

Sealed but Single: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Experience of Divorced Latter-day  
Saints Returning to Dating

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## SEALED BUT SINGLE

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#### Abstract

This qualitative study examined the experience of divorced Latter-day Saints beginning to date again after having been sealed in an LDS temple. Eight divorced Latter-day Saints participated in semi-structured interviews, with areas of inquiry covering the reason for divorce, current romantic relationships, whether participants discussed their prior sealing with new partners, challenges and benefits participants experienced in dating again, what had been helpful to them as they began dating, what they wished family and friends knew, plans for marriage, and whether they would consider non-LDS partners. Data were analyzed thematically and themes were generated by grouping similar responses. Participants over 30 expressed discouragement at the number of available partners in the LDS faith, while those under 30 felt optimism that they could re-marry. Participants also indicated difficulty transitioning back to sexual abstinence and making sense of divorce in light of their religious beliefs. However, participants also reported enjoying singlehood and the opportunities it presented, and some showed signs of personal and spiritual growth. Participants over 30 considered dating and marrying outside of their faith to not be alone, which decision brought mixed support from family members. While family and community members were generally supportive, divorced Mormons continue to report a sense of “otherness” in their community. Recommendations for clinicians in working with this population are included.

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SEALED BUT SINGLE

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **The Problem and its Setting**

As divorce rates have risen in recent decades, the effects of divorce have been widely researched in social science literature (Tucker et al., 1997). Specific challenges and benefits associated with post-divorce life have thus been well documented. Divorce has been linked to depression among single-again parents navigating new custodial roles (Hill & Hilton, 1999). Other research emphasizes the positive effect of divorce on personal happiness and improved parent-child relationships (Arditti & Madden-Derdich, 1995). In a review of divorce literature, Amato (2000) cited dozens of studies linking divorce to lower self-esteem and a higher risk of health problems. However, other research indicates more positive trends, linking divorce to great personal growth (Thomas & Ryan, 2008). Divorce's impact is not generalizable, as coping is individual and dependent on resources and personality as much as circumstances. In spite of this, efforts continue to understand the depth of the divorce experience and how to alleviate any negative outcomes.

Recently, researchers have turned their attention to the process of forming relationships after divorce. Anderson et al. (2004) observed that within a year of divorcing, 79% of individuals studied had re-entered the dating world. Brimhall, Wampler, and Kimball (2008) interviewed couples in a second marriage regarding their re-partnership and noted that couples commonly reported trust issues throughout dating and remarriage as a result of their experiences in their first marriage. Interestingly, Wu and Schimmele (2005) discovered that among those who re-partnered within five years of a divorce, cohabitation was a more popular choice than re-marriage. Remarriage is also influenced by a new partner's attitude towards and acceptance of the divorced individual's relationship history, particularly when children are involved

(Goldscheider et al., 2009). These data indicate that while forming new relationships is an important part of post-divorce life, it is a complex experience involving both individual and familial considerations.

Beginning to date again after divorce has also been noted as an important milestone in recovery for divorcees (Schneller, 2002; Graham, 1997). Though it is not without its challenges, dating after divorce has been shown to mitigate negative mental health consequences such as depression (Symoens, Colman, & Bracke, 2014). It has also been described as an important mechanism in re-building self-esteem and “saving face,” as there is a certain stigma surrounding divorce even today (Miller, 2009). Among this research, the dating process itself has not been specifically separated from cohabitation and re-partnership (Langlais, Anderson, & Greene, 2015). As this is a newer area of study, beginning to date again has also not been contrasted between sub-populations. Rather than assuming that dating after divorce is a similar process among diverse groups, this research explored these dynamics in a unique and understudied population, namely the Latter-day Saint (LDS) community. Latter-day Saints, or Mormons as they are more colloquially known, hold beliefs about marriage and divorce that differentiate them from other Christian denominations and the population at large.

Latter-day Saints believe that marriage, when solemnized in one of the Mormon temples under proper religious authority, is a sacred covenant between not just the two individuals being married, but between the couple and God (Howard, 2003). These commitments are of eternal significance to Latter-day Saints (Howard, 2003). Members of this church who are sealed in LDS temples are married not just for time but for eternity, an arrangement that is not annulled without petitioning the highest authority in the church, the LDS prophet. Evidently, the decision to be sealed and married in a Mormon temple is one with great weight and significance to active

members of the LDS faith. Statistics would seem to indicate this as well. Currently, the national divorce rate is reported as 50% (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). Among Latter-day Saint individuals, those divorce rates drop significantly. Current divorce rates in the Mormon Church among those who have been married in an LDS temple ceremony are reported as 6% (Lobdell, 2000).

Research has begun to examine the experiences of divorced individuals who affiliate with religious groups that advocate against divorce. There are currently 68 million Catholics in the United States, and statistics indicate that 23% of these Catholics have been divorced (Duba & Ponton, 2012). According to Bruzzese (2009), Catholics may feel role conflict as they separate and divorce due to their commitment to their faith. A study of 420 Catholics also found that those who were married scored highest on well-being and those who were divorced scored lowest (Jenks & Christiansen, 2002). In terms of re-partnership, scholars are suggesting that clinicians must be well-versed in both remarriage literature and Catholic beliefs to guide remarrying Catholics through that process (Sauerbeher, Duba, & Ponton, 2013). Researchers thus acknowledge the need for religious and cultural competency in post-divorce counseling.

In discussing Mormon beliefs on marriage and divorce, it is important to differentiate them from similar religious denominations. Mormons, for example, are similar to Catholics in their reverence for marriage. Catholics also believe that a marital union, sanctioned by God, is a bond that men alone cannot break (Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta, n.d ). A catholic divorce may be recognized legally, but is not recognized religiously without a council declaring a “decree of invalidity,” or a statement that the canonical requirements for a valid marriage were never present in the first place, and, as such, the union is invalid (Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta, n.d). It is in this facet that Catholic divorces differ from dissolved Mormon sealings.



A dissolved Mormon sealing is essentially going back on a promise with God, while a decree of invalidity from the Catholic Church implies that a divorce may be granted because the marriage was never canonically sanctioned in the first place.

While Mormons and Catholics share a similar belief in the sanctity of marriage, the concept of not living up to a covenant with God is unique to the Mormon population and has emotional implications for this group. For example, Mormons report undergoing a period of identity crisis after their divorces (Mattson & Scharman, 1994). Mattson and Scharman (1994) called on LDS therapists to understand the estrangement that divorced Mormons in particular may feel from a long-held romantic and religious identity. The struggle of LDS divorced individuals has been examined generally in terms of social isolation, struggles of faith, and identity issues (Mattson & Scharman, 1994; Shaw, 1991). However, research is lacking in the area of their efforts to form new relationships, and how those practices are hindered, if at all, by the knowledge that a previous marriage commitment (meant to last for eternity) has ended.

In a broader sense, divorce has generally been associated with poor mental health outcomes, although personal factors greatly influence that experience (Symoens et al., 2014). In a study of cohabitation and re-partnership following divorce, Prevalin and Ermisch (2004) found that poorer mental health coming out of a relationship was associated with lower likelihood of re-partnership. As many divorcees desire to form new relationships after their divorce (Anderson et al., 2004), and relationship issues are often seen in therapists' offices, it is important for clinicians to understand the experiences of divorcees dating again. This may particularly be true in the case of Mormons, who hold a set of values surrounding marriage that may complicate the emotions surrounding the divorce process and the recovery afterwards (Shaw, 1991; Lafkas, 2012).

## **Significance**

Although research has established the complexities of navigating new roles and residual emotions in dating (Afifi & McManus, 2006), there is little commentary on the experience of dating among groups that advocate against divorce. Schneller's (2002) research findings on reactions to divorce suggest that individuals respond differently to divorce based on their religious convictions. However, this research did not delve into particular populations. Mattson and Scharman (1994) studied divorced Mormon women, however they did not examine dating and their advice was targeted at LDS therapists. As such, this study sought to explore the experience of divorced and dating-again Mormons in light of their religiously significant change of relationship status. It was expected that the strongly held value of enduring and eternal marriage among Mormons would influence dating in a way that is unique to Latter-day Saints and is meaningful for non-LDS clinicians to understand. This study sought to fill a gap in the literature regarding those challenges.

This research also added to the limited body of literature on Mormons. There are currently 15 million members of the Latter-day Saint religion worldwide ("2013 Statistical Report", 2014). Latter-day Saints make up the fourth largest Christian denomination in the United States (Limb, Hodge, & Leckie, 2013; Lyon, 2013). Since its initial organization in 1830, the LDS church has grown from just 6 original members to 15 million members worldwide ("2013 Statistical Report", 2014). The Mormon religion has been gaining more coverage and notoriety in the press in recent years, particularly due to the rise of high-profile Mormons, such as Mitt Romney, in the political and business arena (Rucker, 2013). Nonetheless, the research literature on this population in general is still quite limited (Limb et al., 2013). Specific research

on divorce among Latter-day Saints is even more scarce and antiquated. Many of the articles regarding Mormons and divorce date back to the mid-nineteenth and twentieth century.

Recent statistics indicate that when Latter-day Saint couples have been sealed in the Mormon temple marriage ceremony, 6% divorce (Lobdell, 2000). Being in company with only 6% of their religious colleagues may make a newly divorced Mormon feel particularly isolated socially (Mattson & Scharman, 1994). While divorce causes social discomfort generally, it is of particular distress to LDS individuals due to their faith's focus on eternal marriage and families (Ulrich, Scott, & Bergin, 2000). Lyon (2013) discussed some Mormons' tendencies towards guilt and shame as a result of a cultural emphasis on self-improvement, a value that then may manifest itself in perfectionism and depression among Latter-day Saints. While Mormons are generally shy of psychotherapy, they are not exempt from mental health struggles and seek services today more than they have historically (Ulrich et al., 2000). Recently, psychotherapy has been reframed in the LDS community as a tool that can be used in conjunction with faith (Ulrich et al., 2000). As such, updated research was needed to aid this population.

Research indicates that of all the Christian denominations, Mormons are the least likely to divorce (Xu, Hudspeth, & Bartkowski, 2005). They are also more likely to marry early and to marry within their faith, as compared to other religious denominations (Xu et al., 2005). Throughout Mormon doctrine, marriage and family commitments are emphasized as paramount and the most important priorities a person can have in this life. A common teaching among Latter-day Saints is expressed as an adage: "No other success can compensate for failure in the home." The emphasis on an ideal family situation raises concern for the emotional health of those who, by this definition, have not achieved success in their marriage and family life.

In addition to the financial and social difficulties that follow a divorce, Mormons face challenges unique to their culture. For example, Mormons believe that the highest degree of heavenly glory can only be obtained if one has been sealed to a spouse in a temple marriage ceremony (Kunz, 1964). Divorced Mormons who actively practice their faith also return to a life of chastity, because LDS individuals do not have sexual relationships outside of marriage (Bednar, 2013). One study of divorced Mormons highlighted the challenges of returning to chaste living after having experienced a full expression of sexuality in their marriages (Shaw, 1991). Though research on the emotional experience of LDS divorcees is limited, there is some evidence to suggest that the normal stressors of divorce are compounded by these unique factors of LDS culture and religious beliefs (Mattson & Scharman, 1994; Shaw, 1991). Because Latter-day Saints' covenant version of marriage is laden with eternal ramifications for practicing Mormons, it is reasonable to believe that the experience of re-entering the dating world will be influenced by these beliefs.

### **Rationale for Methodology**

This qualitative study employed a semi-structured interview approach to collect information regarding the experiences of divorced Latter-day Saints returning to dating after having been married in a temple sealing. As this project aimed to understand the experience of Mormons dating again, and as little had been done to research this topic previously, a qualitative approach allowed for in-depth data collection. A semi-structured interview approach gathered clients' experiences while giving them freedom to elaborate past the formal questionnaire. As Hurst (1987) contends, "the quality of research that is entirely dependent on number crunching is often impoverished – an ounce of insight is worth a mountain of multiple regression." According

to this line of thinking, qualitative research better expressed the experience of returning to dating as a divorced Mormon.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study utilized a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology assumes that different individuals make sense of the same experience in varied ways and that there is value in capturing those varying experiences in order to understand the essence of the whole lived experience (Flood, 2010). Phenomenology respects the individual's expertise in a situation and puts the researcher in the position of a curious observer. In fact, best practice in phenomenology requires that researchers bracket out all biases and prior experiences in the field of research so as to acquire an air of complete objectivity (Flood, 2010).

As the intent of this study was to understand the experience of divorced LDS individuals in dating, a phenomenological approach allowed for individuals to expound on their experiences. This theoretical framework assumes that examining several individuals' perceptions of life events will yield common truths regarding their experiences, struggles, and coping. As the end goal of this research is to assist non-LDS clinicians in their work with the divorced LDS population, the phenomenological framework provided a means for common experiences among divorced and dating LDS individuals to emerge.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This research explored the experience of Latter-day Saint adults in their return to dating and courtship relationships after a divorce. Specifically, this research examined LDS individuals who have been divorced after being married in a Mormon temple sealing ceremony, as this relationship is expected to continue in the hereafter unless annulled by the leading authority of the LDS church. The divorced segment of the Latter-day Saint church reports feelings of

isolation, identity issues, and struggles over family arrangements that may be unique to their religious beliefs (Mattson & Scharman, 1994). Certainly, divorce has serious personal implications for this population and may impact their interpretation of their experience and opportunities in the dating field.

