

UNIVERSITY OF DERBY

FEMALE PERCEPTION OF THE ANNULMENT  
OF MARRIAGE IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.

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## Abstract

If one accesses the website of the Association of Separated and Divorced Catholics (ASDC) and selects the “annulment” tab it reads: *“We are building up this page as quickly as possible. Because the annulment process attracts such very wide interest we are placing information about it on the website as soon as possible and updating it as we put more information together”* (<http://www.asdcengland.org.uk>. Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> March 2010).

This study is current and it is unique in examining the relationship between divorced female Catholics and the Catholic Marriage Annulment Process in England and Wales. A divorced female Catholic wishing to remarry in the Catholic Church must apply for a Marriage Annulment from her local Catholic Marriage Tribunal. The Marriage Tribunal examines the Petitioners previous marriage through interviews and witness statements to see if there are grounds for granting an Annulment. A successful ruling for the Petitioner is not always guaranteed.

Through professional practice and previous research (Masters Paper, Derby, 2002) the author is able to evidence that the Annulment Process is lacking in certain areas of professionalism and continuity and in the provision of appropriate emotional care for female Catholic petitioners. The author will recommend the need for a review with regard to how the Catholic Marriage Tribunals in England and Wales currently operate (2010).

This thesis examines issues concerning female perception of Catholic marriage and their perception of the Catholic Church and clergy. The thesis will highlight issues that will improve Marriage Tribunal practice such as: improved communication, the need for a more transparent approach to the Annulment Process and appropriate

training for Tribunal staff and volunteers. It will recommend the implementation of acceptable structures for improved emotional care and support of female Petitioners.

The research methodology is qualitative and triangulation was used throughout the study to validate material. The research tools include the following:

- A thorough literature search with regard to: the Catholic Annulment Process, Catholic teaching on marriage, the Catholic Church as an institution and the perception of Catholic clergy.
- Two semi -structured questionnaires to forty six female Catholics of varying ages, inviting their comments and reflections as to how they perceive their role within the Catholic Church and their understanding of marriage in the Catholic Church.
- A comprehensive questionnaire to the twenty-two Catholic Marriage Tribunals of England and Wales to ascertain their current way of operating.
- A questionnaire given to seven Tribunal Auditors (volunteer statement takers) asking for comment on the responses given by the Marriage Tribunals.
- Five semi - structured interviews with female Catholics who have experience of the Annulment Process.
- The examination of three written accounts by females who have experienced the Annulment Process.

Female Catholics might perceive the Annulment Process more positively if the author's recommendations are put into practice and these recommendations are discussed in the final chapter.

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## **INTRODUCTION & LITERATURE REVIEW**

When a man and woman decide to marry, either in a civil ceremony or a religious ceremony, one might presume that the majority of couples hope their marriage will last 'till death do us part'. The Catholic Church holds the marriage contract in high esteem. The Catholic Church views the marriage bond between a couple as one that reflects the relationship of Christ with his Church - the Church referred to in Church documents - as 'the Bride of Christ' (Rice, 2004, West, 2000, *et al*). The Catholic Church teaches its faithful followers that a validly celebrated Catholic marriage is for life and the Catechism of the Catholic Church states clearly the indissolubility of a valid, sacramental, consummated marriage:

“Thus the marriage bond has been established by God himself in such a way that a marriage concluded and consummated between baptised persons can never be dissolved. This bond, which results from the free human act of the spouses and their consummation of the marriage, is a reality, henceforth irrevocable, and gives rise to a covenant guaranteed by God’s fidelity. The Church does not have the power to contravene this disposition of divine wisdom.”

(Catechism of the Catholic Church, number 1640, 1994)

Catholic Church documents further endorse the Catechism when speaking of the permanence and irreversible nature of the marital bond. The Vatican Council document '*Gaudium et Spes*' speaks of marriage in terms of biblical covenant brought about by consent:

“The intimate partnership of life and love which constitutes the married state has been established by the creator and endowed by him with its own proper laws; it is rooted in the covenant of its partners, that is, in their irrevocable personal consent.”

