance of their divorce, (Park, 2010), and feelings of having purpose in life owing to them becoming involved in activities beyond the self. Adaptive meanings, according to Park (2010), are predictors of better post-divorce adjustment. Although two participants were still involved in a process of adaptation, the other five have adapted successfully and spoke about experiencing higher levels of functioning than prior to their divorce.

These findings relate closely to Frankl's (1963) view that people find meaning through their ability to reflect upon and grow from negative life experiences and suffering. Janoff-Bulman (1992) and McIntosh et al., (1993) regarded finding meaning in negative life

experiences as a powerful coping tool. The above findings also resonate closely with the

meaning-making coping theory of Park and Folkman (1997).

CHAPTER 4

4.1 Summary of findings

The study aimed to explore the role of religion in meaning-making coping exhibited by middle-aged, Afrikaans, female Christian divorcées who divorced as a direct result of betrayal by their spouses. In this chapter a succinct summary of the main findings will be provided. Thereafter I will point out the limitations and significance of the research. A few recommendations are made, and, finally, I reflect on the study.

Participants grew up in an era of Afrikaner nationalism characterised by patriarchy. Fathers were in positions of power in the family; they were the breadwinners and spiritual leaders, while mothers were mainly caregivers and took responsibility for household chores. Participants were socialised according to these conservative Christian values. Their global meaning systems were formed by inflexible religious and cultural convictions. As newlyweds they had religious and culturally informed, preconceived assumptions about their role in marriage.

When experiences align with global meaning related expectations, people's assumptions are not challenged. For participants their partners' infidelity and their divorce initiated an existential crisis. Their religious and cultural beliefs and assumptions were fundamentally shaken. Participants' appraisal of divorce was essentially incongruent with their philosophy of life, to such an extent that they were unable to assimilate the event within their global meaning system.

Participants' psycho-social readjustment was eventually enabled by their re-evaluation and changing of some deeply rooted religious and cultural values. The meaning created by participants included a deeper connection with God, believing there to be a bigger God-given

plan for their life, and focusing on eudaimonic happiness, by being true to themselves and living out their inner virtues, talents and new found values.

4.2 Limitations of Research

Results reflect the experiences of participants that represent specific values and socio-demographic context, namely white Christian midlife female divorcées between 50 and 60 years of age. This study focused on the meaning-making coping experiences of these women post-divorce, and only mentions infidelity as reason for divorce. A possible limitation might have been that I did not focus on the role of religion from the first moment that participants were confronted with infidelity. Infidelity in itself is a very shocking experience that shakes the most profound religious assumptions about marriage. Focusing on their coping with the realisation of their spouse's infidelity might have provided a more in-depth picture of participants' religious coping. The dynamics of the religious coping might have differed in the sense that the aim of coping with the knowledge of infidelity might have been to maintain the relationship and to work towards reconciliation, while the aim of coping after divorce, where the relationship could not be repaired, was healing and adaptation as single individual.

4.3 Recommendations

- Replication of this study with a more diverse sample of religious participants (age, gender, culture) could add to current knowledge on the role of religion in the meaning-making coping of divorcées.
- A multi-cultural study on demonisation, reasons for blaming the Devil, and how different religious-cultural groups employ it as coping strategy might produce interesting findings.
- It is recommended that findings of research be used in the development of training programmes to equip clergy students to better understand the phenomenon of divorce,

the important role of religion in coping with divorce and to equip them with knowledge and skills on how to render more comprehensive (emotion and problem focused) support .

- The writing of an article to be published in secular media is advisable. Such an article articulating the real life experiences of midlife female divorcees could be informative, and serve to normalise religious struggles and coping-experiences of divorcees.

4.4 Significance of the study

- The significance of this study lies in the fact that it addresses a gap in existing literature on the role of religion in meaning-making coping after divorce.

- This study also has implications for counsellors and those involved in divorce counselling. Understanding the role of religion as meaning system will enable counsellors to facilitate sessions where clients are encouraged to talk about their religious experiences and struggles after divorce. Viewing divorce as a process of transition, and being aware of the personal developmental challenges that accompany post-divorce adjustment, will enable counsellors to guide clients more effectively through this difficult period of rebuilding their lives.

- This study has significance on a congregational level in that greater understanding and empathy can be fostered by using the findings of this research to create awareness of the negative impact of divorce, especially on women in midlife. Thus support groups might be formed where guidance on how to work through the process of mourning, and post-divorce transition in an empathic and caring manner are offered can be beneficial. Those affected by divorce will also have the opportunity to share with and receive support from others with similar experiences.

4.5 Personal Reflection

In this section I write notes on my reflexivity, which is a very important aspect of a qualitative study. I provide a summary of my journey as researcher, and acknowledge that my experiences during the research process also influenced my meaning-making of the data. As previously stated I had debriefing sessions with my supervisor to ensure that I respect the voices of participants and tell their story honestly.

Exploring the narratives of participants took me on a turbulent ride of emotions and experiences, namely those of participants and sometimes my own. I heard echoes of my own struggle but also could identify the unique way in which each participant forged forward on her journey of coping. As for participants, my process of recovery was prolonged, and religious coping provided me hope for a better future.

Regarding the healing of participants, my research focused on their religious coping experiences. I acknowledge the contribution of other supportive resources such as medical practitioners, medication, and hospitalisation. I realise that religious coping can be enhanced by like-minded individuals who are able to understand the philosophical assumptions of a person in need.

Two narratives that brought back very sombre memories were that of participants married to clergy. I could closely relate to their experience of regarding marriage as an institution of God and infidelity, as a deliberate, intentional act of deceit, as profound and incomprehensible. Reflecting back on own experiences enabled me to own my own pain in my reporting on the experiences of participants.

Closely relating to the experiences of participants, for me forgiveness was the only religious strategy that provided total freedom from past hurt, pain, anger and resentment. Its profound influence contributed to my healing.

Knowing myself and taking pride in my ability to endure and succeed through hard work and dedication, enabled me to complete this journey in spite of various unanticipated obstacles and delays. This study took me on an experience of self-discovery far beyond what I had expected and made me realise how far I have travelled on my own journey towards healing, but also how far I still have to go. This accentuated the rebuilding of one's life as a prolonged process.

"She looked back and marvelled how far she had come… She didn't wonder how she made it … She already knew the answer. Only with God's help had she powered through. For without his strength she could do nothing".

Unknown

References

Abu-Raiya, H., & Pargament, K. I. (2015). Religious coping among diverse religions: Commonalities and divergences. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality, 7*(1), 24-33.

Ajjawi, R., & Higgs, J. (2007). Using hermeneutic phenomenology to investigate how experienced practitioners learn to communicate clinical reasoning. *The Qualitative Report, 12*(4), 612-638.

Allport, G. W. (1966). The religious context of prejudice. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 5*, 447-457.

Amato, P. R. (2000). The consequences of divorce for adults and children. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 62, 1269-1287*. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2000.01269.x

Atkinson, R., & Flint, J. (2001). Accessing Hidden and Hard-to-reach populations: Snowball Research Strategies. *Social Research Update, 33*. Department of Urban Studies. University of Glasgow, Scotland.

Babbie, E. R. (2016). *The Practice of Social Research.* (14th ed.). Boston, MA: Cengage Learning.

Baumeister, R. F. (1982). A self-presentational view of social phenomena. *Psychological Bulletin, 91,* 3-26.

Baumeister, R. F., & Vohs, K. D. (2002). The Pursuit of Meaningfulness in Life. In C. R. Snyder, & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *Handbook of Positive Psychology* (pp. 608-618). Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

Bible Gateway. (2011). *New International Version of the Bible by Biblica.* Retrieved from https://www.biblegateway.com/

Biggerstaff, D., & Thompson, A. R. (2008). Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA): A qualitative methodology of choice in healthcare research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 5*(3), 214-224.