Because divorced Mormons are more likely to seek therapy than their counterparts, it is essential to understand the post-divorce experience of a minority group in the LDS faith. Clinically speaking, this research thus contributed to the limited body of knowledge regarding therapy with Latter-day Saints. It aimed to help non-LDS understand and assist divorced Mormons as they transition into a new dating identity.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

The literature reviewed includes current attitudes towards divorce in America, the transition to dating after divorce, an explanation of Latter-day Saint doctrine regarding marriage and divorce, and an overview of existing research on working with the LDS community in light of their unique beliefs.

### **Divorce in America**

The United States has one of the highest divorce rates among industrialized countries (Mullins et al., 2006). The “no-fault” divorce was introduced in 1969; while previously divorce had required evidence of infidelity or cruelty, no-fault divorce laws allowed couples to separate due to dissatisfaction with their marriage. As a result, the divorce rate doubled between 1960 and 1980 (Wilcox, 2009). This statistic expresses a fundamental shift in society’s view of divorce; while traditionally it had been a topic of shame, Americans now became more accepting of the practice. Currently, about half of all first marriages end in divorce (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). In fact, 40% of marriages involve a spouse who has been married previously (Livingston, 2014). Nearly 20% of marriages involve spouses who have both experienced divorce. Research indicates that 52% of divorced individuals either desire to re-partner or at least do not have strong objections to it (Livingston, 2014). As research has focused greatly on the complexities accompanying remarriage and blended families, less is known about the experience of dating itself (Anderson et al., 2004). The experience of divorced adults re-entering serious courtship is a comparatively newer area of research.

### **Consequences of Divorce**

Individuals experience divorce differently; the aftermath of a broken marriage can be emotionally traumatic for many, but some find relief immense relief in the dissolution. As such,

the literature varies in its account of divorce and its impact. Cohen (2002) found that women commonly experience depression and anxiety and seek mental health services. They may also report feeling humiliated and overwhelmed by their marriage ending. Men may also experience depression and anxiety and are prone to substance abuse; however, they are less likely to seek services than women (Baum, 2004). According to Dykstra and Fokkema (2007), divorced men experience more social and emotional loneliness than women. They also tend to mourn the loss of their support system and children or family network more than they grieve the loss of their spouse (Baum, 2004). Women, however, tend to mourn more for the loss of that intimate relationship following a divorce. Both genders may commonly experience depression and loneliness after separation. Indeed, Lucas (2005) found that those who divorce report lower life satisfaction than married couples.

In contrast, other researchers have found that divorce can be a gateway to greater individual happiness for couples leaving troubled marriages (Arditti & Madden-Derdich, 1995; Rutter, 2005). Rutter (2005) studied over 4,000 individuals and found that those in distressed (albeit non-violent) marriages were personally happier after divorce. Similarly, Kaffman et al. (1984) studied 24 divorced individuals and found they largely reported their divorce being a major turning point in their personal development and the beginning of a period of greater maturity and rewarding relationships. Munoz-Eguileta (2007) found that couples who had experienced conflict for a long time before divorcing enjoyed better emotional adjustment following divorce. Divorce research presents varied findings, due to wide differences in individual resilience, coping, and circumstances surrounding the divorce. While some struggle with depression and loneliness, others find divorce a means to personal happiness and increased social opportunities.



It is important to understand the emotional impact of divorce as one examines the experience of dating. Many divorcees state that they wish to re-marry (Livingston, 2014), and establishing a new intimate relationship can improve mental health following divorce (Symoens et al., 2014). However, poor mental health can also strain a relationship and has been shown to increase likelihood of separation during cohabitation (Prevalin & Ermisch, 2004). While research has begun to focus on dating as it is experienced by the individual, and not just the family system, we need to know more about dating following a divorce and what can help these divorced individuals achieve their relationship goals. In her doctoral dissertation, Schneller (2002) found that people whose families and religious beliefs systems discouraged divorce had a particularly difficult time adjusting to their new, single role. They felt guilt and confusion and often felt isolated from their community. This project intends to expand on that research by examining the experience of dating in a unique religious community, the Latter-day Saints.

### **Dating after Divorce**

**Personal benefits.** Dating after divorce has been described by divorced individuals as a way to “save face,” in essence a way to boost one’s social confidence and cope with the loss of a prior romantic identity (Miller, 2009). In a study of 892 divorcees, researchers found that those who married or cohabited following a divorce showed increase self-esteem and less depression (Symoens et al., 2014). Mirecki (2014) also found that those who dated after divorce were more secure than non-dating individuals and experienced a less fearful attachment style. Dating after divorce appears to be a marker for personal well-being, or at least a step in the right direction of it. Indeed, many divorced individuals report dating and remarriage (either of themselves or of their ex-spouses) as a turning point in their recovery following a divorce (Graham, 1997). It is a way to recreate a positive identity following the loss of a marital status and defining oneself in

those terms.

The benefits of dating after divorce are centered chiefly in the return of close relationships. In a meta-analysis of 21 studies examining post-divorce adjustment, Kramrei et al. (2007) found that divorced individuals benefited mentally from establishing a network of social relationships. Developing a more specific and intimate relationship helped some individuals navigate the negative consequences of divorce, because they had a companion with which to process challenging events and emotions (Kramrei et al., 2007). Perrig-Chellio, Hutchison, & Morselli (2015) found that dating helped divorcees adjust to their new lives and helped them ruminate less about the old partner. Dating was also cited as a coping mechanism for women who were suffering from the shattering of their “happily ever after marriage” (Leighman, 2010). It was a gain in the face of loss of income, family, plans, and lifestyle.

Many divorcees report loneliness and depression; thus, the establishment of new relationships is an important development in recovery after divorce. However, divorced individuals do not necessarily hurry towards remarriage. Indeed, many report hesitancy to do so (Livingston, 2014), and cohabitation and casual dating are popular options among this group (Schneller, 2002; Wu & Schimmele, 2005). While remarriage is not necessarily a priority, divorced individuals enter the dating pool relatively quickly (Anderson et al., 2004). They recognize and yearn for the benefits and comfort that come from a new intimate relationship.

**Challenges.** There are, of course, challenges to establishing and maintaining this intimacy. Some individuals continue to struggle with romantic feelings for their ex-partner, as well as with feelings of low self-worth (Afifi & McManus, 2006; Berman, 1985). As many as 25% of divorcees continue to struggle with a psychological attachment to the ex-spouse (Berman, 1985). According to the findings of Graham (1997), a major “turning point” following

marital dissolution is the “emotional divorce,” or the realization (sometimes long after the legal process has ended) that the separation is a reality. For example, one participant reported having the finality of the divorce finally hitting her when she called her ex-partner and heard over the phone that this number had been disconnected (Graham, 1997). Grief has an unpredictable timeline, and a quarter of divorcees find their separation strikingly difficult to resolve and accept (Berman, 1985).

Those having difficulty coping with the emotional impact of divorce find barriers in establishing new romantic relationships. In a study of divorcees and their post-divorce relationships, Schneller (2002) found that the majority of participants had difficulty with commitment to their current partners. They reported being blocked from emotional intimacy because of hurt, fear, and skepticism. Many described an active struggle with themselves to re-engage emotionally and keep themselves from “recoiling” from their partners (Schneller, 2002). These findings coincide with Brimhall et al.’s (2008) work with couples dating following divorce. These individuals cited broken trust in their past relationships, complicating events in their new relationship. For example, participants recalled times when they had overreacted to something their new partner had said, and the root for the overreaction stemmed from negative experiences in the prior marriage. One man’s trigger phrase was “We need to talk.” When his new partner would use that phrase, the man would immediately become defensive and angry because of experiences with his prior wife. This magnification of emotions illustrates how past traumas continue to influence relationship behaviors for divorced individuals. Emotions following a divorce can be complicated for divorcees to navigate.

**Familial considerations.** Dating after divorce can also be a question of family loyalties and parenting stressors. Anderson and Greene (2005) identified as many as nine relationship

transitions that divorced individuals may undergo in dating again, particularly when there are children involved. These transitions include dating again, introducing the new partner to one's child, cohabitating, experiencing breakups, pregnancies, engagement, and remarriage. Anderson et al. (2004) found that within a year of being divorced, these individuals had had an average of two new dating partners and their children had witnessed 2.5 relationship transitions. In Miller's (2009) study of 28 divorced individuals, 25 had described the ex-partner's dating interfering with their co-parenting in some way. For example, some participants had expressed stress over a spouse's new dating partner being referred to as a "new mommy or daddy" by their child. Dating after divorce is thus not an individual affair, but is often a complex navigation of boundaries and role redefinition between ex-partners.

This role re-definition often extends beyond the parental dyad. Research shows children may be an active part of divorced adults' coping process. In their study of familial coping following divorce, Afifi and McManus (2006) discovered that parents may rely on children as confidants as they sort out complicated emotions connected to the former spouse. Children may exert power over their parent in turn by influencing the course of their parents' new relationships. For example, they may choose to frustrate the parent's new relationship by rejecting the new partner or limiting access to grandchildren (De Jong Grierveld & Merz, 2013). Parents are thus compelled to bend their relationship course to fit the preferences of their children in order to preserve the unit. De Jong Grierveld and Merz (2013) found that children's influence even led some parents to make their living choices (whether they would cohabit with their partner or live separately) based on those preferences.

Carr and Boerner (2013) also found that adult children's relationships with their parents can be affected when parents begin to date six months after the loss of a spouse (in this study's

case, after bereavement). Widowers reported increased conflict with their children, while widows reported closeness with their children. Carr and Boerner (2013) suggest that this gender difference is likely because men who wish to date will actually initiate relationships, while bereaved females at six months are more likely to state they wish for a relationship without actually engaging in one. Though this research is regarding bereavement, these findings may even be intensified with parents dating after a divorce, as parent-child relationships continue to evolve following separation. It should be noted that according to Carr and Boerner's (2013) research, those who struggled typically had difficult relationships with their parents to begin with. The transition to dating was viewed more positively by children who had good relationships with their parents. The literature thus gives a picture of dating after divorce as a potentially complicated venture in terms of familial support.

**Older individuals.** It should be noted that some unique dating considerations exist for older individuals. While roughly 50% of divorcees express some hesitation regarding re-partnership (Livingston, 2014), divorced individuals re-marry more quickly than bereaved persons (James & Shafer, 2012). It may be that the unexpected breakup of a relationship results in a greater need for companionship than the natural ending of one. Older, less educated individuals are at greater risk for diminished mental health following a divorce (Cohen & Finzi-Dottan, 2012). Dating can offset negative divorce effects, however, the pool of available partners decreases with age (Skew et al., 2009). Females tend to outlive males, and so the gender ratio of available partners is somewhat skewed for older individuals.

Due to the extension of life expectancy, older individuals report loneliness and a desire for internal familial, rather than external hired care, at the end of their lives (James & Shafer, 2012). Gender differences in this age group are manifest. Men are particularly likely to re-partner

and may prefer younger partners when selecting a mate (Hughes, 2000; De Jong Gierveld, 2004). Despite this, both genders report wanting more egalitarian relationships for their second unions (Schneller, 2002), with older women particularly seeking that quality (Gierveld, 2001). Although many express hesitation regarding dating after divorce, it is still a cherished goal for many, even in advanced years.

**Cohabitation.** Although nearly 50% of divorced individuals report that they would like to marry again, or at least will not rule it out (Livingston, 2014), cohabitation and dating while living separately are popular forms of re-partnership (De Jong Gierveld, 2004). Wu and Schimmele (2005) found that within five years of their first union ending, 42% of women and 54% of men were in a second union, and cohabitation was the more popular arrangement for these individuals. Although it cannot definitively be claimed that preference for cohabitation over marriage following divorce is a result of being “gun shy” regarding a second marriage, the implication of the data is that the end of a first union impacts dating choices, which may take non-traditional forms (Schneller, 2002).

### **Past Theoretical Approaches**

The existing literature on forming post-divorce relationships has approached the topic from a variety of theoretical frameworks. However, studies have focused largely on re-partnering rather than dating. Skew et al. (2009) conceptualized re-partnering from a Life Course theory perspective. Life Course theory examines the timeline of events in a person’s life and the historical framework in which they are set, and analyzes the connection between the two. In their study of dating in the United Kingdom and Australia, Skew and her colleagues (2009) used Life Course Theory to examine if previous relationship status (i.e. marriage or cohabitation as life events) impacted later dating. It was found that of all previous relationship statuses, being

married directly (without cohabiting) and then divorcing meant that these individuals were less likely to re-partner than cohabiting ones.