(*Gaudium et Spes*, number 48, p:219, 2007)

A couple planning to marry in a Catholic ceremony are asked to make a life long commitment to each other. Couples planning to marry in the Catholic Church are



offered pre - marital preparation, however, the type of instruction and preparation varies nationally in the English Catholic Church (Buckley, 2002).

In recent times the Catholic Church has acknowledged that the statistics for the break up of Catholic Marriage in the western church are no better than the statistics for break up incidences from those who have chosen to marry in a secular civil ceremony (Hegy & Martos, 2000). This led the Pontifical Council for the Family (2002) to call on bishops to put into place within their diocese better forms of pre - marital preparation and it encourages bishops to provide better support for those experiencing marital problems.

If one accepts then, that Catholic couples are no less exempt from marriage break - down than those who are not Catholic, what is the way forward for a divorced Catholic who wishes to marry again? There is nothing to prevent the divorced Catholic from marrying again in a civil ceremony but if the Catholic faith plays an integral part in their life then they would need to apply for a Marriage Annulment if they wished to marry in the Catholic Church.

What is an Annulment?

**“It is a decree or ruling issued by the Church to say that what appeared to be a true marriage was, in fact, only the appearance of one; it lacked one or more necessary conditions for a true marriage. This does not mean that the marriage partners were to blame. It was presumed by the Church, including the parties themselves that there was a true marriage, but the Tribunal having looked at all the relevant facts, have concluded that the partners were mistaken and that the facts prove that there was, in reality, no marriage. This does not mean that there had never been any kind of bond between them but that the bond did not make up what true marriage requires.”**  
(National Board of Catholic Women, 2000, p: 4)

Every one of the Catholic Dioceses in England and Wales has a Marriage Tribunal (National Catholic Directory of England and Wales, 2008) usually located in the Diocesan Curial Office. A person wishing to proceed with the application for



Annulment of their marriage usually make an approach to the Marriage Tribunal through their local Parish Priest (Gasche, 1998, Rice, 2004). As this study will demonstrate not all Catholic priests accept the Annulment Process or are familiar with it and either flatly refuse to help the applicant or try to dissuade them from applying. Buckley (2002) has also drawn attention to this in his extensive study on Catholic Marriage.

A Marriage Tribunal in the Catholic Church is effectively a Church Court that tries to establish relevant facts about what was thought to be a true marriage, and gives judgement on those facts as to whether or not there was a true bond there in the first instance. The Tribunal is not a Catholic divorce court, neither does it offer a marriage counselling service. The concerns of the Tribunal are the circumstances before and at the time of a marriage, and this point will be addressed later in the thesis.

The title of this thesis is: "Female Perception of the Annulment of Marriage in the Catholic Church."

During the researcher's time as a Catholic Priest (1989 - 2009) the issue of marital break up in the Catholic Church, and how it is managed by the Church authorities and the parties involved, has been of significant interest to the researcher. The researcher's own practice and experience on a pastoral level seems to indicate that women are more likely to make an appointment to see a priest than men are, when they have a marital difficulty this was also noted in the findings of Jenks, 2002. This appears more so pre and post divorce. It is worth noting that this is the researcher's own particular experience in pastoral placements undertaken from 1989 to present - 2009.

The real interest in the issue of Catholic marriage break up and female perception of the situation, with regard to the Catholic Church teaching, intensified when the

researcher became a Parish Priest (1995) in sole charge of a Catholic Parish. Between the years 1995 - 2000 the researcher had dealings with 16 females of differing ages who were seeking to have their marriage investigated by the Catholic Church with a view to obtaining an Annulment.