Binswanger, L. (1963). *Being-in-the-world: Selected papers of Ludwig Binswanger.* New York, NY: Basic Books.

Bogolub, E. B. (1991). Women and mid-life divorce: Some practice issues. *Social Work, 36*(5), 428-433.

Bower, J. E., Kemeny, M. E., Taylor, S. E., & Fahey, J. L. (1998). Cognitive processing, discovery of meaning, CD4 decline and AIDS-related mortality among bereaved HIV-seropositive men. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 66,* 979-986.

Brandstädter, J. Y., & Rothermund, K. (2002). The life-course dynamics of goal pursuit and goal adjustment: A two-process framework. *Developmental Review, 22*, 117-150. doi:10.1006/drev.2001.0539

Brown, S. L., & Lin, I. F. (2012). The Gray divorce revolution: Rising divorce among middle-aged and older adults, 1990-2010. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences, 67*B, 731-741. doi:10.1093/geronb/gbs089

Brown, T. L. (2014). Bruised but not broken: How coping styles, spirituality and social support are contributing factors to how well people do after divorce. *Electronic Theses, Projects and Dissertations, Paper 84. California State University: San Bernardino.*

Canham, S. L., Mahmood, A., Stott, S., Sixsmith, J., & O'Rourke, N. (2014). 'Till divorce do us part: marriage dissolution in later life. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage, 55*(8), 591-612. doi:10.1080/10502556.2014.959097

Conroy, S. A. (2003). A Pathway for Interpretive Phenomenology. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 2*(3), 1-43.

Cooper, R., Fleischer, A., & Cotton, F. A. (2012). Building connections: An Interpretative phenomenological analysis of qualitative research students' learning experiences. *The Qualitative Report, 17*, 1-16.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Davis, C., Wortman, C. B., Lehman, D. R., & Silver, R. (2000). Searching for meaning in loss: Are clinical assumptions correct? *Death Studies, 24,* 497-540.

De Vos, A. S., Strydom, H., Fouche, C. B., & Delport, D. S. (2011). *Research at grass roots. For the social sciences and human service professions* (4th ed.). Pretoria, South Africa: Van Schaik.

Department of Justice. (2017). Divorce Statistics in South Africa. Retrieved from www.divorcelaws.co.za/divorce-statistics.html.

Dragan, I. M. & Isaic-Maniu, A. (2013). Snowball Sampling Completion. *Journal of Studies in Social Sciences, 5*(2), p 160-177.

Emmons, R. A. (2003). Personal goals, life meaning and virtue: Well-spring of a positive life. In C. L. Keyes & J. Haidt (Eds.), *Flourishing: Positive psychology and the life well-lived* (pp. 105-128). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Fazio, R. J., & Fazio, L. M. (2005). Growth through loss: Promoting healing and growth in the face of trauma, crisis, and loss. *Journal of Loss & Trauma. International perspective on stress and coping, 10*(3), 221-252.

Fitness, J. (2001). Betrayal, rejection, revenge and forgiveness: An interpersonal script approach. In M. Leary (Ed.), *Interpersonal rejection* (pp. 73-103). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Folkman, S., & Moskowitz, J. T. (2004). Coping: pitfalls and promises. *Annual Review Psychology, 55*, 745-774.

Frankl, V. E. (1963). *Man's search for meaning: An introduction to logo therapy.* New York, NY: Washington Square Press.

Gibbons, F. X., & Gerrard, M. (1991). Downward comparisons and coping with threat. In J. Suls & T. A. Wills (Eds.), *Social comparison: Contemporary theory and research* (pp. 317-345). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Giller, E. (1999). *What is Psychological Trauma?* Article presented at Annual Conference of the Maryland Mental Hygiene Administration, "*Passages to Prevention: Prevention across Life's Spectrum*".

Gosset, D., & Kenyon, E. W. (1981). *The power of your words.* New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House.

Greenberg, M. A. (1995). Cognitive processing of traumas: The role of intrusive thoughts and reappraisals. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 25*, 122-1295.

Harris, J. H., Erbes, C. R., Engdahl, B. E., Ogden, H., Olson, R. H., Winskowski, A. M., ... Mataas, S. (2012). Religious distress and coping with stressful life events: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 68*(12), 1262-1269. doi:10.1002/jclp.21900

Hilton, J. M., & Anderson, T. L. (2009) Characteristics of women with children who divorce in midlife compared to those who remain married. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage, 50*, 309-32. doi:10.1080/10502550902766365

Hornsby, R. (2011). *What Heidegger means by being-in-the-world.* Retrieved from https://royby.com/philosophy/pages/dasein.html

Janoff-Bulman, R. (1992). *Shattered assumptions: Towards a new psychology of trauma.* New York, NY: Free Press.

Janoff-Bulman, R. & Frantz, C. M. (1997). The impact of trauma on meaning: From meaningless world to meaningful life. In M. J. Power & C. Brewin (Eds.), *The*

transformation of meaning in psychological therapies: Integrating theory and

practice (pp. 91-106). Hoboken NJ: Wiley & Sons.

Jenkins, K. (2010). In Concert and alone: Divorce and congregational experience. *Journal of*

the Scientific Study of Religion, 49(2), 278-292.

Joseph, S., & Lindley, P. A. (Eds.). (2008). *Trauma, recovery and growth. Positive*

psychological perspectives on posttraumatic stress. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley &

Sons.

Kafle, N. P. (2011). Hermeneutic phenomenological research method simplified. *Bodhi: An*

Interdisciplinary Journal, 5(1), 181-200.

King, L. A., Hicks, J. A., Krull, L. & Del Gaiso, A. K. (2006). Positive affect and the

experience of meaning in life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 90*(1),

179-196.

Krause, N., & Ingersoll-Dayton, B. (2001). Religion and the process of forgiveness in

late life. *Review of Religious Research, 42*, 252-276.

Kressel, K. (1986). Patterns of coping in divorce. In R. H. Moos (Ed.), *Coping with life*

crises. An integrated approach. New York, NY: Plenum.

Krumrei, E. J., Mahoney, A., & Pargament, K. I. (2009). Divorce and the divine: The role of

spirituality in adjustment to divorce. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 71*, 373-383.

Krumrei, E. J., Mahoney, A., & Pargament, K. I. (2011). Spiritual stress and coping model of

divorce: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Family Psychology, 25*(6), 973-985.

Laaser, D. W. (2011). *Posttraumatic growth: Hope and healing for women who have been*

relationally betrayed. Research paper presented to the faculty of the Adler Graduate

School.

Latalova, K., Kamaradova, D., & Prasko, J. (2014). Perspectives on perceived stigma and
self-stigma in adult male patients with depression. *Neuropsychiatric Disease and
Treatment, 10,* 1399-1405. doi:10.2147/NDT.S54081

Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisals and coping.* New York, NY:
Springer.

Lazarus, R. S. (1991). Cognition and motivation in emotion. *American Psychologist, 46,* 352-
367.

Lloyd, G. M., Sailor. J. L., & Carney, W. (2014). A phenomenological study of post-divorce
adjustment in midlife. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage, 55*(6), 441-450.
doi:10.1080/10502556.2014.931757

Mahoney, A., Krumrei, E. J. & Pargament, K. I. (2008). Broken vows: Divorce as a spiritual
trauma and its implications for growth and decline. In S. Joseph & P. A. Linley (Eds.),
*Trauma recovery and growth: Positive psychological perspectives on posttraumatic
stress* (pp. 105-123). New York, NY: Wiley.