According to Skew et al. (2009), Life Course theory is an apt one from which to examine dating, because it takes into account a person's relationship history and trajectory and examines that trajectory in terms of historical trends. This theory allows the researcher to assess the experience of divorcing and dating in the culture of the participants. In the case of this study, it was applied to analyze data from two countries who have a similar culture, the UK and Australia. This same approach may be used to examine a phenomenon like religious culture. When the larger culture does not agree with divorce, divorced individuals may face a more complicated path to re-partnership than those with no espoused belief system because they must work through a personal burden of guilt and confusion (Schneller, 2002).

Others approach dating from a risk analysis and reward perspective, framing it as a process driven by economic and social needs. De Graaf and Kalmijn (2003) theorize that understanding dating is advantageous to societies seeking economic and social stability, as it offsets the financial burdens and loneliness of divorce. They studied forming relationships from an opportunity perspective, wanting to examine the availability of partners and the factors that influence divorced individuals' success in terms of dating routes. De Graaf and Kalmijn (2003) bluntly acknowledge that the pool of potential partners for divorcees is smaller than when those individuals were first married. They also acknowledge that not every divorcee will want to re-partner, with some even rejecting remarriage. They therefore examine the personal factors that make a person more likely to successfully re-partner, if they wish to. These factors are, in summary, a level of financial stability, being employed, being socially integrated and having a network of friends, and being a woman with a less individualistic mindset or a man with a certain

level of domestic dependence. The authors' overall goals were to discover what factors made individuals more likely to re-partner, as well as to compare marriage and cohabitation as alternate dating trajectories. These topics were couched economically and the discussion was focused on external factors and qualities that made a partner more likely to meet other potential mates.

Other research has used a combination of theoretical frameworks in looking at post-divorce intimate relationships. In her doctoral dissertation, Schnell (2002) examined how divorcees interpreted their divorce experience and how this interpretation shaped expectations for future intimate partnerships. She utilized four frameworks: social constructionism to observe the influence of cultural values on divorce beliefs, attribution theory to compare post-divorce adjustment differences between individuals, attachment theory to examine adults' evolving perceptions of intimacy following a divorce, and loss and renewal as a way to understand dating after a difficult separation. These frameworks allowed Schnell (2002) to study post-divorce relationships holistically, with regard to the cultural, emotional, and historical factors motivating individuals. Her findings indicated that the initiation of new relationships was a time period marked by personal growth and intentional change. She also commented that the context in which the individuals divorced was influential in that individuals raised in cultures morally against divorce struggled more particularly.

Although divorce itself has been studied for decades, and some studies exist on re-partnering, dating is a newer field of research. Phenomenology is a fitting framework to examine intimate relationships after divorce, as it presupposes no understanding of the event besides what the participants describe. It makes the individuals the expert of their experiences. This objectivity is crucial to the understanding of divorce and dating because it can be a very emotionally



charged process, filled with complicated attachments to both prior and new partners (Berman, 1985; Afifi & McManus, 2006). The lack of hypothesizing regarding outcomes makes space for any type of data to come forward. Circumstances may also greatly influence the experience of divorce for the individual (Schneller, 2002). As such, the openness of a phenomenological approach allows for diverse reporting of experience and yet still enables one to draw broad conclusions based on individuals' commonalities.

The experience of dating has been generally described as a process of coping with the aftermath of divorce and building a new future, and benefits and challenges have been outlined. However, few studies have examined subgroups in-depth. In light of the seemingly significant impact that personal belief systems have on the adjustment to divorce (Shaw, 1991; Schneller, 2002), the phenomenological study will endeavor to add to the limited body of research on Latter-day Saints by exploring the experience of Mormons as they return to dating.

### **Latter-day Saint Beliefs on Marriage**

To understand fully the implications of dating as a divorced Mormon, it is essential to examine Mormon teachings on marriage. Like many other Christian denominations, Mormons celebrate marriage as being a holy institution ordained of God (Howard, 2003). Unlike other Christian denominations, Latter-day Saints have faith that God restored proper priesthood authority to perform marriages to the earth when the LDS church was organized in the 1830s. According to this doctrine, marriages performed under this priesthood authority and solemnized in an LDS temple are viable to last not just throughout life, but throughout eternity. A press release put out by the Mormon Church clarifies:

When a man and a woman are married in a Mormon temple, the ceremony is referred to as a sealing...According to Latter-day Saint belief, the sealing means these family

relationships will endure after death if the individuals live according to the teachings of Jesus Christ. (“Sealing”, n.d.)

This sealing is essentially a covenant between spouses to love each other and God eternally and help the other spouse return to God’s presence. The decision to marry in an LDS temple is thus a choice that Mormons do not take lightly, but often make in conjunction with serious contemplation, religious fasting and prayer (Hägglund, 2015). The expectation of Mormons who are sealed in the temple is that their marriage will last forever, and the choice is given serious weight.

Citing scriptural teachings on the essential nature of an eternal marriage, Mormon prophet Joseph F. Smith taught:

No man can be saved and exalted in the kingdom of God without the woman, and no woman can reach perfection and exaltation in the kingdom of God, alone. He made man and woman in His own image and likeness, male and female, and in their creation it was designed that they should be united together in sacred bonds of marriage, and one is not perfect without the other (Hinckley, 1991).

In a proclamation issued in 1995, the LDS church reaffirmed its position on union between men and women being divinely ordained. The teaching describes males and females having unique roles and spiritual characteristics that work in tandem to help the other fulfill his or her spiritual potential (Hinckley et al., 1995). LDS scripture echoes this same theme: “Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 11:11 King James Version). The message of these Mormon scriptures and ecclesiastical commentary is that companionship in the form of marriage is the natural and best state in which men and women should exist. For Mormons, other arrangements (for example, staying perpetually single or

becoming divorced) are generally undesirable. In addition, the implication is that men and women on their own cannot achieve the level of growth, progression, and exaltation that a couple sealed eternally could.

To be sealed in an LDS temple thus carries an eternal commitment to working on one's marriage and making it a success. In light of the shifting marriage trends in American societies, prominent Latter-day Saint church leaders have frequently sermonized the need to nourish and sustain marriages. In the words of LDS church leader F. Burton Howard regarding marriage (2003), "when you want something to last, you treat it differently." Counsel from LDS pulpits includes exhortations to unselfishness, service towards one's spouse, having regular date nights to keep marriages vital, enjoying a healthy sex life, and participating frequently in worship activities (such as scripture reading, prayer, and temple attendance) together (Dahl, 1982; Matheson, 2009).

One of the reasons marriage is so emphasized in the Latter-day Saint community is because LDS individuals believe that having families is a sacred responsibility, an act that is in fact believed key to their eternal progression. In a proclamation to the world released in 1995, the prophet of the Mormon Church and his counselors issued the following:

We declare that God's commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force...The family is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity. (Hinckley et al., 1995).

Having children and raising them in love and righteousness is a central tenet of the Mormon faith. According to this teaching, children have the inherent right to be raised in an intact and

loving family, and actively practicing Mormons strive to live by this ideal. Religion indeed permeates every aspect of family life for actively practicing Mormons. In a study conducted by Loser, Klein, Hill, and Dollahite (2008), 67 Latter-day families were interviewed regarding the influence of their religion on their daily activities. A prominent theme of the responses indicated that religion was inseparable from Latter-day Saints' thoughts on family life, dress (in which Mormons are counseled to be comely and modest), social interactions, and even eating habits. One participant's response illustrates the level to which religious beliefs influence LDS life schemas: "I think when the gospel is so much a part of your life it's not like you separate it from other things. It's just part of everything" (Loser et al., 2008). In light of these doctrines espousing a specific and ideal family situation, one may ask, what then are the implications for individuals who cannot live up to this ideal. In particular, what are the implications of dating in light of a "failed" first attempt at an eternal relationship?

### **Latter-day Saint Teachings on Divorce**

Divorce is not commonplace in the Latter-day Saint community. Mormon Church leaders have consistently taught against seeking a divorce except in extreme cases (Oaks, 2007). As previously discussed, Mormons view marriage as a covenant, or a binding promise with one's spouse and with God, the fulfilling of which brings eternal blessings (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, n.d.). In discussing marital happiness, it should be noted that throughout Mormon doctrine the concept of agency is prevalent. Mormons believe it is essential to take responsibility for their reactions to life's stressors (Hales, 2010). The connection between this doctrine and divorce is the following: if a marriage is suffering, it is the sacred responsibility of husband and wife to use their agency to save their marriage. The Mormon Church leader Dallin H. Oaks taught the following doctrine:

I strongly urge you and those who advise you to face up to the reality that for most marriage problems, the remedy is not divorce but repentance. Often the cause is not incompatibility but selfishness. The first step is not separation but reformation. (Oaks, 2007)

This teaching illustrates a general belief among LDS individuals that selfishness and personal agency are the reasons so many marriages fail today, and that personal evaluation and re-investment in a marriage are the antidote to marital conflict. Lyon (2013) noted that the Mormon emphasis on agency might make some Mormons feel wholly responsible for their troubles. The reality of divorce in Mormon families is thus an issue influenced not just by the difficult and complex emotions of those undergoing separation, but by all of the implications of finding a new identity in a community with such a strong family culture.

### **Working with Mormons**

Mormons have traditionally been skeptical of therapy, seeing it as a more atheistic tradition, but are now more accepting of seeking clinical help (Lyon, 2013; Ulrich et al., 2000). Interestingly, there is but a small body of literature covering clinical work with Mormons. Limb et al. (2013) suggest that many find Mormon beliefs “off-putting” and that the population is understudied as a result of this. It should be noted that Latter-day Saints report anxiety that therapists will dismiss their deeply held personal beliefs; in particular, LDS individuals fear clinicians will disregard their unique views on suffering (Limb et al., 2013). Mormons believe that unhappiness is often caused by sin and living out of harmony with God’s laws, and Mormons seeking therapy may be hesitant to work with clinicians for fear they will disregard this value. It is thus vitally important to increase the literature on how to respectfully work with this population, for the fact remains that Mormons, like all other populations, struggle with their

own mental health issues and do access therapeutic help (Ulrich et al., 2000).

In speaking generally of this population, researchers have noted Latter-day Saints' preferences towards cognitive behavioral therapy, because CBT has with it an element of personal responsibility that resonates with Mormons' beliefs in agency (Lyon, 2013; Ulrich et al., 2000). Researchers have suggested that one common roadblock to working with Mormons is LDS individuals' fear that struggling with negative emotion can be traced back to some mistake on the individual's part, or a misuse of their agency (Ulrich et al., 2000). Research on working with this population suggests that practitioners should help clients sort out life's normative struggles and stressors from those clients perceive to be stemming from sin or mistakes.

### **Mormons and Dating**

As relates to dating, Mormons may be "perfectionistic daters" (Ulrich et al., 2000). Whether due to unresolved issues from earlier years or because of subconscious pressure to have a solid and lasting marriage, more Latter-day Saint young adults are delaying marriage and experiencing longer years of singlehood (Oaks, 2006). One university professor, David Dollahite of Brigham Young University, described the trend of LDS singles putting off marriage as stemming from a combination of financial fears, pickiness, and distractions (Fletcher, 2011). Speaking in particular of the young men in this faith, David Dollahite described them as thinking 'I am dating a 9.7, but if I wait, maybe I could get a 9.9'...these kids are terrified of making a mistake." Some research has captured the experience of growing older as a single in the LDS church, documenting the feeling of failure and pessimism about opportunities these individuals experience (Johnson, 2013). What is lacking is a clear picture of what it is like to be a divorced Mormon dating yet again, after having once been sealed in a believed to be eternal relationship.

Mormons face other challenges unique to their dating circle. For example, Mormons are

very likely to partner within their own faith (Xu et al., 2005). Divorced LDS individuals may face the likelihood that they will have less selection in the dating market, as current statistics indicate that for every 100 religiously active LDS women over thirty there are only 19 religiously active LDS men (Goodman & Heaton, 1986). It was also anticipated that participants would report distress over their previous marriages ending spilling over into their new relationships, as their previous marriages were eternal promises made with the spouse and God. Overall, it was anticipated that divorced Mormons experience dating after divorce in a unique way that would be meaningful for clinicians to understand.

### **Research Question**

This study used a phenomenological approach to explore how divorced Mormons experience dating following divorce when they have also been sealed in an LDS temple. This research aimed to capture the experience of Mormons as they begin to date in light of a believed continuing eternal relationship.

## **Chapter Three: Methods**

### **Design of Study**

This phenomenological study utilized in-depth, semi-structured interviews to explore the experience of divorced Latter-day Saints in dating after having been sealed in an LDS temple. These interviews sought to capture the essence of what it is like to date again as a member of a community that teaches eternal marriage and discourages divorce.

### **Participants**

This study interviewed eight participants who identify as practicing Latter-day Saints, who have been sealed in marriage in an LDS temple, and who have subsequently divorced. This study specifically examined Mormons who have kept their sealing intact despite being legally divorced, for the general counsel of church leaders to divorced Mormons is to preserve their sealing unless they are re-marrying. The implication is that divorced Mormons continue to be religiously married and connected to their spouse in the eternities, and this previous sealing's impact on the experience of dating was a potential topic of interest in this study. While the number of years married before divorce and whether or not the couples have children is information that was gathered for demographic purposes, this research did not focus on being a divorced Mormon with children. Rather, the general experience of dating after having once been sealed in an eternal covenant relationship was examined.