“Many dissertations and thesis develop out of a concern with real life problems, which spring from practice.”  
(Wisker, 2001, p: 216)

These 16 females were at different stages with regard to their marriage break up and their concerns included some or all of the following:

- If they divorced what would their position be with regard to Catholic Church teaching on the ‘indissolubility’ of Catholic Marriage.
- If they had already obtained a civil divorce how would they go about applying for a Catholic Marriage Annulment to enable them to marry again in the Catholic Church should the occasion arise.
- Certain females approached the researcher to share their experience of the Annulment Process.

The researcher was able to conclude, from pastoral experience, that the common denominator for all of the 16 females was the stress and distress they were experiencing and other studies have shown this to be a familiar trait (Coriden 2000, Hegy & Martos 2000, Bedard & Rabior 2004, *et al*). In his Masters Paper, (Derby University, 2002) on the same topic, the researcher had interviewed five female Catholics who were either going through the Annulment Process or had obtained an Annulment and all five of them had found or were finding the experience an unpleasant one. I illustrate this with two extracts from the interviews conducted for the Masters Study (Derby, 2002):

On describing the Annulment Interview Participant L (2002) states:

**“I just find the process unfair. It opens up all your past life, you feel rejected - you, you, you feel as though you don’t belong, you feel a failure and I felt dirty and frightened in that first interview!”  
(Participant L, Appendix 4, Masters Paper, Derby, 2002)**

**Participant D (2002) says of her Annulment Interview:**

**“It was very distressing I felt that I had been put on trial. There was absolutely no sensitivity to feelings! Questions led into others, into others, until alarmingly the very core of my personal life was laid bare and open. Yes, open, laid bare like an open and fresh wound!”  
(Participant D, Appendix 4, Masters Paper, Derby, 2002)**

**This study seeks to examine further the reasons why the Catholic Annulment Process is able to evoke such negative feelings for female petitioners.**

**If one conducts a literature search around the subject of Catholic Marriage and Divorce one can find a substantial amount of information. The literature available ranges in character from self - help and support books (usually encouraging the person to ‘work’ at their marriage), to literature explaining what one should expect and be prepared to commit to when contemplating marriage in the Catholic Church. From the research that I have undertaken in this area, both for the Masters (2002) and for this current research, I would place the literature available in three categories:**

- I. Literature that gives the facts of what constitutes a Catholic Marriage and what is involved in obtaining or applying for a Marriage Annulment should the marriage end in divorce. This type of literature offers a legalistic approach and gives scant pastoral guidance as to what one might do or expect should a Catholic Marriage end in divorce - other than to accept the situation.**
- II. A second category of literature looks at the situation of those experiencing divorce as a Catholic and examines the help available to resolve the situation.**



In the main this involves advising the person to approach a Diocesan Marriage Tribunal with a view to applying for an Annulment.

III. The third category of literature tends to examine the Catholic Marriage and Divorce question and is critical both of the pastoral care available to divorced and remarried Catholics and the Annulment Process as it operates today (2010).

### **Category 1.**

In this category I would place the thinking and teaching of authors such as Christopher West (2000), Joseph Rice (2004) and Tony Castle (2005). These writers, among others, place emphasis on the permanence and indissoluble nature of Catholic Marriage. Authors and commentators such as these see the Catholic Marriage Bond as a bond that mirrors, or should mirror, the relationship that Christ has with his Church (Catholic) that of utter fidelity and commitment. This is the view that is endorsed by the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and is one that is communicated to the faithful locally through the Diocesan Bishop (Nottingham Diocesan Ordo, 2010, p: 9 - 10; National Catholic Marriage Week in England and Wales, 14<sup>th</sup> February 2010).