Malhotra, M., & Chebiyan, S. (2016). Posttraumatic growth: Positive changes following
adversity – an overview. *International Journal of Psychology and Behavioral
Sciences, 6*(3), 109-118.

Maisiri, O. (2016). *Male headship and female submission in marriage among African
Christians: A pastoral perspective*. University of Pretoria, South Africa.

Maree, K. (Ed.). (2007). *First steps in research*. Pretoria, South Africa: Van Schaik.

Mattis, J. S. (2002). Religion and spirituality in the meaning-making and coping experiences
of African American women: A qualitative analysis. *Psychology of Women Quarterly
26*, 309-321).

McIntosh, D. N., Silver, R. C., & Wortman, C. B. (1993). Religion's role in adjustment to a negative life event: Coping with the loss of a child. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 65,* 812-821.

Menaghan , E. G., & Lieberman, M. A. (1986). Changes in depression following divorce: A panel study. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 48*(2), 319-328.

Michael, S. T., & Snyder, C. R. (2005). Getting unstuck: The roles of hope, finding meaning and rumination in the adjustment to bereavement among college students. *Death Studies, 29*(5), 435-458, doi:10.1080/07481180590932544

Moos, R. H., & Schaefer, J. A. (1986). Life transitions and crises: A conceptual overview. In R. H. Moos (Ed.), *Coping with life crisis: An integrated approach* (pp. 3-25). New York, NY: Plenum.

Neculaesei, A. N. (2015). Culture and gender role differences. Theoretical article. *Cross-Cultural Management Journal, 17*(7), 31-35.

Newton, T., & McIntosh, N., (2013). Unique contributions of religion to meaning. In J. A. Hicks and C. Routledge (Eds.), *The experience of meaning in life: classical perspectives, emerging themes and controversies.* doi:10.1007/978-94-007-6527-6_20

Noble, H., & Smith, J. (2015). Issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research. *Evidence-Based Nursing, 18*(2), 34-35, doi:10.1136/eb-2015-102054

Pargament, K. I. (1990). God help me. Towards a theoretical framework of coping for the psychology of religion. *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion, 2*, 195-224.

Pargament, K. I., Ensing, D. S., Falgout, K., Olsen, H., Reilly, B., Van Haitsma, K., et al., (1990). God Help Me (1): Religious coping efforts as predictors of the outcome to significant negative life events. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 18*(6), 793-824.

Pargament, K. I. (1997). *The psychology of religion and coping: Theory, research practice.* New York, NY,: Guilford Press.

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,* 519-543.

Pargament, K. I. (2002). The bitter and the sweet: An evaluation of the costs and benefits of religiousness. *Psychological Inquiry, 13*(3), 168-181.

Pargament, K. I., Desai, K. M., & McConnell, K. M. (2006). Spirituality: A pathway to posttraumatic growth or decline? In L. G. Calhoun, & T. Tedeschi (Eds.), *Handbook of Posttraumatic Growth: Research and Practice* (pp. 121–137). London, United Kingdom.

Park, C. L., & Cohen, L. H. (1993). Religious and non-religious coping with the death of a friend. *Cognitive Therapy and Research, 6,* 561-577.

Park, C. L., & Folkman, S. (1997). Meaning in the context of stress and coping. *Review of General Psychology, 1*(2), 115-144.

Park, C. L. (2005). Religion as meaning making framework in coping with life stress. *Journal of Social Issues, 61*(4), 707-729.

Park, C. L. (2008). Testing the meaning making model of coping with loss. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 27,* 970-994.

Park, C. L. (2010). Making sense of the meaning literature: An integrative review of meaning making and its effects on adjustment to stressful life events. *Psychological Bulletin, 136*(2), 257-301.

Park, C. L. (2011). Implicit religion and the meaning making model. *Implicit Religion, 14*(4), 405-419. doi:10.1558/imre.v14i4.405

Park, C. L., & Edmondson, D. (2011). *Religion as a quest for meaning.* Retrieved from

  http://portal.idc.ac.il/en/symposium/hspsp/2011/documents/cpark-edmondson11.pdf

Park, C. L. (2013). *The meaning making model: A framework for understanding meaning,*

  spirituality, and stress-related growth in health psychology. Retrieved from http://

  www.researchgate.net/publication272955903

Perrig-Chiello, P., Hutchison, S., & Morselli, D. (2014). Patterns of psychological adaptation

  to divorce after a long-term marriage. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships,*

  1-20. doi:10.1177/0265407514533769

Pieper Webb, A. (2008). *A Religious coping model of divorce adjustment.* University of

  Texas, Austin.

Pieper Webb, A., Ellison, C., McFarland, M., Lee, J. W., Morton, K., & Walters, J. (2010).

  Divorce, religious coping, and depressive symptoms in a conservative protestant

  religious group. *Family Relations, 59*, 544-557.

Pietkiewicz, I., & Smith, J. A. (2014). A practical guide to using interpretative

  phenomenological analysis in qualitative research psychology. *Psychological Journal,*

  20(1), 7-14.

Plaks, J. E., Grant, H., & Dweck, C. S. (2005). Violations of implicit theories and the sense of

  prediction and control: Implications for motivated person perception. *Journal of*

  Personality and Social Psychology, 88, 245-262.

Priest, H. (2002). An approach to the phenomenological analysis of data. *Nurse Research,*

  10(2), 50-63.

Rabie, R., & Grieve, K. (2010). *The lived experience of female alcohol dependence: A*

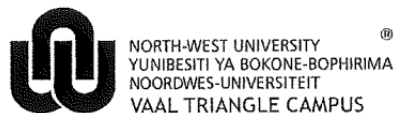 *hermeneutic phenomenological approach*. Department of Psychology. University of

  South-Africa.

Rapport, F. (2005). Hermeneutic phenomenology: The science of interpretation of texts. In I. Holloway (Ed.), *Qualitative research in health care* (pp. 125-146). Berkshire, United Kingdom: Open University Press.

Sailor, J. L. (2013). A phenomenological study of falling out of romantic love. *The Qualitative Report, 18*(37), 1-22.

Sakraida, T. J. (2005). Divorce transition differences of midlife women. *Mental Health Nursing, 26,* 225-249. doi:10.1080/01612840590901699

Sakraida, T. J. (2008). Stress and coping of midlife women in divorce transition. *Western Journal of Nursing Research, 20*(10), 869-887. doi:10.1177/0193945907311324.

Sbarra. D. A., Hasselmo, K., & Bourassa, K. J. (2015). Differences and health: Beyond individual differences. *Association for Psychological Science, 24*(2), 109-113. doi: 10.1177/0963721414559125

Schneider, J. P. (2003). The impact of compulsive cybersex behaviours on the family. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy, 18*(3), 329-353.

Schultz, J. M., Tallman, B. A., & Altmaier, E. M. (2010). Pathways to posttraumatic growth: The contributions of forgiveness and importance of religion and spirituality. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality, 2*(2), 104-114.

Silver, R. C., & Updegraff, J. A. (2013). Searching for and finding meaning following personal and Collective traumas. In K. D. Markman, T. Proulx, & M. Lindberg (Eds.), *The psychology of meaning* (pp. 237-255). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Simon, M. K., & Goes, J. (2011). What is phenomenological research? *Dissertation and Scholarly Research: Recipes for Success*. Seattle, WA: Dissertation Success LLC.

Smith, C. A. (1991). The self, appraisal, and coping. In C. R. Snyder & D. R. Forsyth (Eds.), *Handbook of social and clinical psychology: The health perspective* (pp. 116-137). Elmsford, NY: Pergamon Press.

Smith, A., Jarman, M., & Osborn, M. (1999). Doing interpretative phenomenological analysis. In M. Murray, & K. Chamberlain (Eds.), *Qualitative Health Psychology.* London, United Kingdom: SAGE.