This study focused on Mormons who have been divorced at least one year, in order to find participants who have had time to adjust to divorce and return to dating. According to Anderson et al. (2004), 79% of divorced individuals return to dating within the first year of being divorced. As such, one year was the minimum amount of time from divorce required for this study, in order to find a sample that had dating experiences. No stipulation was made as to the



length of time the participants must have been married before divorcing, as the purpose of this study was to examine the general experience of dating following the divorce of an LDS temple marriage. For the purposes of this study, dating was defined as being either in an exclusive committed relationship with one other person or going on casual dates with different individuals concurrently. No requirement was made as to the length of committed relationships that participants may be in, and both exclusively committed and casually dating individuals were encouraged to participate.

Participants were recruited through advertisements posted via three major LDS listservs in the eastern region of the United States. These listservs are connected specifically to single adult congregations in the LDS church. In 1973 the leadership of the LDS church organized these regional singles congregations to increase chances for young adults of the Mormon faith to mingle and court. These congregations include “young single” (defined as ages 18-30 by the LDS church) and “single” (defined as ages 31 and above) adults. The rationale for sampling from these congregations was the assumption that one would be more likely to find divorced individuals worshipping in singles congregations as opposed to family congregations. This study also incorporated word-of-mouth and snowball referral techniques to recruit participants.

### **Procedure**

Following Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval of this project, this study was advertised on the LDS listservs mentioned previously. The recruitment announcement sought divorced LDS single adults, at least 18 years old, who had been divorced for at least one year and had begun dating again. The recruitment announcement informed participants that being in the study includes a brief screening interview, demographic questionnaire, and a one-hour interview via Skype, telephone, or in-person. A \$10 Amazon gift card was provided as compensation.

Following recruitment, each participant was screened for eligibility via a brief, ten-minute phone interview. At the beginning of the phone screening, all participants were assigned an alphabetical ID for confidentiality reasons. Participants were given a short description of the study and its purpose. Following that information, the participants were asked a series of screening questions. They were asked if they are over 18 years old, if they were still currently practicing members of the LDS faith, if they had been divorced after being sealed in a Mormon temple ceremony, and if they had not had their sealing revoked. They were asked how long it had been since they legally divorced, as well as if they were currently in an exclusive relationship or were at least actively dating. If the participants did not fully meet the eligibility criteria, they were thanked for their participation and time and asked to refer others they thought may fit the requirements for this study.

If, however, the participant did fit the requirements for this study, they were asked if they would like to receive the research consent paperwork via mail, email, or have the opportunity to review it in person before the formal interview. If the participants preferred to receive the paperwork before the scheduled interview day, they were mailed (or emailed, according to their indicated preference) the research consent form and a brief demographic questionnaire. The research consent form advised participants about the purpose of the study and the potential risks and benefits of being involved in the research. It also detailed the procedures of the study and explained confidentiality and freedom to withdraw. Participants who reviewed this paperwork and signed the consent form were then interviewed more formally. These interviews did not take place until the necessary consent paperwork had been reviewed, signed, and returned (via mail or in person) to the researcher.

The demographic questionnaire included basic questions regarding age, gender, ethnicity, level of education achieved, average income, years the participant was married to their most recent spouse, and the number of times the participant had married overall. This demographic questionnaire also assessed if the participant had children from the previous marriage, but this study did not focus on the state of parent-child relationships as the participant formed new partner relationships.

Following their completion of the consent form and demographic questionnaire, the researcher contacted the participants individually to set up an interview time. These interviews were conducted via the telephone and Skype, as participants lived in various locations across the country. Interviews lasted approximately one hour and were recorded via a digital voice recorder. A \$10 Amazon gift card was mailed to participants after the interview as a thank you.

The recorded interviews were transcribed by the researcher and an assistant transcriber. This transcriber signed a confidentiality agreement stating that they would never disclose information shared by participants during the interviews and would not discuss the data outside of meetings with the researcher. The assistant transcriber also agreed to never disclose identifying data for any of the participants. The informed consent form disclosed that an assistant transcriber would be included on this research team, so participants had full knowledge of their involvement in the research process. The researcher reviewed all transcripts transcribed by the assistant in order to ensure accuracy and consistency of notation style. No real names of people or places will be included in the transcripts. All recordings were erased once the researcher had reviewed the transcriptions.

Any identifying information of the clients (such as names, addresses, and contact information) was kept in paper format in a locked file box, to which the researcher alone had

access. All names and identifying details were removed from interview transcripts and replaced with replacements in order to secure participant confidentiality.

### **Instruments**

Each participant completed a semi-structured interview with the researcher. These questions explored the experience of returning to dating as an LDS divorcee. The following is a list of questions that were asked during the interview. These questions were not exhaustive and served as a framework for more in-depth prompting. Some questions were asked in a variation of these formats as the need arose, and additional questions were asked to elicit participants' experiences and examples as deemed appropriate by the researcher. The participants were informed before the beginning of the interview that they could choose not to answer any question they felt uncomfortable with and could also withdraw from the study at any time.

**Interview questions.** I know that you were married in an LDS temple ceremony and later divorced. I am interested in learning about your experience as you begin dating again.

1. Before we get started, I wonder if I could get some more information about your divorce.
  - a. Who initiated the divorce?
  - b. What would you say was the main reason?
2. Now I would like to ask you about your current romantic relationship/s.
  - a. Are you seeking to meet people, seeing or dating someone in particular? Or are you engaged or cohabiting with anyone?  
  
Probes: Dating seriously or casually?
3. Do you ever discuss your previous temple marriage and divorce with your dating partner(s)/fiancé/e?
  - a. If so, i. How do you share it with him/her/them?

- ii. What is that experience like?
      - b. If not, can you share why you do not discuss it with them?
  4. How long did you wait after your divorce before dating again?
    - a. What do you think influenced the amount of time you waited before dating again, if anything?
    - b. Can you describe how you came to feel ready to date again?
  5. Have you experienced any challenges as you return to dating that may be unique to the divorced LDS population?
    - a. Have you experienced any internal conflict as you begin dating again? If so, can you tell me more about that?
      - i. Has any of that inner conflict been spiritual? Can you tell me more?
      - ii. What is it like to be dating someone while sealed to your prior spouse?  
Can you explain further?
    - b. If not, what do you think has contributed to your not feeling internally conflicted?
    - c. How do you feel about your dating prospects?
      - i. If you wish to date Mormons, do you feel there is opportunity for you to have a relationship? Why or why not?
      - ii. If you are dating outside of the LDS church, what is that experience like for you?
    - d. How would you describe your community's responses to your dating again after divorce?
      - i. Do you feel supported by your religious community? Why or why not?
      - ii. Do you feel supported by your family? Why or why not?

6. What would you say are the benefits you have experienced from divorcing and dating new partners?
  - a. Have you experienced personal growth?
    - i. Has any of this growth been spiritual? Can you explain further?
  - b. Have your relationships with friends and family been positively impacted? If so, how?
  - c. How has your identity in your community been influenced by you beginning to date again, if at all?
7. What has been helpful for you to know as you return to dating?
8. What do you wish your family and friends knew about dating as a divorced LDS individual, if anything?
9. What are your thoughts on marrying again in the future?
  - a. If you wish to re-marry, do you plan on marrying within the Mormon faith? If so, why?
    - i. In an LDS temple ceremony or a civil ceremony?
    - ii. If not, can you describe why you do not plan on re-marrying in the Mormon faith?
  - b. If you do not wish to re-marry, can you tell me more about that?
10. What advice would you give to therapists working with LDS divorced individuals that are beginning to date again? Why?
11. Is there anything else on this topic you think would be helpful for people to know that we have not already covered? If so, would you share it with me?

**Reliability and validity.** To establish research reliability, Dr. Mariana Falconier, the advisor

for this research project, performed a separate coding of the transcribed data. The researcher and Dr. Falconier worked to establish inter-rater reliability by discussing common themes in the data and seeking agreement on the naming and organization that best represented the overall data. Representative quotes were also presented in the written discussion of the data to increase comprehensiveness and validity.

In an effort to be completely objective regarding the interview data, the researcher also increased validity by bracketing out personal beliefs and biases regarding this population. In this instance, the researcher is a Mormon who has some friends who divorced following an LDS temple sealing. In the researcher's anecdotal experience, Mormons who have divorced after a temple sealing feel a sense of shame and failure because their marriage was covenanted to be eternal. The researcher has Mormon friends who have struggled with mental health, faith, and identity issues following their marital breakup. In order to ensure that the researcher's preconceived ideas regarding this particular population did not skew the coding of data, the researcher bracketed out in written format all of her assumptions regarding divorced Mormons. The researcher was also cognizant that others in this population may have had positive experiences following their divorce. In order to maintain objectivity while reporting, the researcher composed bulleted lists of her assumptions and core beliefs regarding Mormons and divorce. She repeated this process after the transcription efforts as well, and during the writing up of results in order to constantly refresh objectivity.

The assistant transcriber is also a member of the LDS church and subscribes to the strongly held ideal of an eternal marriage. The assistant transcriber was also asked to bracket out her assumptions regarding divorced Mormons in written, bulleted format. This took place prior to the assistant's transcribing of recorded interviews.

### Analysis

This data was analyzed according to common themes, in a process Moustakas (1994) calls *horizontalization*. The researcher examined the transcripts and highlighted key statements and significant themes that seem to be prevalent. In making these notations, the researcher constantly hunted for statements that uncovered the essence of participants' experiences. These statements were then organized into what is called "clusters of meaning," and these clusters became the researcher's themes (Cresswell, 2013). The researcher cited specific interview passages to support a description of specific themes, in a process called *textural description*. Finally, the data was described in a summary that conveyed the essence of the experience for the studied population.

Before coding took place, the researcher read each transcript to become familiar with the data. Afterwards, the researcher re-read the transcript with the intent of highlighting relevant and important information. This first coding of the interviews was based on annotating key statements and interesting examples presented by the participants. After the first coding of the transcripts was completed, the data points highlighted in each of the interviews were further organized into preliminary "clusters of meaning" to clarify the dominant themes of participants' responses. The researcher refined these groupings by performing a second reading of the transcripts, bearing in mind these tentative themes. A second reading afforded the researcher an opportunity to examine whether the participants' responses were best represented by the chosen themes. If at any point during the second reading it became apparent that a tentative theme or sub-theme did not reflect the groupings of data, it was adjusted. Similarly, if any data had been grouped together, and it later became apparent that these data could more accurately be separated into different categories or in a sub-theme category, a new grouping was created.



At this point, the data was highlighted during an initial reading, tentatively organized before the second reading, and adjusted into more specific and refined categories during and after the second reading. A third and final reading with these categories in mind was completed, at which point a final adjustment took place. All suggested themes discovered to be irrelevant to the data set were disregarded, and those that were applicable were furnished with a variety of rich quotations and examples. A cross-coding was performed by the second researcher and a consensus reached about the naming of themes and representative quotations.

Following the decision on data themes, the researcher summarized and discussed the experiences of the studied population, using supporting quotations and examples. The intent was to convey the experience of divorced Mormons as they return to dating and to suggest implications for clinical work with this population.

## **Sealed but Single: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Experience of Divorced Latter-day Saints Returning to Dating**

With the introduction of the no-fault divorce policy in 1969, Americans witnessed a dramatic increase in divorce rates and a shift in marriage culture. In fact, divorce rates doubled between 1960 and 1980 (Wilcox, 2009). While precedent had necessitated major events such as infidelity or abuse to end a marriage relationship, divorce could now be obtained for reasons of personal dissatisfaction. Current statistics indicate that nearly half of all marriages end in divorce (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). However, those who have experienced divorce are by no means against remarriage. Fifty-two percent of divorced individuals report a desire to re-marry or at least no aversion to the idea (Livingston, 2014). Interestingly, 20% of all marriages are between two previously divorced individuals (Livingston, 2014). Re-partnership is thus a topic of great importance for divorced persons.

Re-partnership and remarriage research has recently accelerated, with nearly 30% of remarriage research taking place in the last decade (Anderson & Greene, 2013). The literature on the dating life of divorcees itself is still a growing field, with many studies focusing on the complexities of dating with children (Goldscheider et al., 2009; Anderson & Greene, 2005; De Jong Grierveld & Merz, 2013). The divorced individual's dating experiences are only recently beginning to be explored; thus far, studies have established a general set of challenges and benefits.

Anderson et al. (2004) found that 79% of divorced individuals had begun dating again within a year of divorce. This turnaround highlights the value divorcees continue to place on companionship. Beginning to date after a divorce is seen by divorcees as an important milestone in recovery (Schneller, 2002; Graham, 1997). Re-partnering also appears to mitigate depression

in the divorced population and help them adjust to the post-divorce life (Perrig-Chellio, Hutchison, & Morselli, 2015; Symoens, Colman, & Bracke, 2014). Researchers suggest that focusing on a new partner minimizes dwelling on an old partner (Perrig-Chellio, Hutchison, & Morselli, 2015). Additional benefits include saving face in a world where divorce still carries a stigma of personal deficiency (Miller, 2009). Dating after divorce is thus a key event in a divorcee's personal progress.

