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DIVORCE: A STUDY OF COPING BEHAVIORS AND THE  
INTERRELATEDNESS WITH RELIGIOSITY, LONELINESS, AND WELL-  
BEING

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PREVIEW

DIVORCE: A STUDY OF COPING BEHAVIORS AND THE  
INTERRELATEDNESS WITH

RELIGIOSITY, SOLIDARITY, AND WELL-BEING

by

Lewis L. Moore

A DISSERTATION

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Community and Human Resources

Under the Supervision of Professors  
Howard C. Eckel and Nick Stinnett

Lincoln, Nebraska

March, 1980

TITLE

DIVORCE: A STUDY OF COPING BEHAVIORS AND THE INTERRELATEDNESS  
WITH RELIGIOSITY, LONELINESS, AND WELL-BEING

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L.L.M.

Dedicated . . .

To God for granting me a life to live  
and a life to give.

To Sue for sharing my life and being  
my wife.

To my boys who are me and what I  
can be.

To Ted for being my friend all the  
way to the end.

To those in crisis that they may  
find peace.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### STATEMENT AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM

In the area of human relationships, there is no greater concern than the family dissolutional process of divorce. Current statistics indicate that approximately one of three or four marriages will terminate in divorce; furthermore, study by the United Nations (1973) reveals that the divorce rate in the United States is higher than any other nation in the world at any point in history.

The divorce rate has increased over the years and, interestingly enough, so have the volumes of associated literature. While the literature has had little effect on the divorce rate, the studies provide information about the social and psychological dynamics, certain demographic indicators and expectedly the need for additional divorce research.

Although divorce has been the topic of numerous investigations, studies cluster around selective objectives. The focus of previous research efforts has been statistical and problematic in nature. The majority of professional research has examined:

1. The statistical frequency of divorce among selected populations.

2. The problematic perspective associated with pathological development in individuals and family relationships.
3. The effect of divorce upon the offspring.
4. The causal relationships between background, marital conflict, and subsequent divorce.
5. The change in status and roles as associated with the transition from married life to singlehood.

The divorce literature has obviously focused upon circumstantial, cause-and-effect factors rather than the process orientation of individual coping or adjustment. The direction of this research has been toward a social-psychological awareness of the individual's responses to the crisis of divorce and away from the collective, problematic, and statistical inferences.

The problem for this study was an exploration of specific behaviors that individuals used in an effort to cope with divorce. The specific behaviors were organized into patterns and correlated with religiosity. A secondary assessment was made by correlating coping behavior patterns with reported loneliness and well-being.

While it is uncertain as to why individuals demonstrate differential patterns of response to divorce, it is evident that the common denominator evolves around attempts to cope or adjust to the experience. The expressed behaviors of divorced persons become avenues for understanding perceived needs and adaptive measures.

Since loneliness and well-being are subjectively perceived emotional states, they are experienced in varying intensity by persons coping with the divorce experience. In this regard, loneliness and well-being are considered potentially problematic and influential in coping patterns of behavior.

#### Definitions of Terms Used in the Study

Coping. Coping is a process which incorporates personal resources and behaviors to deal with stress or threat. For the purpose of this study, coping incorporates the concept of adjustment. Specific coping patterns, in this study, are determined by utilizing the Family Coping Inventory (FCI).

Religiosity. Religiosity is a belief system that can be described through: An individual's stated belief, ritualistic involvement in formal religious activities, and religious practices of prayer and/or Bible reading. Belief, involvement, and practice are subjective appraisals reported by subjects on a religiosity scale.

Loneliness. Loneliness is an individual's subjective perceptions about current feelings related to situations and experiences in life. Expressions of loneliness or non-loneliness are reported on a likert type scale.

Well-being. Well-being represents the individual's perceptions of present life satisfaction. Participants reported self-satisfaction on a likert type scale.

Religious Belief. Religious belief describes a person's subjective appraisal of faith.

Religious Activity. Religious activity reflects involvement in church attendance.

Religious Practice. Religious practice includes prayer and Bible reading.