Smith, J., Flowers, P., & Osborn, M. (2002). Interpretive phenomenological analysis. In L. Hardley, J. Smith, P. Flowers, & M. Larkin (Eds.), *Material discourses of health & illness.* (pp. 53-80). London, United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis.

Smith, J. A. (2004). Reflecting on the development of interpretative phenomenological analysis and its contribution to qualitative research in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 1*(1), 39-54. doi:10.1191/1478088704qp004oa

Smith, J. A. & Osborn, M. (2008). *Qualitative Psychology: a practical guide to research methods* (2nd ed.). London, United Kingdom: SAGE.

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P. & Larking, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method, research.* London, United Kingdom: SAGE.

Spinelli, E. (2005). *The Interpreted World* (2nd ed.). London, United Kingdom: SAGE.

Steffens, B. A. & Rennie, R. L. (2006). The traumatic nature of disclosure for wives of sexual addicts. *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity, 13,* 247-267.

Steger, M. F. (2009). Meaning in life. In S. J. Lopez, & C. R. Snyder (Eds.), *Handbook of positive psychology* (pp. 679-685). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Steiner, G. (1978). *Heidegger.* Sussex, United Kingdom: The Harvester Press Limited.

Tashiro, T. & Frazier, P. (2003). I'll never be in a relationship like that again: Personal growth following romantic relationship breakups. *Personal Relationships, 10*(1), 112-128.

Tedeschi, R., & Calhoun, L. (2004). Posttraumatic growth: Conceptual foundations and empirical evidence. *Psychological Inquiry, 15,* 1-18. doi:10.1207/s15327965pli1501_01

Thomas, C., & Ryan, M. (2008) Women's Perception of the Divorce Experience: A Qualitative Study. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage, 49(*3-4), 210-24. doi:10.1080/10502550802222394

Thompson, S. C. & Janigian, A. S. (1988). Life schemes: A framework for understanding the search for meaning. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 7* (2/3), 260-280.

Tracey, S. J. (2010). Qualitative Quality: Eight "Big-tent" criteria for excellent Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 16*(10), 837-851. doi:10.1177/1077800410383121

Tunis, S. L. (1991). Causal explanations in psychotherapy: Evidence for target- and domain-specific schematic patterns. In M. Horowitz (Ed.), *Person schemas and maladaptive interpersonal patterns* (pp. 261-276). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Uhlenberg, P., Cooney, T., & Boyd, R. (1990). Divorce for women after midlife. *Journal of Gerontology, Social Sciences, 45,* 3-11.

Usher, K., & Jackson, D. (2014). Phenomenology. In J. Mills, & M. Birks (Eds.), *Qualitative methodology: A practical guide* (pp. 181-197). London, United Kingdom: SAGE.

Van der Merwe, E. K., Van Eeden, C., & Van Deventer, H. J. M. (2010). 'A psychological perspective on god-belief as a source of well-being and meaning'. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies, 66*(1), 1-10. doi:10.4102/hts.v66i1.332

Van Uden, M. H. F., & Zondag, H. J. (2014). Religion as an existential resource. On meaning-making, religious coping and rituals. *European Journal of Mental Health, 11*, 3-17. doi:10.5708/EJMH.11.2016.1-2.1

Wishman, M. A., & Wagners, T. P. (2005). Assessing relationship betrayals. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 611*(11), 1383-1391.

Wong, P. T. P. (2008). Transformation of grief through meaning: Meaning-centered

    counselling for bereavement. In A. Tomer, G. T. Eliason, & P. T. P. Wong (Eds.),

    Existential and spiritual issues in death attitudes (pp. 375-396). New York, NY:

    Lawrene Erlbaum Associates.

Wong, C. C. Y., & Yeung, N. C. Y. (2017). Self-compassion and posttraumatic growth:

    Cognitive processes and mediators. *Mindfulness, 8,* 1078-1087. doi:10.1007/s12671-

    017-0683-4

Wood, B. (2013). *Marriage counselling – combatting SA's high divorce rate.* Retrieved from

    http://www.bryanwood.co.za/marriage-counselling-combatting-sas-high-divorce-rate/

Yarben, Y. (2010). Attachment style and adjustment to divorce. *The Spanish Journal of*
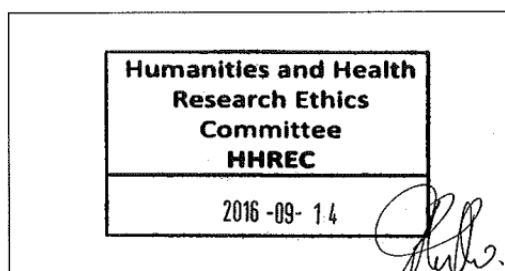
    Psychology, 13(1), 210-219.

Addendum A: Consent form

NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY ®
YUNIBESITI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT
VAAL TRIANGLE CAMPUS

PO Box 1174, Vanderbijlpark
South Africa, 1900

Web: http://www.nwu.ac.za

14/09/2016

**Humanities and Health
Research Ethics
Committee
HHREC**

2016 -09- 1 4

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LEAFLET AND CONSENT FORM FOR MARIA ELIZABETH PIENAAR

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT: Religion in the meaning-making and coping experiences of middle-aged Christian female divorcees

REFERENCE NUMBERS:

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: MARIA ELIZABETH PIENAAR

ADDRESS: 61 WATERSON STREET, SASOLBURG, 1947

CONTACT NUMBER: 073 600 7247

You are invited to take part in a research project that forms part of my Masters in Applied Positive Psychology. The information given in the invitation, explains the details of the research project. Please take some time to read through the information. It is very important that you understand what the study is all about and how you can become involved. You may ask the researcher any questions about any part of this project that you do not fully understand. You must also be aware that your participation is **entirely voluntary** and you are free to decline to participate at any time. If you say no, this will not affect you negatively in

any way whatsoever. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point, even if you do agree to take part.

This study has been approved by the **Humanities and Health Research Ethics Committee (HHREC) of the Faculty of Humanities of the North-West University (NWU-HS-2016-0067)** and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines and principles of the international Declaration of Helsinki and the ethical guidelines of the National Health Research Ethics Council. It might be necessary for the research ethics committee members or relevant authorities to inspect the research records to make sure that the researcher are conducting research in an ethical manner.

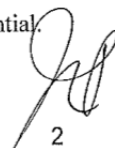### What is this research study all about?

This study will explore the role of religion in the meaning-making coping experiences of middle-aged female Christian divorcees who divorced as a direct result of unfaithfulness of their spouses.

The research question is: How does religion influences the coping and meaning making experiences of middle-aged female Christian divorcees after divorce?

The researcher will take care to do the research in an ethically sound manner meaning that the researcher has been adequately trained and has the necessary skills to do research.

At least 8 to 10 participants will be included in this study. If more information is needed to answer to the research question, more people will be recruited to participate.

This study will involve one semi-structured, tape-recorded interview of about 60 minutes to obtain data from participants. You will be interviewed in person by the researcher in a safe office either at the Sasolburg Counselling Centre, the North-West University or the University of Johannesburg. Your details and the fact that you participated will thus be kept confidential. No one will be able to connect your name with the information provided.

2

The study was chosen due to the fact that: Limited publications on the role of religion in helping women cope with divorce is available. The information gained from this research may be helpful in giving guidance to pastoral and other counsellors involved in the counselling of Christian female divorcees.

Why have you been invited to participate?