However, the transition to dating again is not always simple. Following divorce, some individuals continue to struggle with romantic feelings for their ex-partner, as well as with feelings of low self-worth (Afifi & McManus, 2006; Berman, 1985). Others cite trust issues in new relationships due to the negative experiences they had in their previous marriages (Brimhall et al., 2008). Yet many also recognize the post-divorce period as a time of personal growth and find themselves seeking greater independence, relationship skills, and meaning (Brimhall et al., 2008; Gierveld, 2001; Schneller, 2002). For example, Schneller and Arditti (2004) reported from a study on 21 divorcees that divorce often propels individuals into a period of self-discovery and growth. These divorcees sought more egalitarian relationships, worked on conflict management, and enjoyed improved communication. Although research has established the importance of re-partnering to mental health after divorce, there is less research on the experience of dating again, particularly among diverse groups. There is more work to be done in understanding the re-partnering experiences of specific populations. In particular, research is needed to examine dating again among groups whose religious systems strongly discourage divorce, as their post-divorce dating mentality may be heavily influenced by their values.

Schneller's (2002) findings on reactions to divorce suggest that individuals respond differently to divorce based on their religious convictions. Those whose religious systems

strongly advocated against divorce struggled with guilt and confusion following the separation. Another study found that one year after divorce, those who viewed their divorce as a desecrating event struggled with depressive symptoms (Krumrei, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2011). However, those who relied on positive religious coping strategies, such as prayer and forgiveness, experienced greater post-traumatic growth. Research has also explored the preferences of religious people in selecting a dating partner, with findings suggesting that it is a process highly influenced by personal values and that individuals select partners religiously similar to themselves (Stillwell, 2011). Seemingly, there is a religious component to dating again; if examined, it may yield greater insight into how to alleviate post-divorce dating challenges for groups whose religious systems do not condone divorce.

For example, research has begun to examine the experiences of Catholics who divorce and remarry. There are currently 68 million Catholics in the United States, and statistics indicate that 23% of these Catholics have been divorced (Duba & Ponton, 2012). According to Bruzzese (2009), Catholics may feel role conflict as they separate and divorce due to their commitment to their faith. A study of 420 Catholics also found that those who were married scored highest on well-being and those who were divorced scored lowest (Jenks & Christiansen, 2002). In terms of re-entering the dating field, little can be found on Catholics and their specific dating experiences, but scholars have recommended that clinicians working with the remarrying Catholic population must be well-versed in both remarriage literature and Catholic beliefs to wisely guide them (Sauerbeher, Duba, & Ponton, 2013). These scholars thus acknowledge the need for religious and cultural competency in the post-divorce relationship formation process.

Rather than assuming that divorce and dating again are similar processes between religious populations, this research explored these dynamics in a unique and understudied

population, namely the Latter-day Saint (LDS) community. Latter-day Saints, or Mormons as they are more colloquially known, hold beliefs about marriage and divorce that differentiate them from other Christian denominations and the population at large. These beliefs about marriage may introduce a unique set of struggles in the divorce process and the recovery afterwards (Shaw, 1991; Lafkas, 2012). Latter-day Saints believe that marriage, when solemnized in one of the Mormon temples under proper religious authority, is a sacred covenant between not just the two individuals being married, but between the couple and God (Howard, 2003). Members of this church who are “sealed” in LDS temples are married not just for time but also for eternity, an arrangement that is not annulled without petitioning the highest authority in the church, the LDS prophet.

In discussing Mormon beliefs on marriage and family, it is important to differentiate them from similar religious denominations. Mormons, for example, are similar to Catholics in their reverence for marriage. Catholics also believe that a marital union, sanctioned by God, is a bond that men alone cannot break (Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta, n.d ). A catholic divorce may be recognized legally, but is not recognized religiously without a council declaring a “decree of invalidity,” or a statement that the canonical requirements for a valid marriage were never present in the first place, and, as such, the union is invalid (Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta, n.d). It is in this facet that Catholic divorces differ from dissolved Mormon sealings. Dissolving a Mormon sealing is considered failing keeping a covenant with God, while a decree of invalidity from the Catholic Church implies that a divorce may be granted because the marriage was never canonically sanctioned in the first place.

Evidently, the decision to be sealed and married in a Mormon temple is one with great weight and significance to active members of the LDS faith. Statistics would seem to indicate

this as well. While the national divorce rate is reported as 50% (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014), among Latter-day Saint individuals those divorce rates drop significantly. Current divorce rates in the Mormon Church among those who have been married in an LDS temple ceremony are reported as 6% (Lobdell, 2000).

Despite the emotional implications of Mormon beliefs on marriage and divorce, there has not been much emphasis on studying this particular culture. Since its initial organization in 1830, the LDS church has grown from 6 original members to 15 million members worldwide (“2013 Statistical Report”, 2014). However, the research literature on this population in general is still quite limited (Limb et al, 2013). Some researchers suggest that this may be because some Mormon doctrines and beliefs are unusual (Limb et al., 2013). Research on divorce among Latter-day Saints is even more scarce and antiquated. Many of the articles regarding Mormons and divorce date back to the mid-nineteenth and twentieth century.

There are a few studies on divorced Mormons, and the literature portrays a group of individuals attempting to make meaning of their role in a very family-oriented community (Shaw, 1991; Mattson & Scharman, 1994). Preliminary research also suggests that divorced members struggle to maintain chastity outside of marriage, as the LDS faith requires (Shaw 1991). However, recommendations for working with this population have been aimed mainly at LDS therapists (Mattson & Scharman, 1994; Shaw, 1991). There is little discussion on working with the Mormon population clinically in general (Limb et al., 2013), and virtually nothing can be found on working with divorced Latter-day Saints who have returned to dating.

The struggle of LDS divorced individuals has been examined generally in terms of social isolation, struggles of faith, and identity issues (Mattson & Scharman, 1994; Shaw, 1991). However, research is lacking in the area of their efforts to form new relationships, and how those

practices are hindered, if at all, by the knowledge that a previous marriage commitment (meant to last for eternity) has ended. It is important to understand the unique challenges and experiences of a population seeking to establish new relationships in the aftermath of a covenant marriage. As research has established that divorcees in general commonly desire to re-partner after their divorce (Anderson et al., 2004), and relationship issues are often seen in therapists' offices, it is important for clinicians to understand the experience of dating again. This may particularly be true in the case of Mormons, whose beliefs in eternal implications for a temple marriage may complicate the post-divorce experience (Shaw, 1991; Lafkas, 2012).

The present study sought to examine the experience of divorced Mormons that have been sealed in an LDS temple as they begin dating again. The premise of this research was that Mormons potentially experience dating in a way that is unique to their culture and significant for clinicians to understand. Because marriage and family life is so emphasized in the LDS faith, some in this population struggle with the eternal implications of divorce (Lafkas, 2012). Accordingly, and because divorced Mormons are more likely to seek therapy than their LDS counterparts (Shaw, 1991), it is important to give voice to this minority group within the LDS culture. It is possible that their interpretations of their dating experiences may be influenced by the strong emphasis on maintaining a temple marriage in this culture. As such, divorced Mormons may experience challenges associated with that belief; however, it is also possible that Latter-day Saints will also report benefits resulting from their divorces. Understanding their experiences may inform clinicians on how to address issues that Mormons may bring into therapy.

This project also adds to the limited body of research on Mormons. There are currently 15 million members of the Latter-day Saint religion worldwide ("2013 Statistical Report", 2014).

Latter-day Saints make up the fourth largest Christian denomination in the United States (Limb et al. 2013; Lyon, 2013). Yet they are not frequently studied, perhaps for the same reasons this research is vital. Mormons largely seek help from within their religion and have reported skepticism towards the therapeutic profession; past attitudes have particularly chafed against the concept of healing from psychotherapy replacing healing and help from God (Lyon, 2013). However, Mormons are not exempt from mental health struggles and seek services today more than they have historically (Ulrich et al., 2000). The LDS culture has recently begun reframing therapy as a tool that can be used in conjunction with faith (Ulrich et al., 2000). Updated research was thus needed in this area to understand the experience of divorced Mormons in dating in order to provide clinical recommendations for non-LDS therapists working with this population.

The existing literature on post-divorce relationships has approached the subject from a variety of theoretical frameworks. However, the emphasis has been on re-partnering, largely ignoring dating itself. Skew et al. (2009) conceptualized re-partnering from a Life Course theory perspective. Life Course theory examines the timeline of events in a person's life and the historical framework in which they are set and analyzes the connection between the two. According to Skew et al. (2009), Life Course theory is an apt one from which to examine re-partnering, because it takes into account a person's relationship history and trajectory and places it in the context of historical trends. Others approach forming post-dating relationships from a risk analysis and reward perspective, framing it as a process driven by economic and social needs. For example, De Graaf and Kalmijn (2003) suggest that individuals form new relationships to offset the financial burdens and loneliness of divorce.

Because research literature has focused on re-partnering and forming long-term relationships post-divorce (Anderson et al., 2004), beginning to date again is a neglected topic in



literature the literature. What is missing from the research literature is an in-depth picture of what it is like for divorcees to date again. This first step back into the dating world may be stressful for individuals in the wake of an ended romantic relationship. As such, this research explores the experience of dating again using a phenomenological framework. This theoretical framework assumes that examining several individuals' perceptions of life events will yield common truths regarding their experiences, struggles, and coping. As the end goal is to help therapists serve the divorced and dating again LDS population, phenomenology is an apt lens from which to study the experiences of this population.

### **The Present Study**

This qualitative study explored the experience of divorced Latter-day Saints returning to dating after having been “sealed” in an LDS temple ceremony. Data was gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. As this project aimed to understand the experience of dating again after having been sealed in an LDS temple, and as little has been done to research this topic previously, a qualitative approach was ideal for data collection. As Hurst (1987) contends, “the quality of research that is entirely dependent on number crunching is often impoverished – an ounce of insight is worth a mountain of multiple regression.” According to this line of thinking, qualitative research better represented the in-depth experiences of those dating again after divorcing in the LDS church.

### **Methods**

#### **Participants**

For this study, eight Latter-day Saint adult individuals were interviewed regarding their divorce and dating experiences. All participants had been previously married in a Mormon temple ceremony and had been legally divorced at least one year. All participants had kept their

religious temple sealing to the ex-spouse intact and self-identified as being currently active in their religion. Participants also reported having begun to date again; for the purposes of this study, dating was defined as either going on casual dates with others or seeing someone more particularly or exclusively. No participants were engaged or re-married, and none had married more than once.

Participants were recruited via email announcements on LDS listservs in the DC metro area and by word-of-mouth and snowball sampling techniques. The recruitment announcement detailed the study's criteria for participation and gave information regarding the initial phone screening, demographic questionnaire, and the hour-long phone, Skype, or in-person interview. It also advertised the incentive of a \$10 Amazon gift card for all study participants. The demographic questionnaire asked about gender, age, ethnicity, income and education level, number of times the spouse had been married (if more than once), length of most recent marriage, and whether or not the individual had any children from their previous marriage(s). The demographic questionnaire also asked about participants' employment status and relationship status (i.e., single and not dating, going on dates but not in an exclusive relationship, in a committed relationship, engaged, etc.).

Following Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval of this project, recruitment began. Sixteen individuals expressed interest in participating in this study; however, fewer responded to follow-up communication and eight were finally interviewed for this research.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

Informed consent forms were mailed to each participant with a pre-addressed, pre-stamped envelope. Once the informed consent forms were mailed back to the researcher, the researcher set up a formal interview time with each participant. Each participant completed an

approximately one hour in-depth, semi-structured interview with the researcher. Due to the participants' living in various places in the United States, the eight interviews were conducted via telephone and Skype. The interview questions covered the reason for divorce, current romantic relationships, whether participants discussed their prior sealing with new partners, challenges and benefits participants experienced in dating again, what had been helpful to them as they began dating, what they wished family and friends knew, plans for marriage, and whether they would consider non-LDS partners. Although the researcher did not specifically ask if participants had sought therapy, they were asked what advice they felt could possibly benefit a therapist working with this population. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher and a hired transcriber, who had signed a confidentiality agreement. The principal researcher reviewed each transcript for accuracy and took steps to ensure confidentiality throughout, including removing identifying data and deleting all audio following transcription.