When asked why the Catholic Church is reluctant to admit that some Catholic Marriages just don't work West (2000) comments:

“Why is the Church so obstinate. Because marriage is where human and divine love “kiss”. To diminish in any way the permanence of married love is to diminish the permanence of God’s love. As a sacrament marriage is a true participation in the love of Christ and for his Bride, the Church.”  
(West, 2000, p: 58)

Joseph Rice (2004) acknowledges the existence of Annulments in the Catholic Church but insists that they are there not necessarily to effect closure on a broken relationship or to invite the person back to a sacramental life in the Church but that they are there to reinforce Church teaching on the sanctity and indissolubility of

marriage. Rice sees the ingredients to taking on board a marriage in the Catholic Church as:

**“Careful, prayerful, honest and chaste preparation for the reception of the sacrament of Matrimony helps not only to receive it worthily and well, but also to minimise the need for future annulments.”  
(Rice, 2004, p: 74)**

Whilst these authors and theologians offer the ideal of Catholic Marriage they do not particularly offer any type of practical pastoral advice to those who fail to live up to the Catholic ideal of marriage. This brings us to what I refer to as the category two type of literature.

### **Category 2.**

Literature that I would place in this category often defends and upholds the sanctity of Catholic Marriage as a Sacrament but it acknowledges the need for pastoral support and intervention should a Catholic Marriage end in divorce.

I place authors in this category such as Wells Bedard and Rabior (2004), Flowers (2002), Catoir (2002) and Instone - Brewer (2004). Often, through case studies, authors such as these recognise the importance of Catholic Marriage as a “life - long indissoluble commitment” but they try to offer, in varying degrees, pastoral support and spiritual encouragement for those who have found marriage difficult or destructive. We can also begin to sense a diverse way of thinking and interpreting Catholic Marriage and Annulments between the authors. In category 1 we saw the author Joseph Rice (2004) considering Annulments as tools to “reinforce Church teaching on the sanctity of marriage” in category 2 Wells Bedard and Rabior claim that Marriage Annulments are:

**“Signs of the Church’s compassion and concern for those who have gone through the experience of divorce. They can be an invaluable means to facilitate healing and assist in the rebuilding of a new life.”**



(Wells Bedard & Rabior, 2004, p: 37)

Smith Foster (1999) claims that Annulments will always be viewed differently by each individual applying for one. Smith Foster feels that the Catholic annulment Process can either be spiritually healing or spiritually crippling. Because Catholic Marriage Tribunals operate as judicial bodies they are, according to Smith Foster, often “devoid of spiritual reflections” rather they are “very formal and legal”. Authors such as Dennis & Kay Flowers (2002) presume that people going through the Annulment Process have a good grounding in spirituality. With regard to the Catholic Annulment Process they rightfully acknowledge that there is a chance your petition might fail. If an Annulment is turned down and refused then they state that the Petitioner will often experience anger and rejection. The authors recommend prayer for failed Annulment Petitioners:

“You cannot change the fact of the annulment. What you can do is pray. Ask God to change your heart and your attitude, and, if you need this extra step, to help you forgive the Church for making you go through this painful necessity.”  
(Flowers, 2002, p: 74)

This might be considered a fair course of action for some but it is dependent on each individual’s perception of prayer and its efficacy. Not everyone one will be able to rid themselves of anger and frustration by prayer alone and further pastoral assistance and guidance ought to be available for someone who has had their Annulment Petition rejected.

It is my opinion that John T Catoir (2002) was one of the pioneers in identifying the pastoral needs for divorced Catholics who experienced difficulty in applying for an Annulment or a Catholic who had an Annulment Petition rejected. Catoir’s work was first published in 1979 under the title: “Where do you stand with the Church? The dilemma of divorced Catholics.” In my opinion Catoir was the first person (and a

Catholic Priest himself) to acknowledge the negative role that clergy were able to have in assisting those who wished to apply for an Annulment. He rightly, in my opinion, acknowledges that most Annulment Applications begin by making an approach to the local parish priest. Catoir notes:

“The more experienced the priest the better. If your parish priest is unfamiliar with the annulment process, he will probably advise you to go to someone on the tribunal staff. Beware of any priest who simply gives you a form and does not listen to your story.”  
(Catoir, 2002 ed, p: 29)