You have either reacted to an advertisement that was placed on the Finesse Facebook page in Afrikaans to adhere to the magazine's requirements or you have read a poster that was distributed to one of the local churches or you have heard about the study via word of mouth from a family member or friend and you furthermore adhering to the following -

Inclusion criteria:

- ✓ *You are female*
- ✓ *You are a self-identified Christian;*
- ✓ *You are between 40 and 60 years of age;*
- ✓ *You were married for at least 10 years before your divorce;*
- ✓ *The reason for your divorce was physical or emotional betrayal/ unfaithfulness of your partner*
- ✓ *You've only been divorced once*
- ✓ *You have been divorced for at least 5 years*
- ✓ *You reside in Sasolburg, the Vaal Triangle area or Johannesburg*

You are **excluded** if:

- ✓ *You are currently receiving psychotherapy*

What will your responsibilities be?

This document is an adapted version of the one used by HREC, Potchefstroom Campus (HREC General WICF Version 2, August 2014).

82

- You are expected to do one digitally-recorded interview that will last about 60 minutes.

The interview will be guided by the following questions:

- How did religion help you to cope with the trauma of betrayal and subsequent divorce?

- What was the effect of this trauma on your religious beliefs?

- How did this experience affect your understanding of your role in your family and society?

- How did this experience affect your approach to life?

- What has the influence of your coping with divorce been on your understanding of the meaning of adversity?

If you indicated your willingness to be contacted on the consent form the researcher may contact you to clarify or confirm details of your experiences as shared in your interview. The process will be as follows:

After transcription a word-for-word written account of our interview will be emailed to you. You may clarify or add to the details in the transcript.

Will you benefit from taking part in this research?

- There will be no direct benefits. However it might be of some benefit to share your story with the researcher.

- Talking about your experience may be a way of re-evaluating your circumstances.

- Your participation may contribute towards new understanding of experiences of Christian divorcees

- A pamphlet highlighting the findings of the study as well as recommendations on how to

This document is an adapted version of the one used by HREC, Potchefstroom Campus (HREC General WICF Version 2, August 2014).

83

improve your overall meaning of the divorce experience wil be emailed to you after completion of the study.

Are there risks involved in your taking part in this research and how will these be managed?

The risks in this study, and how these will be managed, are summarized in the table below:

Probable/possible risks/discomforts	Strategies to minimize risk/discomfort
No intentional risks are anticipated, but due to the fact that interviewing is a time consuming process that might require deep concentration you may become slightly tired.	The interviewing will take the form of a conversation which is very informal. Should you become tired a coffee and tea station is available for your convenience.
Because the researcher will ask you questions about you divorce experience which was a difficult time in your life you might become uncomfortable or emotionally overwhelmed.	Should you need some support afterwards you will be able to contact Mrs. Estelle Cloete a Registered Social Worker for a free counseling session of 45 minutes at 082 895 0827 in the Vaal Triangle or Mrs. Wilmien Human a Clinical Psychologist at the University of Johannesburg at 082 443 8554.

➤ *However, the benefits (as noted above) outweigh the risk.*

5

Who will have access to the data?

Only the interviewer will know your true identity. The transcribed interview will be identified by a pseudonym. Your informed consent forms will be stored separately from the transcripts further ensuring your confidentiality. In no way will the results be linked to your identity.

Confidentiality of the data will be protected. Report findings will remain anonymous and data will be kept safe in a locked filing cabinet at North-West University. Electronic data will be protected by a password.

Audio-recorded data will be deleted from the recorders as soon as data has been transcribed Data will be stored for a period of 5 years in the archives of the North-West University.
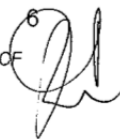
What will happen to the findings?

The data from this study will be written up as an article in a journal HTS Theological Studies. The results of this study could be used in future by other researchers affiliated with the North-West University, always under the supervision of Dr Van der Merwe. Your details will remain anonymous and no one else will know that you have participated in this study.

No compensation will be paid for participating in this study. You will however after completion of the study, receive a pamphlet with the findings of the study together with recommendations on how to improve your overall meaning of the divorce experience via email. An article will also be published in the Finesse Magazine in 2017.

Is there anything else that you should know or do?

You can contact Dr. Marina Borman at 011 559 3873/ mbornman@uj.ac.za or Dr. Karen van der Merwe at 016 910 3417/ Karen.VanDerMerwe@nwu.ac.za if you have any further queries

This document is an adapted version of the one used by HREC, Potchefstroom Campus (HREC General WICF Version 2, August 2014).

85

or encounter any problems or the chair of the Humanities and Health Research Ethics Committee Prof Tumi Khumalo, 016 910 3397/ Tumi.khumalo@nwu.ac.za or you can contact, the co-chair, Prof Werner Nell, 016 910 3427/ werner.nell@nwu.ac.za. You can leave a message for either Tumi or Werner with Ms Daleen Claasens at 016 910 3441.

You will receive a copy of this information and consent form for your own records.

7

86

Addendum B: Letter of intent to recruit

AGREEMENT OF INTENT TO RECRUIT PARTICIPANTS FOR A MASTER's STUDY AT NWU

31/08/2016

I, Dr. Marina Bornman (affiliated with the University of Johannesburg) declare my willingness to recruit participants for a research study done by Me. Marlene Pienaar. The title of the study is "The role of religion in the meaning-making coping experiences of middle-aged female divorcees".

I give permission that participants may contact me at 011 559 3873 or mbornman@uj.ac.za during office hours from 09:00 – 14:00. I also give permission that my details might be displayed on the advertisement and on the consent form.

I furthermore agree to –

- Keep all information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing information with anyone else.
- Information disclosed to me will also be kept safe and secure while in my possession.

Dr. Marina Bornman

ESTELLE CLOETE

Medical Social Worker/Counsellor

PR no: 089 00002 51585 SACSSP: 10-05802
Hon. Medical Social Work (US) M.A.
Social Work (clinical) (W)
Hon Psych (NWU)

Medi-Clinic Hospital

Suite C3

VEREENIGING

cell: 082 8950 827

Office: 016 421 3844

E-mail: estellecloete@gmail.com

09 May 2016

Agreement of Intent to debrief participants

l, Estelle Cloete a social worker in private practice, registration number SACSSP: 10-05802 declare my willingness to conduct a debriefing session of 45 minutes with participants of a research study conducted by Mrs Marlene Pienaar either in person or telephonically should the need arises.

I furthermore agree to —
- Keep all information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the information with anyone else.
- Information disclosed to me will also be kept safe and secure while in my possession.

Estelle Cloete   _E Cloch_   _9|5|2016_
(Date)

MIDLIFE FEMALE DIVORCEE?

VOLUNTEERS ARE NEEDED TO TAKE PART IN A RESEARCH PROJECT ON THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN THE COPING AND MEANING MAKING EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE DIVORCEES

Are you a female who has been divorced due to the infidelity of your partner? What was the role of religion in your understanding of the experience?

You are:

Between 40 - 60 years of age

A self-identified Christian

You were married for at least 10 years

You have only been divorced once

You have been divorced for 5 years or more

You are not currently in psychotherapy

You must reside in Sasolburg, the Vaal Triangle of Johannesburg

What is involved?

One 60 minute personal interview. You may at any stage leave the study without any negative consequences. Confidentiality of information is guaranteed. No one will be able to link your name to the information given. Participation is voluntary and no incentives for participation or travelling will be offered. Time and place for the interview will be arranged at your convenience.

If you are interested and want to participate in this study, please contact Marina Bornman at 011 559 3873 or send her an email at mbornman@uj.ac.za. This study is supervised by Dr. K v d Merwe of the Department of Psychology at the North West University, Vaal Triangle Campus 016 910 3417.