### **Analysis**

This data was analyzed according to common themes, in a process Moustakas (1994) calls *horizontalization*. Each transcript was read a minimum of three times. In the first reading the researcher became acquainted with the data. During the second reading, the researcher highlighted key statements and significant themes that seemed to be prevalent. In making these notations, the researcher constantly hunted for statements that uncovered the essence of participants' experiences. These statements were then organized into preliminary "clusters of meaning," which would later become the themes of the study (Cresswell, 2013). During the third and final reading, the researcher adjusted and refined these themes, bearing in mind the tentatively chosen categories and ensuring they accurately portrayed participants' responses. The researcher cited specific interview passages to support descriptions of specific themes, in a

process called *textural description*. At this point, data had been highlighted during a second reading, tentatively organized before the third reading, and adjusted into more specific and refined categories during and after the third reading. These tentative themes and codes were then reviewed with the second researcher, who performed a separate coding of the data to ensure reliability and validity. Together, the researchers further refined the themes and solidified names and representative quotations that accurately conveyed the participants' experiences. Finally, the data was described in a summary that conveyed the essence of the experience for the studied population.

### **Demographics**

Eight total participants were interviewed for this study. Six participants were female and two were male. All participants had been married no more than once and had been divorced for more than a year. The participants' prior marriages had lasted from a range of one year to 23 years, and four of the participants had children from their previous marriages. All of the participants had begun dating again, but seven were only dating casually at the present time. One participant identified as being in an exclusive relationship. All participants were white and their ages ranged from 28 to 55. Two participants had received their associate's degrees, three had completed their bachelor's, one had completed a master's and two had completed some graduate work. Seven of the participants were employed and one participant was a current student. The participants' incomes ranged from 0-\$25,000 to over \$100,000 dollars a year. See Table 1.

Table 1

*Demographics*

	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Ethnicity</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Education</u>	<u>Employment Status</u>	<u>Income</u>	<u>Times Married</u>	<u>Length last marriage</u>	<u>Children past marriage(s)</u>
1	F	White	28	Some graduate	Student	0-\$25,000	1	2.5 yrs	No
2	F	White	39	Associate's	Employed	\$100,000+	1	10 yrs	No
3	F	White	28	Bachelor's	Employed	\$25,000-\$50,000	1	6 yrs	Yes
4	M	White	55	Bachelor's	Employed	\$75,000-\$100,000	1	14 yrs	Yes
5	F	White	37	Associate's	Employed	\$25,000-\$50,000	1	4 yrs	Yes
6	M	White	36	Master's	Employed	\$100,000+	1	5 yrs	No
7	F	White	29	Some graduate	Employed	\$25,000-\$50,000	1	1 yr	No
8	F	White	52	Bachelor's	Employed	\$25,000-\$50,000	1	23 yrs	Yes

**Researcher Characteristics**

The first researcher conducted the interviews. She is a white, Latter-day Saint female. The researcher bracketed out her perceptions of divorced Mormons (according to her anecdotal experience) by compiling bulleted lists of her assumptions regarding their experiences and challenges. The researcher took special note of biases that she had previously acquired based on her anecdotal experience with divorced Mormons and her familiarity with the LDS culture. This bracketing was done before interviewing the participants, prior to the first coding, and after the coding to keep objectivity in analyzing the data and writing the results. The second researcher is an Argentinean with Catholic and Jewish heritage; she has no current religious affiliation.

**Findings**

The analysis of the data showed themes in several areas: The most recurring themes pertained to (a) making sense of divorce, (b) dating after being sealed, (c) finding dating partners, (d) transitioning back to sexual abstinence, (e) singlehood, (f) ideas about remarriage

(g) family's response to divorce and dating, (h) LDS community's response to divorce, (i) personal growth, and (j) seeking therapeutic help.

### **Making Sense of Divorce**

**How could divorce happen to me?** Five participants also described having to make sense of their divorce as they formed new relationships. A common theme among their responses was an inward struggle regarding how their divorces could have occurred in the first place, especially when they had been taught that if they kept the commandments, they would be blessed with a thriving marriage. One woman stated:

...during the divorce I remember feeling so devastated and just thinking, this is, I remember feeling very um, it, it wasn't fair, I wanted to scream foul, like where's the referee, you know, blow your whistle, because I remember thinking I did everything right, like, I got married in the temple, I saved myself for marriage, I, and I remember doing that and looking at this checklist and thinking how is this happening, how is divorce happening to me? (Participant M)

These individuals struggled to make sense of their divorces in context of their religious schemas.

### **Dating After Being Sealed**

**"Dating feels like cheating."** Four of the eight participants indicated some level of distress over being still sealed religiously to their prior partners. Two of these participants went so far as to state that dating again while still sealed to their ex-spouses felt like infidelity.

When I first started dating...I felt very like I was being unfaithful, kind of like, like I was cheating on my former – because just like, the covenants that we made are like just how, like, I don't know, how deep that loving relationship was, and then like choosing to date

someone else, like it just, it felt like I was being unfaithful. That was the really hard to, to come, hard to deal with (Participant K).

Another woman shared:

I felt like as I sat across from him when we were sitting down at the dinner table, and I, I felt like I was cheating on my husband. I still had that internal like, I'm married (Participant J).

**Discomfort being connected to prior spouse.** Two other individuals expressed discomfort with the idea of still being connected to their ex-spouse religiously. One woman shared the following:

I do remember thinking like, I don't like that thought of being bound to him...I remember when I was putting in my genealogy it still had me sealed to him and it had his name and it brought up all these emotions like oh, get him off, like I, he's not with me he doesn't own me...so I remember this, I was like I can't progress in this until we get his name off (Participant M).

A man also detailed how he was confused about how the future state of his relationships in the eternities, as he was dating again but still sealed to his ex-wife:

I've been spending some time with a girl that I like...but it's got me thinking about, well, you know, hypothetically, if like, if that was going to, if we were going to start dating, and if we were going to get married, how the heck would that work, because she's sealed to her spouse and I'm sealed to my spouse, you know I, I have some understanding doctrinally about how that works but it's still, there's still some confusion, so (Participant D).

The participants noted varying reasons for their discomfort while still being sealed. Some cited feeling like they were being unfaithful and others strongly disliked being linked to an ex-spouse for more personal reasons. Four of the participants cited these factors as causing some discomfort in their dating process.

### **Finding Dating Partners**

**Limited availability of LDS dating partners for women.** Five of the six female participants noted the difficulty of finding single Latter-day Saint partners to date. They reported discouragement at the uneven ratio of men and women. One woman described a typical situation socializing as a single, divorced female in the LDS church:

I don't have a statistic to back this, but there's probably about five girls to every guy, and this is in [place] LDS. So there's just not that many. And you'll just find, I know a lot of really good women and not that many really good men...that would be a struggle is, I would love to meet and marry someone that's LDS but there are so many more women than men and that's a hard thing (Participant B).

A dominant theme among women was the challenge of finding available LDS men. However, female participants under thirty stated that they felt there was hope and opportunity to date LDS individuals like themselves. Latter-day Saint women over thirty reported more discouragement and less selection of desirable partners than they would like.



**Men not finding attractive LDS partners.** Both men in this study reported difficulty finding partners that were attractive to them. One even suggested that LDS women were less in shape than single non-LDS women. He expressed that he had difficulty feeling physically attracted to the LDS women he did meet:

...you know that is sad to me that practically all of them that I have run across are, are just physically unattractive to me, so anyway that was another reason why just recently in the past few months I was more openly....investigating the possibility of you know, dating outside of the church because you know if you, you are not LDS then it seems like they, most of the single women are, more place more of an emphasis on exercise and um, anyhow they are more in shape...(Participant A)

Both genders thus indicated dissatisfaction with the number of desirable partners, whether for reasons of physical attraction and compatibility or an uneven ratio in the dating pool.

### **Challenge of Transitioning Back to Sexual Abstinence**

Four of the eight participants described returning to a chaste lifestyle after their divorce as being a current struggle in dating. One woman noted the difficulty of keeping the LDS covenant to be sexually chaste outside of marriage after enjoying sex in her married life:

...it's the fact that you were married, there are certain things that you are used to feeling and doing and getting used to that situation, so being back in a dating situation if you start to have feelings for that person it's a very much challenge to keep, well to keep you covenants secure and in place because, you are, your mind and body and everything is very much willing to be like, well let's go back to what you were doing when you were, you were married (Participant J).

Similarly, another woman shared her struggle in dating again as a single Mormon after being sexually active in her marriage:

...the whole sex thing. Well you, you know you've been married and you've had sex and it's okay and your body wants it and now you...well, you take temple covenants you can't just do that. It's, it's uh, it's a really really hard thing that takes a lot of self-control (Participant B).

**Refusing sex when dating non-members.** One female participant also indicated that she had experienced frustration in her relationships with non-member men because she was unwilling to have sex with them outside of marriage:

It becomes problematic when I was dating outside the church because even now I'm very up front with my beliefs and where I'm at in relationships, saying listen I don't have sex outside of marriage, it's not going to happen...but when you date for three or four months them understanding that, they understand it like I think on a cerebral level, but in practicality they're like, well if we're dating, I expect different things, so it got to where I was kind of conflicted...(Participant M)

Evidently the principle of chastity is a challenge for LDS divorcees returning to abstinence after enjoying a full expression of sexuality in their marriages, whether dating LDS members or people outside of the faith.

### **Singlehood**

**Appreciating singlehood despite desire to remarry.** Each of the participants expressed a desire to remarry, but five also indicated that they had grown to like aspects of their singleness. One man described how he had been able to get a master's degree and advance his career. He further stated:

I have an appreciation now for, and this probably sounds bad but, my life as a single, like, that you're able to, you know cultivate friendships with so many different people who've come from different walks of life and have different experiences...I do still want, very much want to get married and want to be in a relationships and, and want to have a family but at the same time I'm also very content, I guess, just where I am today, you know, as a single, and so, yeah (Participant I).

**Feeling guilty about enjoying singlehood.** Three participants also described feeling slightly guilty at appreciating their singlehood because of their faith's focus on marriage and family. One woman described turning down dating opportunities and feeling conflicted as she did so:

...and I felt really guilty because I know there's so much emphasis in our culture to date, and to, towards marriage...and I didn't want to feel like the dating exception, I guess.  
(Participant K).

### **Ideas about Remarriage**

**Desiring the ideal LDS temple sealing but considering compromise.** Each participant desired to be remarried in an LDS temple sealing ceremony. However, some participants were skeptical that this was a probability for them due to the limited availability of partners or other personal factors. A common question among participants was whether or not they should date outside of their faith in order to find a partner. One woman expressed her dilemma between

satisfying her desire to date and potentially remarrying in the temple:

Do I, do I settle for somebody because I don't want to be alone and then, and another struggle or...like I don't want to, I mean, I would want to marry someone that's LDS and marry in the temple, I just don't see it, and I'm living in \*place\*...I haven't limited myself to only date people who are active LDS. I would prefer to, but then I wouldn't date as much (Participant B).

Six of the eight participants had considered dating outside of their faith in order to have more dating experiences. One male stated that he was tired of the LDS dating scene and was even considering marrying outside of his faith:

I wanted a second temple marriage and now...I struggle with that, with my feelings of, you know it's just fighting, I would describe it as just fighting the loneliness. I struggle with, you know compromising that, well maybe I don't have to, you know be married in the temple but I put, I don't know I still have those sealing blessings towards, you know my sealing hasn't been canceled...so it's, you know I don't feel pressured I guess to by myself to be sealed again (Participant A).

This man felt that his intact sealing provided him with the needed religious promises in the next life and that he could potentially compromise on his second marriage in order to have companionship for his final years. All participants stated that their ideal was an LDS temple marriage, but the majority of participants had at some point considered dating or marrying outside the faith in order to not be alone.

### **Response of Family**

Participant responses were mixed regarding family support. All but one participant came from an LDS family. Some participants felt their families were very supportive of their divorce

and dating, while others felt family members simply were unsure how to help through that difficult transition.

**Difficulty accepting dating outside of faith.** In terms of dating again, several participants stated that they did not share much with their families regarding their current dating, citing either a lack of closeness or simply a preference to keep that information private. Two participants indicated that family members had questioned their decision to date outside of their faith. One female participant described her family's response as follows:

They probably had the harder time with me dating outside the church, my mom in particular. She's, my, my family's very loving and supportive but my mom was like, are you sure this a route you want to go, have you really thought it through, and I support you and love you but are you okay doing this? But for the most part they're very supportive (Participant M).

**Lack of experience from family regarding divorce.** Two participants described feeling that family members did not know how to support them, as their divorces were the first in their family circle. One woman even felt her divorce was a "tarnish" on her family. Another woman shared:

That's the first divorce of our whole family. And I think, I think that, it was hard, it was hard and my mother didn't understand, I had to go home and live with my parents, because I needed help raising my son. And I think there were times when she didn't understand why I was down (Participant J).

Most believed their families were supportive, but four participants noted that their families did not know how to best support them in their divorce or dating simply because of their lack of experience with divorce.

## **Response of Community**

**Feeling out of place after divorce.** Three participants shared that being divorced in a religious community which emphasizes eternal families made them feel somewhat isolated. One man described the following:

I am just going to church on Sunday and well mostly sitting, well I'm practically always sitting there in a pew by myself and I just don't feel supported at all...(Participant A)

One woman, a single mom with children, also indicated that while her religious community was welcoming, there was an element of "otherness" to her situation.