### Development of Research Questions and Research Hypotheses

#### Research Questions

1. What are the primary coping behaviors used by individuals in response to the crisis of divorce?
2. What role, if any, does religious involvement play in an individual's efforts to adjust to divorce?
3. Do divorced persons report a high degree of loneliness?
4. What are some of the individual perceptions about self and personal relationships?
5. Do individuals experiencing divorce express negative patterns of feelings about life and personal well-being?

#### Research Hypotheses

1. There is a significant relationship between the coping behavior patterns of divorced individuals and their reported religious belief.



2. There is a significant relationship between the coping behavior patterns of divorced individuals and their reported involvement in religious activity.
3. There is a significant relationship between the coping behavior patterns of divorced individuals and their reported religious practices.
4. There is a significant relationship between the coping behavior patterns of divorced individuals and their self-estimate of loneliness.
5. There is a significant relationship between the coping behavior patterns of divorced individuals and their self-reported statement of well-being.

Research Assumptions  
Facilitating the Hypotheses

1. The divorce experience is a personal and family crisis.
2. The individual's reported involvement in religious activities is a statement of religiosity.
3. The family background, religious involvement, demographic, and socio-economic factors vary among the divorced individuals.
4. Loneliness is a perception that can be determined by self-reports of the individual.
5. Well-being is a perception that can be identified by the individual self-reports.
6. The procedures used for this study are valid, and the individuals selected are a representative sample.
7. The research instruments applicable to the study are appropriate for measuring coping behavior patterns.

### Statement of Hypotheses in Null Terms

The null hypothesis for each of the research hypotheses was assumed for statistical analysis.

### Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

Population. The population involved in the study was comprised of divorced individuals residing within the continental United States. Individuals participating in the study were volunteers and representatives of twelve states in all geographic regions.

Behavior. Behavior studied in this research constituted that of divorced persons at various phases in the crisis experience. Individual coping behaviors were evaluated via self-reports. The behaviors assessed reflect the coping attempts of individuals and do not represent diagnostic categories of adjustment or maladjustment.

Research Design. The design for the study was inductive and ex post facto.

### Significance of the Study

A review of literature indicated the need that exists for more research into intrapersonal and interpersonal behavior of individuals experiencing a crisis such as divorce. In addition, the research findings provide insight into some of the primary factors that influence coping responses. An assessment of religious, socioeconomic, and other selected indicators provide information

about the interrelated facets of divorce. Furthermore, the information gained will contribute to the development of programs to support family relationships and enhance the adjustment of individuals who are experiencing a severed relationship.

Additionally, this study provided divorced persons an opportunity to participate in a self-analysis as they completed the questionnaire. Individuals can profit from this analysis as they evaluate the mutual concerns of other individuals in the coping process.

This research study can potentially effect a change in direction as investigators examine the marriage and family literature. This study will provide some impetus in the direction of more positive and personally-oriented research endeavors. In the final analysis, it is projected that the real benefit of this study will be felt by individuals experiencing the dissolutional experience of divorce.

The following is an excerpt from a participant's response and is indicative of the personal import of divorce.

Dear Friend,

I have had the sad experience of going through a divorce. To me it was worse than a death in my family....

-A Few Hellos, But Many Goodbys-

In my 80 years of life, I've said so many goodbys I haven't had time to say hello.

Many friends and loved ones I've had, but they always seem to be on the go.

I've said so many goodbys and it always makes me cry. No one ever seems to be born, they always have to die. Oh my dear friend, I've said so many goodbys.

A father and a mother of course I had, and God gave me a family circle, just to see it disappear overnight, then all we could do was say goodbye. I can hardly remember saying hello, but sobbing as we said goodbye.

I've said so many goodbys, it seems I never get to say hello, as someone is always leaving me as through this life I go.

All my life has been plans and startings, but instead things are always ending.

I never have time to visit all the graves where I've stood and cried.

I never get to say hello as someone always has to die, then another goodbye.

But I am shure, oh so shure, that it is not so important how many years we had, but oh thank God how sweet the time we had together.

So don't you think it was worth it, saying all those goodbys?

For soon we will meet where there will be no more goodbys.