Addendum E: Steps in the research process

STEPS IN THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The research process was conducted as summarised below:

1. Writing of research proposal and approval of research proposal.

2. Obtain ethical clearance from the Ethics Board of the North West University. Ethics number NWU-HS-2016-0067.

3. Obtain permission and consent to advertise from relevant role players as well as from health care practitioners.

4. Advertise study via electronic media, and local congregation for a period of 6 weeks. (No response was received).

5. Adapt recruitment strategy. Colleagues, friends and family members locate individuals for the study. Once participants were recruited, recruitment continues via snowballing.

6. Obtain informed consent from interested individuals.

7. Conducting interviews.

8. Transcribing one interview at a time.

9. Continue data analysis.

10. Writing research report.

11. Keep electronic data safe for 5 years after which files will be discarded.

12. Publish research report.

A true account of findings was given and the researcher refrained from falsifying any information.

Stage 2 – Identifying preliminary themes

Q: Hoe het jou geloof jou gehelp om te cope met die trauma van 'n affair en die daaropvolgende egskeiding. Watter rol het jou geloof gespeel?	**Note:**
	Coding was derived from the original transcription. Wording in the left column is the original words of the participant as transcribed from data obtained. In the original transcripts the paragraphs and lines are numbered.)
Paragraaf 1	
Sjoe dit was vir my 'n baie moeilike ding. Ek het getrou tot die dood ons skei. Ontrouheid en egskeiding was nie eens deel van my woordeskat nie. En tog was ek die een wat gese het ek wil skei.	Christian values does not allow adultery and divorce (8p1,1:9-12)
Aanvanklik het ek gewonder, hoe dit my geloof sou beinvloed, hoe ek sou voel, want God se in sy woord dat egskeiding sonde is, maar toe het ek besef die Here wil het dat ons voluit moet leef, moet word wie hy ons geskep het om te wees en ek dink nie dat dit sy wil is dat jy voortdurent, verklein, verneder, in die rug gesteek word deur die een persoon wat jy met jou hele hart vertou het nie.	Experience feelings of humiliation, hurt and loss of trust in her marriage.(8p1,1:12-22)
Ek dink my geloof is versterk deur die gebeure, ek het van die begin af dit op my kniee voor God uitgemaak, vir vergifnis gevra en gebid dat die Here my die krag sal gee om ook te vergewe soos wat Hy my vergewe het. Ek dink my geloof het my hoop gegee. Ek het rustig gevoel in die wete dat God in beheer is, dat ek in hom rus kan vind en my nie hoef te vermoei oor dinge waaraan ek niks kan doen nie. Nou agterna dink ek dis die beste ding wat ooit met my gebeur het, maar midde in die affair en egskeiding was dit vir my bitter moeilik gewees. "Nadat ek die besluit geneem het was dit asof ek rustig geraak het in die wete, dat dit nou finaal was, dat daar geen omdraai kans meer was nie ". Min het ek geweet hoe intense ervaring dit vir my sou wees. 35 Jaar saam met iemand is 'n leeftyd wat eensklaps binne enkele sekondes tot niet verklaar word. Ek het so gehuil dit het ingedruis teen alles waarin ek glo.	Religious coping
	Strengthening of faith, through adversity (8p1,1:23)
	Ask for God's guidance, in her decision to divorce, pray for forgiveness and the ability to forgive (8p1,1:23-27)
	Faith give hope in trouble times (8p1,1:27-28)
	Give control in God's hands, provide peace of mind (8p1,1:28-31)
	Divorce was the best thing that could happened to her (8p1,1:31-32). Growth
	Midst in the affair and subsequent divorce, she went through a severely difficult time (8p1,1:33-34)
	Decision to divorce provide sense of finality (8p1,1:34-37)
	Divorce an intense and devastating experience – contradicting her value system also an ironic experience – a lifetime together declared null and void in seconds (8p1,1:38-42)
Hoe het die trauma van 'n affair en egskeiding jou geloof beinvloed?	
Paragraaf 2	
Ek dink nie regtig dit het 'n invloed op my geloof gehad nie, in elk geval nie 'n negatiewe invloed nie. Ek het van die begin af die beheer in God se hande oorgegee, ek het geweet hy sal my hierdeur lei, hy sal my emosioneel weer heel maak. Ek het somtyds	Religious coping
	Put God in control of her situation from the beginning – Put her trust in God

gebid en baie alleen gevoel dan het ek myself getroos dat God met sy Gees in my woon al kan ek hom nie op daardie oomblik sien of voel nie, en ek het dankie gese vir al die beloftes in sy woord en dat ek weet dat hy dit vir my sal laat waar word. Ek het aanvanklik gedink dat al die beloftes vir my en my man bedoel was, maar nou 'n paar jaar later kan ek sien dat dit net vir my bedoel was. God het sy beloftes vir my kom waar maar, en dit dink ek het my net weereens laat besef dat Hy God met ons is. Hy het my kom heel maak, hy het my laat groei verby die seerkry en pyn van die affair en die egskeiding en vandag kan ek in alle eerlikheid se ek is 'n beter, sterker persoon en ek beleef God steeds as 'n ongelooflike werklikheid.	She know that she could rely on his guidance, Trust him for emotional healing, Trust him for comfort and support, She know His Holy Spirit dwells in her Rely on the promises in God's word (8p2,2:49-58)

Years later – realization – Trusting God is a very important coping mechanism - God did make his promises true to her, He is God with us He healed her from the emotional pain devastation of divorce Today she is a stronger, better person She still experience his nearness, (8p2,2:61-68) |
| **Vraag 3**

Q: Hoe het die jou egskeidings ervaring jou verstaan van jou rol in jou gesin en jou rol in die samelewing beinvloed?

Paragraaf 3

Dit was moeilik, want jy is nou 'n alleen ma, jou kinders is verwese en stukkend, hul moet die nuus met hul maats by die skool gaan deel. Jy is self stukkend, maar moet sterk staan terwill van hulle. Jy moet alleen oueraande en prysuitdelings bywoon, terwyl jy voel om maar self 'n lae profiel te handhaaf. Dit was baie moeilik, jy moet jou kinders ondersteun en dinge vir hulle so normaal as moontlik laat voortgaan. Wat baie sleg was is die verlaagde lewens standaard, ewe skielik is daar nie geld nie, die kerk, jou ouers vriende moet vir jou sorg. Jy leef basies onder die broodlyn, somtyds gaan daar weke verby wat jy nie eens brood en melk geld het nie. Jy ly en jou kinders ly saam. Maar dis dan wanneer jy hul moet leer dat alles in die lewe nie om geld en aardse goed gaan nie, dis dan wanneer jy liefde in oormaat moet uitdeel, druk hul vas, se vir hul jy is lief vir hul, jy moet probeer standvastigheid te skep, kry hul in 'n spesifieke roetine, wees daar vir hul, hul moet weet hul kan met jou kom praat, oor enige iets en dat dit nie hul skuld is nie. Hul moet kerk toe gaan en sondagskool toe, en ewe skielik word jy die immer afwesige ouer wat jou kinders net by die kerk aflaai. Dis bitter sleg jy mis uit op 'n deel van jou kinders se lewe saam met hul pa, waarvan jy glad nie meer deel is nie. Hul doen dinge sonder | Difficult to adapt to society expectations as single mother -

Be sensible and strong for her children - Create an as normal as possible environment for them. (8p2,3:75-84) (Can relate)

Disrupting effect of divorce Experience financial hardship and lower living standards, Rely on social and financial support from family and friends to survive She and her children experience severe financial suffering (8p3,3:84-89) – (Can relate closely)

Teach children to value small but significant things in life such as family, Create stability through routing, discipline and lots of love and hugs. Let them know that you care and that they can talk to you anytime about anything (8p3,3:89-98)

Spending time with their father, makes her feel like a cast out, she misses out on a part of their lives that she is no longer part of such as they're going to church on Sundays with their father. She |

jou, en jou hart breek in duisend stukke, dit voel vir jou jou man het jou gesin gekaap.