I never feel like a project and so I feel like it's a really good balance of things like that but there's definitely an element of, okay you're the single mom...Yeah it's still just not quite the same as those families that are all intact, like...Yeah. I know that nobody really does it on purpose, but it's just, it's just there a little bit...(Participant F)

Two of these three participants noted that whether or not they felt supported by their religious community had varied depending on where they had lived. All three expressed feeling on the outside of the main hub of the community at certain points in their single-again life.

## **Personal Growth**

**Decreased judgment of others in dating.** Four participants shared that they were much more empathetic and understanding of others in dating because of their divorce experience and the personal and spiritual growth that followed. One woman stated that she was less judgmental of those who were divorced. Another stated:

I know I've become even more sympathetic and empathetic towards situations...as for meeting new people um I've definitely become more non, non-judgmental. I never felt

like I was a judgmental person before but now I look back and I see how I would automatically assume certain things (Participant J).

**Desire to forgive and move forward.** Three participants also indicated a strong desire to forgive past events and move forward in their dating with faith. One woman described her resolve not to let past events poison her dating experiences in the future:

...I don't want to hate men because of this experience, and I don't want to think men are cheaters because of this experience. And I really remember thinking, I'm not going to blame or hold any man accountable to what happened to me (Participant M).

Seemingly, some divorced Mormons are able to process past events and seek to form new relationships with positive energy.

**Spiritual growth.** Several of the participants also described experiencing spiritual growth and drawing closer to their deity. They felt comfort in this process and even suggested a shift in their schema regarding how to have a successful life. For example, one woman stated:

...as I get older and date more like I...of course I've been scared of being married again...but I think it helps me to know that our agency comes in and like the, like, we have power to create happiness in our lives and in our relationships. And that kind of makes me less scared...(Participant L).

A few participants were thus in the process of reframing their dating experiences as being more within their power because of the spiritual understanding they had gained post-divorce.

### **Seeking Therapeutic Help**

**Therapy as a helpful resource.** Although the interviewer did not explicitly ask about experiences in therapy, all but one participant shared that they had sought counseling services after their divorce. A common theme was participants' recognition that they needed to work on

themselves in a deeper fashion. For example, one man stated:

I see a therapist regularly, at least once a month if not twice a month...I'm still working through kind of trying to address the underlying emotions. I guess it's thing like fear of commitment, fear of rejection, fear of abandonment, you know what I mean, all those things...(Participant I)

Another woman expressed the importance of having a neutral sounding board outside of her family system.

You need somebody who that, you can go to so you can vent, so you can say your frustrations, so you can break down emotionally and spiritually in front of them and they will not judge you, they will not, and they will not give you an answer back because guess what, sometimes you don't need an answer, you just need to get it off your chest and you just need to let someone know, I'm having a bad day and it is, that is what is okay (Participant J).

Seven of the eight participants advocated for therapy and described benefiting from that process. However, not all participants reported positive experiences. One female stated that her therapist had pushed against her belief system, questioning why she actually wanted to be with her faith. Another participant doubted that a non-LDS therapist would have been able to understand her particular challenges, as the issues a Mormon divorcee works through are heavily influenced by religious values. In general however, participants reported appreciating therapy and recommended it as one works through a divorce and begins dating again.

### **Discussion**

Mormons hold beliefs about marriage and the eternal nature of family relationships that set them apart from other denominations (Limb et al, 2013); they believe marriage is a sacred



and eternal covenant with the other person and with God (Howard, 2003). Mormon doctrine teaches the need to live up to all covenants, and that not doing so will hold the individual accountable before God (Howard, 2003). In light of these beliefs, this study sought to understand the experience of Latter-day Saint divorced individuals that returned to dating after having been sealed in an LDS temple. Eight individuals that identified themselves as active LDS members were interviewed. Themes emerged in the following areas: (a) making sense of being divorced, (b) dating after being sealed, (c) finding partners, (d) transitioning back to sexual abstinence, (e) singlehood, (f) ideas about remarriage, (g) the response of family, (h) the response of community, (i) and seeking therapeutic help.

In making sense of divorce, a theme of “how could this happen to me?” was observed. Many participants described feeling shocked and distressed that their divorce had occurred. It appeared to be a spiritually incongruous event for them, with several stating that they had never even imagined divorce to be a possibility for them because they had, in their understanding, tried their hardest to do everything right. Individuals cited partners’ affairs, intimacy issues, financial difficulties, unresolved personal issues, and partner abandonment as the reasons for divorce. Most expressed bewilderment that these events had happened to them. When a Latter-day Saint experiences divorce after having carefully followed the cultural formula for a happy LDS marriage, they may be severely conflicted both spiritually and emotionally. This finding is reminiscent of Lafkas’ (2012) assertion that emerging self-authoring Latter-day Saints may experience tension between their beliefs and life events, although that research examined experiences with parental and not personal divorce. In this case, some participants described feeling that it was unfair divorce had happened to them when they had done everything they

were supposed to do. Reconciling beliefs and life circumstances in the aftermath of a divorce is thus a process that may take additional time for Latter-day Saints.

Regarding dating after having been sealed, two themes emerged. Firstly, a few participants appeared to draw comfort from their intact temple sealings. They described still having the blessings of a sealing in eternity, and even suggested that they were comfortable expanding their dating pool to non-members as a result. However, others reported the intact sealing being a source of discomfort throughout the dating process. The unique doctrine of a temple sealing made some participants feel that they were being unfaithful to prior spouses in dating again, although there was no legal obligation to the ex-partner. One even felt unable to progress while still eternally attached to her ex-spouse. Getting a temple sealing revoked is often a lengthy process and has eternal spiritual implications; however, it appears having an intact temple sealing causes some divorced Mormons distress as they try to progress in their personal lives. This distress may hinder that person's ability to form a new, fulfilling relationship until their schema around that circumstance is altered or their sealing status changed.

Regarding finding partners, two themes emerged. First was the difficulty of finding LDS partners for divorced Mormon women. All participants, male and female, were faithful in their religion and reported a desire to date and remarry within their faith. Strictly adhering to this ideal limited dating prospects to those actively participating in their religion. Six of the eight participants felt discouragement at the lack of available dating partners, and some reported doubting at times whether they would be able to find a suitable partner for remarriage. Women in particular felt that the high ratio of women to men made it difficult or even improbable to date a desirable LDS partner. Interestingly, those over 30 expressed greater discouragement with the number of available partners than those under 30. This is consistent with Goodman and Heaton's

(1986) statistic that for every 100 active LDS women over 30 in the church, there are only 19 active LDS men. A second theme emerged for men; in contrast, they felt that among their dating options there were few that they found physically attractive or compatible with them. The lack of available partners can be discouraging to divorced Latter-day Saints, and seemingly that phenomenon worsens with age.

In the area of transitioning back to sexual abstinence, another challenging aspect of dating was revealed. Half of the responders shared that maintaining their religious covenant to be sexually abstinent outside of marriage was difficult after they divorced and could no longer enjoy intimacy. Chastity is a central commandment for Latter-day Saints, and Mormons believe that breaking this covenant brings spiritual consequences (Bednar, 2013). Participants felt it was a great challenge in dating to keep themselves in check when their bodies so naturally wanted to return to intimacy. This finding supports Shaw's (1985) research that sexual issues are one of the primary struggles for Latter-day Saints who divorce. Shaw (1991) further indicated that some divorced Mormons may slip into a range of sexual behaviors, from masturbation to intercourse. However, any of these sexual behaviors is not supported outside of marriage by the church, and Shaw (1991) suggested that these actions bring further guilt for the divorced Mormon. The loss of a fulfilling sexual life in addition to grappling with the temptation to engage sexually again can be a difficult road to navigate for this minority group in the LDS culture.

Participants also described unexpected benefits of their single-again status. Some were able to receive further education and advance in their careers. Others appreciated the opportunity to form relationships with outstanding people from every walk of life and cultivate new friendships. Though all continued to express a firm belief in the importance of marriage, many described knowing themselves better and coming to a content place with their singlehood. This

finding is reminiscent of Schneller and Arditti's (2004) research on the post-divorce growth many individuals experience. However, some also felt guilty about enjoying their singlehood in light of their faith's strong emphasis on marriage and family. A Mormon's enjoyment of singlehood may thus be complex, with mixed convictions that marriage is the right path but also enjoying their current status.

In planning for remarriage, the theme of desiring the LDS ideal but considering compromise was observed. Some participants over time had become more comfortable being open to partners outside their religion. Interestingly, those under 30 felt more hope that they could re-partner with an active LDS person. All participants over 30 had at some point considered dating and marrying outside of their faith in order to prevent permanent singlehood. All of the participants affirmed that a second LDS temple marriage was their ideal goal and were committed to working towards it if possible. Yet, for those over 30, the possibility that they might not be able to partner within the church seemed to be a prevalent concern. LDS divorcees may thus consider compromising on at least dating non-LDS individuals to enjoy present companionship, with some considering marrying outside of the faith.

As regards the response of family, two themes emerged: firstly, family members struggled with participants' dating outside of the faith, and secondly, some family members were unsure how to support the individual post-divorce. It should be noted that dating and marrying outside of the faith may challenge family and friends in the LDS culture. The active LDS community is generally very tight-knit, and members subscribe to a standardized set of values and teachings (Loser et al., 2008). In the LDS culture, marriage in an LDS temple is a widely understood and valued ideal. While participants largely described family and friends as being supportive in their process, two reported that their families had concerns about their dating

outside of the faith. Those who date outside the religion may thus feel torn between satisfying their longing for companionship and upholding the values and norms of their belief system. This is consistent with Lafkas' (2012) findings that Mormons who align with the core teachings of their faith can experience complex feelings regarding their doctrine in the face of divorce. For a Latter-day Saint who supports all the values of mainstream Mormonism, grappling with the desire not to be alone and the fact of a reduced dating pool may add an additional layer of stress to the divorce and dating process.

Others shared that they felt their families did not really know how to help them after their divorces because divorce is not something Latter-day Saints typically encounter. This view is consistent with Lobdell's (2000) statistic that only 6% of LDS people married in an LDS temple will divorce. While nearly all of the participants indicated their families were loving and supportive, some did report feeling like their families were not able to fully understand their post-divorce challenges. The rarity of divorce in this culture does present an element of crash-course learning for families of divorced LDS church members.

In terms of community response, the theme of feeling out of place after divorce emerged. Most felt that their church leaders and congregations were very supportive and compassionate. However, one man felt socially isolated in his ward. In general, responses of community members were described as loving and supportive; however, several participants noted a sense of "otherness" that they felt as they interacted with other church members, since their family situation did not fit the ideal. Shaw (1991) remarked that divorced members of the Mormon church do not have the "status of the widowed" nor the "purity of the unmarried." The findings of this study support prior research in that participants often described feeling on the outskirts of the community. Some felt that others just simply did not know "what to do with

them,” since divorce is still rare in the LDS church. These findings also support Mattson and Scharman’s (1994) research on divorced Mormons and the mix of positive and negative experiences they reported in returning to LDS congregations.

Strong themes of personal and spiritual growth were observed throughout the data. Participants described feeling less judgmental of others who divorced, recognizing that in the past they had assumed negative thinking about those who ended their marriages. Participants seemed overall more willing to attribute divorce to events outside of their control, such as a spouse’s affair. Some also sought to forgive prior spouses and wanted to move forward with openness to new partners. This research is reminiscent of Schneller and Arditti’s (2004) findings that the post-divorce period can be one of great personal growth. This particular study observed among a few participants a theme of seeking to let go of the past and move forward with hope and a willingness to invest in new relationships. Divorced Mormons thus report varied experiences in post-divorce dating; for some the transition was fraught with challenges, and others cited it as a period of discovery. Interestingly, the majority of those who expressed positive self-discovery in forming new relationships also reported seeking out counseling.

Although the interviewer did not ask about participants’ own experiences in therapy, a theme of seeking therapy as a helpful resource was observed. Seven of the eight participants voluntarily shared that they had sought out counseling services to cope with their divorce. Latter-day saints are somewhat averse to therapy; they generally seek support from within their religion should difficulties arise (Ulrich et al., 2000). However, this finding supports Shaw’s (1991) research that divorced Mormons are the segment of this population most likely to seek therapeutic help. Most participants reported positive experiences in therapy and felt that counseling had helped them know themselves better and become stronger. One participant

reported a negative experience where a therapist had pressured her against her faith. Limb et al. (2013) suggested that many find Mormon beliefs odd, and participants in this study seemed to feel this as they worried if a non-LDS therapist would fully understand the deep influence of their religion on every aspect of their life and thinking.

While not a dominant theme among the findings, it should be noted that participants with children also described navigating loyalties between their children and their new partners and the need to have clear boundaries between the two. Participants also expressed confusion regarding what the arrangement of what their sealing arrangement would be if children were involved. These findings are consistent with prior research on confusion regarding sealing arrangements in Mormon families after divorce (Lafkas, 2012), and future research should establish whether this factor influences dating.