Chief Russell Sage Carter  
(a research participant)

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RESEARCH AND RELATED LITERATURE

In the review of pertinent literature associated with this research, it is valuable to consider two discernible facts. First, the literature concerning divorce is voluminous, but the contributions relevant to coping with the divorce crisis are scanty. A categorical examination of professional research studies and publications reveals extensive efforts in descriptive analysis of divorce statistics and behavior pathology. Relative to these studies, there has been a concentration on divorce as a product of marital conflict and upon the sociopsychological factors related to roles and relationships. In short, many studies illustrate the "why," "when," and "how" of divorce rather than the "what are you doing to cope" with divorce.

In a computer search of psychological and sociological literature, only seven studies were germane to the problem of this research. A review of the International Bibliography of Research in Marriage and Family and The Inventory of Marriage and Family Literature revealed a few more studies, but for the most part they were peripheral to the objective of this investigation. Some books and articles, however, address the divorced population from an

adjustive or coping perspective. Surprisingly, no studies that this researcher found interrelated coping, divorce, and religiosity. Substantial reports deal with religion and divorce, but the emphasis to date has been upon formative effects of Judeo-Christian influence in marriage and family relationships. Ample research has been done into the roles that socioeconomic and cultural factors play in family dissolution. In the scope of this study, only the literature associating divorce, coping behavior, and certain background indicators are included.

The second fact that emerges from the literature is a need, if not requirement, for a conceptual or theoretical framework to guide this study. A conceptual framework provides structure and definition for validating interrelated concepts, assumptions, and postulates (Hansen and Hill, 1960). Although all research efforts are not formulated into precise frameworks, identifiable traits emerge that suggest a certain model or perspective. Some of the primary theoretical positions will be reviewed as they are exposed in literature relevant to this particular study.

In order to shape the content of this review, a developmental scheme is used. The first step is to establish divorce as a crisis that requires coping behavior. A second step is to conceptualize the literature that relates to coping theory. The third and last step will

be devoted to studies that describe coping behaviors (forms, patterns) that are exhibited by individuals attempting to deal with the crisis of divorce.

### Divorce as a Crisis

Divorce has been established as a crisis situation. Hill (1949) defines a crisis as "any sharp or decisive change for which old patterns are inadequate" (p. 51). Assuming an interactional approach, Hill (1958) suggests that divorce is one result that develops from an experiential equation where the interaction of an event (A) with the individual and family resources (B), with a situation definition (C), elicits a crisis (X). Divorce is thus viewed as a response to crisis that evolved from the relationship between stress events in married life, inadequate personal and family resources, and situation definition at the time. In Hill's (1958) framework, the individual responding to the divorce experience is interacting from a social and symbolic perspective--a position that was developed through role relationships and shared meanings with others and maintained through internalization of self and other's perceptions discovered in overt interaction with reference groups. In keeping with this line of thought, Eshleman (1969) described a crisis as an experience that would cause a change in behavior which would of

necessity affect the social life. The change in social self takes place through a network of interactions and expectancies.

Closely associated with Hill's concept of crisis is Jean Lipman-Blumen's (1975) description of crisis:

Any situation which the participants of a social system recognize as posing a threat to the status quo, well-being or survival of the system or any of its parts, whose ordinary coping mechanisms and resources are stressed or inadequate for meeting the threat (p. 890).

Duvall (1971) developed an extensive list of family crises based upon the previous work of Duvall and Hill (1960, pp. 298-299). The crisis situation consisted of: (1) dismemberment, (2) demoralization, (3) accession, and (4) demoralization plus dismemberment or accession. The divorce experience constitutes a case of the last category.

Burr (1973), in a review of interactional literature, concluded:

The students of family crises also seem to view crises as disruptions in the routine operation of the family system. The less disrupted the system is, the less severe the crisis. Thus, the phenomenon that seems to be denoted is the amount of disruption in the family social system (p. 200).

Evident in crisis theory, is the idea of the relativity of the crisis experience in terms of type and degree of stress. For some individuals the divorce crisis is an exaggerated stretching of personal and family resources and subsequent