Paragraaf 4

Wat die samelewing betref kan ek nie regtig se nie. Ek weet nie of mense dood gewoon net nie omgegee het nie en of hul nie betrokke wou raak nie, maar daar was geen ondersteuning van my vorige kerk of vriende nie. Nie eens 'n enkele sms nie. Ek het my dus totaal en al van almal gedistansieer. My lewe het baie klein geword, geen uiteet of fliek meer deels omdat daar nie geld is nie en andersins omdat daar niemand is om dit mee saam te doen nie. Ek dink die samelewing is wreed mense lable jou, jy word gestigmateer, mense skinder sonder om hul regtig agter die waarheid te kom. Dit was vir my regtig moeilik om weer aan te pas. Ek is nog nie volkome daar nie, het steeds geen sosiale lewe nie, maar ek het voornemens .....

Vraag 4

Q: Hoe het die egskeidings ervaring jou benadering tot die lewe beinvloed.

Paragraaf 5

Umm, ek dink ek het meer cautious geword, ek vertrou nie meer so maklik nie, dis half van asof ek my distansieer. Ek raak nie betrokke in dinge wat my mag vermoei nie, dinge wat 'n op my skouers kan plaas nie. Ek doen net dinge, en omring my net met mense wat positief is, wat 'n positiewe bydrae maak. Ek sukkel om nuwe vriendskappe aan te knoop, het geleer om die dieper dinge in die lewe te waardeer. My lewe is nie perfek nie, ek is alleen, maar ek het nie lus om my met enkellopendes te omring nie. Ek voel myself baie meer volwasse, vir my is die lewe nie net 'n gejaag na wind nie, ek is ernstiger, definitief meer geisoleerd, ek verlang daarna om meer sosiaal te wees, maar aan die ander kant sien ek nie regtig kans daarvoor nie. Ek is nou al so lank alleen, dit voel vir my ek is nie meer lus om weer in 'n verhouding betrokke te raak of my te committ nie. Die lewe het baie moeiliker geraak. Vir my is daar op hierdie stadium geen oudag nie. Ek het gestroop daar uitgestap.

became an absent parent. She felt as if her ex-husband abducted her family (8p3,3:99-106) (Can relate to this)

No support from previous friends and church members – experience them as ignorant (8p3,4:108-114) (can relate to this)

Decline in social network – no money or friends to do previously enjoyable activities with (8p3,4:114-118)

Society is cruel, they gossip, label and stigmatized divorcees (8p3,4:118-121) (can relate)

Experience difficulty to adapt to society as single individual (8p3,4:121-124) (can relate)

Life after divorce

She approach life more cautious,
She experience loss of trust , she isolate herself, does not become involved in things that may exhaust/weary her (8p4,5:131-135)
Surround herself with positive people and things that add value to her life(8p4,5:135-137)
Find it difficult to commit to new relationships (8p4,5:138)

Life has changed, she lives a life of isolation, but she is more mature, and value the deeper things in life (8p4,5:139); (8p4,5:142-145)

Reluctant to become involved in new relationships (8p4,5:147-150)

Life is more challenging. No provision for old age. (8p4,5:151 -153)

Vraag 5

Q: Hoe het jou coping met die ervaring van egskeiding jou begrip en verstaan van teenspoed of swaarkry beinvloed. As jy nou weer moet swaarkry wat se lesse het jy geleer uit hierdie situasie wat jy sou kon toepas.

Paragraaf 6

Ek het geleer dat ek 'n innerlike veerkragtigheid het, ek kan baie meer hanteer as wat ek ooit gedink het moontlik is. Ek het baie dinge self leer doen, ek kan my eie besluite neem, ek het meer verantwoordelik geword, en my geloof het baie sterker geword. As teenspoed my nou weer moet tref dink ek ek sal dit presies dieselfde hanteer, in teen deel dalk beter, want ek het nou baie meer vaardighede ontwikkel, ek is nie meer so weerloos soos tydens die egskeiding nie. Swaarkry maak jou nederig, jy waardeer dinge

jy voorheen as vanselfsprekend aanvaar het. Jy leef 'n lewe van dankbaarheid, jou lewe is rustiger, meer sinvol, jy waardeer die skepping, om jou soveel meer, 'n mooi opvoering, 'n mooi sons opkoms of 'n maansverduistering, laat jou so klein voel, jy besef hoe groot die God is wat jy aanbid, en jy voel opregte dankbaarheid om so iets te mag beleef. Jy het soveel minder, jy leef meer simplistic, maar jy voel geseend.

Jy het die heel tyd verwys na hoe jy geloof gebruik het om te cope, hoe jou geloof jou gedra het. As jy nou terug dink watter religious coping mechanism staan vir jou uit ?

Paragraaf 7

Sjoe, ek het baie bybel gelees en gebid, baie verse onderstreep en vir myself toegeeien as God se beloftes aan my. Ek het die ondersteuning van familie en naby vriende gehad, met wie ek kon gesels, en my ouers het baie finansieel ondersteun, ek het 'n christelike berader gaan sien en met haar gedeel, maar as daar een ding is wat dalk uitstaan is dit dat Jesus in die bybel se jy moet 70 x 7 keer

Stress-related growth
Coping with adversity resulted in the discovery of an inner resilience, a new sense of self-reliance, the ability to make autonomous decisions, taking greater responsibility, and greater faith in God (8p4,5:151 -153)

Due to new skills, she will handle future difficulty more effectively (8p4,6:163-169)

Changed values after adversity –
Humbleness,
Greater appreciation for previously taken for granted things, life is more peaceful and meaningful,
Greater appreciation of nature, and God's creation
Realization how almighty God is
New sense of gratitude
Live a life of simplicity but feel truly blessed (8p5,6:175-184)

Religious Coping
Reading Bible, prayer, believe the promises in God's word (8p5,6:191-193)

Non-religious coping –
Support from family and friends – (8p5,6:194-196)
Consulted a Christian Counselor - (8p5,6:197)
Forgiveness – (Religious coping) (8p5,6:198-200)

vergewe. Vir my was dit belangrik om te journal en stap vir stap deur my emosies te werk. Dit het my gehelp om hom en haar te vergewe, ek het hom vrygespreek ek het let go, vandag kan ek my nie indink dat ek met hom getroud was nie. Hy is 'n totale vreemdeling. Ek het hom in die Here se hande oorgegee en ek bid regtig dat hy saam met haar gelukkig sal wees. Ek gun hom om gelukkig te wees as is dit nie deel van my geluk nie. Ek wil he dit moet met hom goed gaan. Ek dink vergifnis is die een ding wat my waarlik vrygemaak het.	Journaling -(8p5,6:200-201)

Forgiveness set her free (8p5,6:202-210) (Can relate)

Pray that her husband be happy and that God bless him (8p5,6:210-211) |

Final Notes:

Onderhoud: 45 min

Transcribing – 1 uur 45 min

Stage 3 – Clustering of themes

Participant 8

1. Life before divorce

Christian values do not allow adultery and divorce (8 p1, 1: 9-12)

Experience feelings of humiliation, hurt and loss of trust in her marriage (8 p1, 1: 12-22)

1.1 Decision to divorce

Midst in the affair and subsequent divorce, she went through a severely difficult time (8 p1, 1: 33-34)

Divorce an intense and devastating experience – contradicting her value system also an ironic experience – a lifetime together declared null and void within seconds (8 p1, 1: 38-42)

2. Religious Coping

Strengthening of faith through adversity. She believes that it was not God's will to be captivated in an unhappy marriage that does not honor Him (8 p1, 1: 12-23)