Overall, dating again as a divorced Mormon appears to offer individuals challenges and benefits unique to their culture. Findings suggest that Latter-day Saints over 30 struggle to find appealing partners and may consider dating and marrying outside of their religion. These individuals may experience mixed responses to that decision from family members. Participants had varied feelings regarding their ongoing temple sealings, with some drawing comfort from them and others feeling they were a barrier to their personal progress. Additionally, findings support prior research that LDS divorcees struggle with keeping their covenant to be chaste as they return to dating. Consistent with prior findings, some participants also reported difficulty finding their role as a single person in a church that so promotes eternal families. However, some Latter-day Saint divorcees enjoy the independence and opportunities of singlehood, despite continued belief in the importance of marriage. Finally, while the general belief is that Mormons

do not seek therapy as a resource, participants reported a strong belief in seeking therapeutic help, suggesting that their struggles merited clinical as well as religious assistance.

### **Limitations**

This qualitative study interviewed eight individuals who voluntarily responded to a recruitment ad in the DC metro area. Though some participants lived in other places throughout the country, a major percentage were tied to the DC metro area; hence, results may not be generalizable to the entire United States. In addition, these participants self-referred and may have already had an interest in sharing their thoughts on dating as a divorced LDS person based on their past experiences. This study also interviewed only Latter-day Saints who considered themselves to be active and fully participating members of the Mormon Church, and does not represent those who are actively debating whether or not to be faithful to their religion. In addition, the viewpoints of only two males are represented here, and so further research is needed to fully glean their perspectives on dating after divorce. Finally, while measures to keep objectivity were practiced throughout the whole course of this research, it must be acknowledged that the primary researcher is LDS and that the researcher's comfort in probing deeper for struggles associated with doctrine may have been impacted as a result. Those who took part in this study may have limited what they shared because the researcher is also LDS. For example, if any participants felt distress over their religion's teachings, they may not have felt comfortable expressing it. Also, because the researcher is single and has never married, it is possible that participants felt the researcher could not relate to certain aspects of their experience. However, the majority of participants thanked the researcher for taking the time to hear their stories; they expressed gratitude that someone was taking interest in their segment of the LDS church, indicating that this is a group that strongly desires to be heard and validated.



### **Clinical Implications**

These research findings provide insight to therapists, in particular those who are not LDS, in working with this population. First, this research suggests that the experience of dating again for LDS individuals divorcing after a temple sealing offers challenges but also opportunities. LDS clients may feel stress over the limited number of partners and debate whether or not they should date outside the faith to avoid singlehood. While this is an individual choice, therapy can provide a space for individuals to process what they are willing or unwilling to compromise. Despite subscribing to the ideal of marrying, some divorced Mormons may also feel liberated in their newly single state and enjoy singlehood. Therapists could serve clients by normalizing this dilemma for participants caught between enjoying singlehood and marrying again.

Therapists can also help LDS clients process the feeling of cheating on their former spouse in dating again and normalize the distress that may come as a result of divorce in light of LDS teachings on marriage. In order to respectfully advise these clients, clinicians must be well-acquainted with Latter-day Saint teachings. A therapist who does not fully grasp the depth of Latter-day Saints convictions regarding a marriage that has been sealed in an LDS temple may not be able to empathize with a client navigating those post-divorce feelings. For Latter-day Saint clients struggling to make meaning of their single and dating-again status, therapists can reframe this period as a time of growth. Indeed, some Mormons do feel that the single-again period is enjoyable and a period of academic, social and employment opportunities.

Therapists can also access the strengths of divorced Mormons, highlighting the personal and spiritual growth individuals have attained as a result of their experiences. The post-divorce experience for a dating again Mormon may be smoothed by a clinician who reframes a potentially shameful event for an active Latter-day Saint as a catalyst for personal growth. As

some divorced Mormons report a motivation to forgive and move forward in building new relationships, clinicians may capitalize on this feeling to help divorced individuals successfully navigate the post-divorce dating field.

As active Latter-day Saints will likely have strong commitments to their belief systems, non-LDS therapists would do well not to pressure against those values even if they appear to be causing the client internal conflict. For example, if participants describe having challenges keeping their covenant of chastity, clinicians ought to respect their sexual values and help the client with their agenda of keeping them, rather than suggesting an alternative mindset course. Rather, the therapist could assist a client in achieving peace and a fresh perspective of their current situation. As the experience of divorced Mormons is unique and, to the researcher's knowledge, no support groups exist to serve this specific population, it would also be helpful to put in place a regular gathering where divorced Mormons could feel safe expressing the feelings connected with this new phase of their lives.

### **Future Research**

Because the LDS population is so seldom studied, it is recommended that future studies examine Mormons in general and the issues that they might bring to a therapist for help. It is suggested that divorced Mormons continue to be studied and that their efforts to re-partner be supported with good clinical study. A helpful format may be to hold several follow-up interviews with participants, thus establishing a relationship and a safe space in which the individuals could disclose the reality of their experiences. Because participants in this study indicated that the interviews had helped them, it is likely that they would desire to share more in future interviews. Future research could also include the difference of Mormons dating again with children versus those who were sealed but did not start a family. It may also be beneficial to examine if the

events driving the divorce influences a person's experience in re-partnering; for example, a person who initiated a divorce due to a partner's affair may be more willing to date than someone who was abandoned by a partner. Finally, as this study interviewed only two men, it is recommended that additional research examine gender differences in Latter-day Saints' dating after a divorce.

### **Conclusion**

This qualitative study examined the experience of divorced Mormons dating again and found that it is a process wrought with many considerations of faith, family and community. Participants were generally discouraged regarding the number of available partners, and several considered compromising their ideal of a temple marriage in order to not being alone. Divorced Mormons struggle with keeping chaste in dating, and some feel discomfort still being attached to their ex-partner as they form new relationships. Some also described feeling isolated in a church that promotes intact nuclear families. While many felt their families were supportive, some reported that their families did not know how to help them in their divorce and dating again. This research also uniquely gives voice to the population that enjoys being single again within the LDS church. Finally, a theme of seeking out therapy was discovered, suggesting that despite the stigma in the LDS church regarding seeking counseling, the struggles a divorced Mormon experiences may often warrant additional clinical assistance.

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## Appendix A

### Research Informed Consent Form

#### **Project Title: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Experience of Divorced Latter-day Saints in Dating**

#### **Researchers:**

Melinda Cummings, M.S. Candidate, Department of Human Development, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Mariana Falconier, Ph.D., Professor, Department of Human Development, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

#### **What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of returning to dating for divorced Latter-day Saints. This study will focus on religiously active Latter-day Saints who have been sealed in an LDS temple and have been divorced for at least one year (without revoking their temple sealing), who are 18 years of age or older, are currently in an exclusive relationship, and who live in the United States.

#### **What will be asked of me?**

You will be asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire collecting basic information such as age, ethnicity, level of education, etc. You will then be asked to participate in an approximately one-hour interview with the primary researcher (Melinda Cummings). These interview questions are aimed at understanding what it is like to be a divorced Mormon re-entering the dating world.

#### **What will be done with my interview data?**

The interviews will be recorded and transcribed by the primary researcher and a hired research assistant. The research assistant has signed a confidentiality agreement and will not disclose any interview data or your personal contact information with anyone at any time. The data from these interviews will be analyzed in the hope of helping researchers and clinicians better understand how best to support this population. Following the transcription of the data, all audio records will be erased.

#### **Will my information be kept private?**

Yes. All identifying information will be removed from the interview accounts during analysis and pseudonyms will be assigned for all participants. Should we need to get in contact with you, paperwork containing your private contact information will be kept in a locked file box to which only the primary researcher has the combination.

**Are there any risks to participating?**

There are minimal risks involved in this research. These risks include possible personal discomfort as you share your personal experiences with the researcher. However, you are free to decline answering any question you do not wish to and may withdraw from the study at any point.

**Are there any benefits to participating?**

You may feel a sense of personal satisfaction at helping add to the body of knowledge on Latter-day Saints, and divorced Mormons in particular. Your participation may help clinicians and LDS clergy know better how to support this population as they establish new relationships.

**Will I be compensated for my participation?**

There will be no compensation for your participation other than the researcher's gratitude for your involvement.

**Can I withdraw at any time from this study?**

Yes, you are free to withdraw at any point during the study. You may also choose not to answer any question that may make you feel uncomfortable.

**Approval of research project:**

This project has been approved by the Institutional Review Board Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

If you have any further questions regarding this research project, please contact any of the following:

Melinda Cummings, Principal Researcher  
571-274-0093, [melcumings7@gmail.com](mailto:melcumings7@gmail.com)

Dr. Mariana Falconier, Principal Investigator  
703-538-8461, [marianak@vt.edu](mailto:marianak@vt.edu)

If you have any questions about your rights as a human participant in this research project, please contact the chair of the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board.

David M. Moore, Virginia Tech IRB Chair  
540-231-4991, [moored@vt.edu](mailto:moored@vt.edu)

**Participant Permission**

I have read the above informed consent form and voluntarily agree to participate in this research project. I understand that all of my personal identifying information will be kept confidential by the above listed research team. I also understand that my participation is completely voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time from this study. My signature below signifies that I am familiar with and agree to the procedures of this research project.

**Participant Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

**Recruitment Email****Mormon? Divorced? Dating? Please Read.**

Hello! My name is Melinda Cummings, and I am a master's student at Virginia Tech, studying Human Development with an emphasis in Marriage and Family Studies. For my thesis, I will be researching the experience of divorced Latter-day Saints as they begin dating again.

**Are you a divorced Latter-day Saint who has re-entered the dating world? If so, please consider participating in a study of the experience of divorced Mormons as they form new dating relationships.**

You are eligible to participate if you:

- Are at least 18 years of age
- Live in the United States
- Consider yourself an active member of the LDS church
- Have been legally divorced at least one year and have not yet re-married
- Were sealed in an LDS temple but have not had your sealing revoked
- Have begun either seriously or casually dating again

What do I need to do for this study?

- Participate in a brief (less than 10 minute) telephone screening
- Complete a demographic questionnaire
- Participate in an approximately one-hour interview with the researcher via telephone, Skype, or in-person. During the interview, you will be asked questions about your experience of dating again as a divorced Latter-day Saint. If in-person, the interview will be performed in a neutral location convenient for you.

Participants will receive a \$10 Amazon gift card as a thank you for their participation.

If you are interested in participating or know of someone else who would be eligible for this study, please contact me at [melcummins7@gmail.com](mailto:melcummins7@gmail.com).

Thank you!



Appendix C

**Hired Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to keep all research participant information confidential in the *Phenomenological Exploration of the Experience of Divorced Latter-day Saints in Dating* project. I will not discuss participant-related information with any individuals outside of the research team for this project, and I will not disclose any details or information learned during transcription of the research interviews to any other individual at any time.

My signature below signifies that I have read and understand the above confidentiality agreement.

Printed name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

**Demographic Questionnaire**

Please fill out the questionnaire below as accurately as you are able. If you are uncomfortable answering any of the below questions, you may leave that question or questions blank.

1. What is your gender?
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  
2. What is your ethnicity? Please circle all that apply.
  - a. White
  - b. Hispanic or Latino
  - c. Black or African American
  - d. Native American or American Indian
  - e. Asian or Pacific Islander
  - f. Other (please indicate) \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. What is the highest level of education you have attained?
  - a. High school diploma or GED
  - b. Some college
  - c. Technical or Associate's degree
  - d. Bachelor's degree
  - e. Some graduate work
  - f. Master's degree
  - g. Doctoral degree
  
5. What is your relationship status?
  - a. Single and not dating
  - b. Going on dates but not in an exclusive relationship
  - c. In an exclusive committed relationship
  - d. Engaged
  
6. What is your employment status?
  - a. Student
  - b. Self-employed
  - c. Employed
  - d. Out of work and looking for work

- e. Out of work and not looking for work
- f. Military
- g. Retired
- h. Unable to work

7. What is your annual income?

- a. Between \$0 –25,000
- b. Between \$25,000-50,000
- c. Between \$50,000-75,000
- d. Between \$75,000-100,000
- e. Above \$100,000

8. Have you been married more than once? If so, how many times?

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9. How long were you and your most spouse married before divorcing? (If you have been married more than once, indicate the length of your most recent marriage).

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10. Do you have children from your previous marriage or marriages?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Unknown

## Appendix E

**Phone Screening Script**

A Phenomenological Exploration of the Experience of Divorced Latter-day Saints in Dating

Participant ID Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Hello, my name is Melinda Cummings, and I am conducting a study of the experience of divorced Latter-day Saints as they begin dating again for my master's thesis at Virginia Tech. The purpose of this study is to understand what it is like for a divorced Latter-day Saint to be dating again and what can best be done to support them in this process. May I ask you a few questions to see if you are eligible for this study?

1. Are you over 18 years old?
2. Do you consider yourself a currently practicing member of the LDS faith?
3. When you were married, were you sealed in an LDS temple?
4. Were you then legally divorced?
5. Have you kept your religious temple sealing intact (that is to say, it has not been dissolved?)
6. How long has it been since you legally divorced?
7. Are you currently dating again? This can be either going on occasional dates or being in an exclusive relationship with someone.

Thank you!