Ask for God's guidance, in her decision to divorce, pray for forgiveness and the ability to forgive (8 p1, 1: 23-27)

Faith give hope in trouble times (8 p1, 1: 27-28)

Giving control in God's hands, provide peace of mind (8 p1, 1: 28-31)

Put God in control of her situation from the beginning – Put her trust in God

She knows that she could rely on his guidance (8 p2, 2: 51)

Trust him for emotional healing (8p2, 2:52)

Trust him for comfort and support (8p2, 2:53)

She know His Holy Spirit dwells in her (8 p2, 2: 4)

Rely on the promises in God's word (8 p2, 2: 56-59)

2.1 Religious Coping mechanisms

Reading her Bible and Pray and rely on the promises in God's word (8 p5, 6: 191-193)

Pastoral Counseling (8 p5, 6: 197)

Forgiveness (8 p5, 6: 198-200)

Forgiveness set her free (8 p5, 6: 202-210); (8 p5, 6: 211-212)

Praying for her ex-husband for God's guidance and care (8 p5, 6: 210-211)

2.2 Non-Religious Coping methods

Journaling (8 p5, 6: 200-201)

Support from family and friends (8 p5, 6: 194-196)

---

3. Outcome of Religious Coping

Years later – realization – Trusting God is a very important coping mechanism -

God did make his promises true to her, He is God with us , He healed her from the emotional pain devastation of divorce, Today she is a stronger, better person, She still experience his nearness, (8 p2, 2: 61-68)

---

4. Divorce a disrupting experience

4.1 Sense of finality

Decision to divorce provide sense of finality (8 p1, 1: 34-37)

4.2 Financial hardship

Experience financial hardship and lower living standards; Rely on social and financial support from family and friends to survive; she and her children experience severe financial suffering (8 p3, 3: 84-89)

Life is more challenging. No provision for old age. (8 p4, 5: 151 -153)

4.3 Decline in social network

No support from previous friends and church members – experience them as ignorant (8 p3, 4: 108-114)

Decline in social network – no money or friends to do previously enjoyable activities with (8p3, 4:114-118)

4.4 Difficulty to adapt to society as single individual

Experience difficulty to adapt to society as single individual (8 p3, 4: 121-124)

Find it difficult to integrate socially – enter new relationships (8 p4, 5: 138); (147-150)

4.5 Life has become more difficult

She approach life more cautious, She experience loss of trust , she isolate herself, does not become involved in things that may exhaust/weary her (8 p4, 5: 131-135)

Surround herself with positive people and things that add value to her life (8 p4, 5: 135-137)

Life has changed, she lives a life of isolation, but she is more mature, and value the deeper things in life (8 p4, 5: 139); (8 p4, 5: 142-145)

Reluctant to become involved in new relationships (8 p4, 5: 147-150)

4.6 Stigmatization

Society is cruel, they gossip, label and stigmatized divorcees (8 p3, 4: 118-121)

4.7 Difficult to adapt to society - expectations as single mother -

Be sensible and strong for her children - create an as normal as possible environment for them (8 p2, 3: 75-84)

Teach children to value small but significant things in life such as family; create stability through routing, discipline and lots of love and hugs; let them know that you care and that they can talk to you anytime about anything (8 p3, 3: 89-98)

4.8 Family abduction

Spending time with their father, makes her feel like a cast out, she misses out on a part of their lives that she is no longer part of such as they're going to church on Sundays with their father. She became an absent parent. She felt as if her ex-husband abducted her family (8 p3, 3: 99-106)

_____

5. Adaptation after divorce

Divorce was the best thing that could happened to her (8 p1, 1: 31-32).

5.1 Self-empowerment

Coping with adversity resulted in the discovery of an inner resilience, a new sense of self-reliance, ability to make autonomous decisions, taking greater responsibility, and greater faith in God (8 p4, 5: 151 -153)

Due to new skills, she will handle future difficulty more effectively (8 p4, 6: 163-169)

5.2 Changed values after adversity –

Humbleness – solar eclipse makes you feel humble (8 p5, 6:180)

Greater appreciation for previously taken for granted things; (8 p5, 6: 175

Life is more peaceful and meaningful; (8 p5, 6: 177)

Greater appreciation of nature, and God's creation; (8 p5, 6: 179-180)

Realization how almighty God is; (8 p5, 6:181)

New sense of gratitude; (8 p5, 6: 176; 182)

Live a life of simplicity but feel truly blessed (183-184); (8 p5, 6: 175-184)

Stage 4 – Coherent table of themes

Main Theme	Sub Theme	Frequency
1. Religious Coping	Faith in God provide anchor in troubled times	3
	Promises in God's word	5
	Prayer	3
	God's guidance through dwelling of Holy Spirit in one's heart	3
	Healing through God's Grace	3
	God give second chances	1
	God will never leave or forsake us	4
	Spiritual Growth	4
	Christian Values a buffer against adversity	2
	More than a conqueror	1
	Place God in control of her situation	2
	Trust in God	2
	Felt worthy of God	1
1.2 Religious Coping Mechanisms	Pastoral guidance	2
	Religious support from friends	2
	Forgiveness	7
	Silence in God's presence	1
	Prayer	4
	Promises in God's word (Reading bible)	5
1.3. Religious Struggles	Question God's authority Why?	3
	Doubt own faith	1
	Unworthy of God	2
	Superficial messages of comfort causes frustration	1
	Temporary Loss of faith	1
	Severe anger towards God	2
	Divorce pose a threat to her God views (God as omnipresent)	3

	Fear of disappointing God	1
	Blame the devil	3
2. Non-Religious Coping	Support from family and friends	5
	Realization she is not the only one suffering *Appraisal Strategy*	1
	Compassion for those in need *Appraisal strategy*	3
	Embracing her aloneness 'me-time' *Growth*	3
	Further study	2
	Extra job provide security	1
	Psychotherapy /medication/hospitalization	2
3. Outcome of Religious Coping	Renewed Faith in God *Spiritual Growth*	5
	Stronger Person due to God's grace	4
	New identity in Christ (new sense of self)	1
	New sense of self *Growth*	5
	New sense of understanding *Meaning*	5
	Spiritual growth (faith) (5)	1
	Significance of trusting God (understanding) 5	1
4. Divorce a disrupting experience	Feeling worthless and inferior	4
	Disappointed and hurt	1
	Hopelessness and despair and loneliness – emotional breakdown	2
	Humiliation	1
	Anxiety	1
	Self-doubt	1
	Stigmatization	4
	Life become very stressful	4
	Strong and sensible for her children	4
	Loss of trust	3
	Taking responsibility very stressful	2
	Live in isolation	4

	Changed relationship with friends – declined social network	3
	Societal ignorance – no support	1
	Family abduction	1
5. Divorce a liberating experience *Participant 7 experience divorce different than other participants*	Divorce a good feeling, WOW feeling, extremely liberating experience	1
	Being pity a miserable experience	1
	Feeling happy and free after divorce	1
	Free from pre-conceived expectations	1
6. Divorce a transition process	Develop inner resilience/hardiness/ assertiveness/ autonomy – *stress related growth*	4
	Self-empowerment -*growth*	4
Change in global meaning - accommodation	Develop new set of values (new person, new identity, live life according to new value system)	6
	Be a strong and sensible mother	4
7. Post-divorce adaptation -meaning	Value of divorce	3
	Compassion for others	5
	Loss of fear	1
	Authentic living	6
	Living a life of gratitude	4
	Living mindful	1
	Healing	1
	Spiritual meaning / growth	4
Change in Global meaning system - accommodation	New values and beliefs (also at transition)	6
	New appreciation for life	4