A look at the clerical influence on the Catholic Annulment Process is addressed further on in the literature review and it has a chapter dedicated to it in the study, but it is interesting to note that as early as 1979 (I have been unable to identify other sources) Catoir identifies the negative influence that Catholic clergy might have on an Annulment Applicant. He makes reference several times to people who have been treated “shabbily by a priest” during the course of the Annulment Process - issues that will be explored later in this study. Catoir positively encourages divorced Catholics to constantly seek out help in resolving what he calls “their dilemma”. He urges divorced Catholics to keep moving forward in seeking out pastoral help and support post - divorce. Towards the end of his book he encourages:

“If you gain anything from this book perhaps it will be the courage to seek out a kind priest who will help you to break down the barriers that separate you from God and the Church. If one priest doesn’t treat you with kindness, try another. There is someone out there waiting to help you. Find that person and your life will improve immeasurably.”  
(Catoir, 2002 ed, p: 78)

### **Category 3.**

This third category of literature that I now examine with regard to Catholic Marriage, Divorce and Annulments calls for greater pastoral care with regard to divorced,



separated and re - married Catholics. Whilst the literature examined in this category would not deny the importance of Church teaching with regard to Catholic Marriage it calls for greater pastoral care for those who have deemed to “fail” in living out the ideal, most often through no fault of their own. I make mention here of authors such as Richard Jenks (2002), McTaggart (2002), Haring (1990), Hegy & Martos (2002), Coriden (2000) and Buckley (2002). As my study is concerned with how Catholic females perceive the Catholic Annulment Process on a pastoral level, mention of the above authors and subsequent quotations are used to clarify points as the reader makes progress through the study.

Jenks (2002) conducted many case studies with reference to the Catholic Annulment process and whilst he found that a certain sample found the Process “palatable” a good majority found it a rather traumatic and distressing experience. One of the recommendations favoured by Jenks was that divorced Catholics seeking help and guidance from the Church should be dealt with by specially trained people so as to eliminate, in so far as possible, distress and emotional hurt. He wanted an organisation set up that would call on the Vatican “to the realisation that God’s grace is present in marriages that end in divorce.” Jenks wanted marriage break - down and Annulment rulings to be dealt with on what he and others (Catoir, 2002; Buckley, 2002; *et al* ) refer to as the “Internal Forum” that is the divorced person seeking re - entry into Sacramental life is helped privately by a competent, compassionate and understanding priest. The least that Jenks feels the Catholic Church should be considering is for the Marriage Tribunals to be reformed so that those who sit in judgement on them are trained not only as Canon Lawyers but embrace and understand more of the human sciences.

Category 3 literature moves away from the rigourist law influenced literature of category 1. Tribunals should not function to remind people of their mistakes or failures and to rule on such. Jenks states that:

“In the final analysis, marriage tribunals are dealing with human beings; human beings who have suffered the pain of divorce; human beings who have sought to understand why their marriages failed; human beings who act, think, and feel.”  
(Jenks, 2002, p: 202)

Hegy & Martos (2002) offer powerful witness in their work - “Catholic Divorce - The Deception of Annulments” - to the emotional pain and suffering certain Catholics have experienced from the Church’s reaction to their being divorced and re - married, or through their experience of the Catholic Annulment Process. Both of these authors call upon the Catholic Church to consider presenting a new positive view of remarriage as a “second chance”. They suggest that biblical imagery could be employed to endorse a “second chance” marriage just as easily as it is used to endorse a first time marriage.

This study will examine the reasons why female Catholics might perceive the Catholic Annulment Process in a negative way. In category 3 I made reference to the work of Fr Timothy Buckley (2002). In my opinion Buckley has conducted one of the most recent studies of the Catholic Marriage question in England and Wales. In his book “What Binds Marriage” (2002). Buckley (2002) examines the Catholic teaching on marriage from both historical and theological roots. He gives recommendations as to how certain practices might be changed or challenged to make the annulment process more compassionate for those seeking an annulment of their marriage. Buckley’s study was not exclusive to female Catholics and their perception of the process, he examined the question of Catholic Marital break up in a broad sense including in the study theological and historical material. This work will, in certain



areas, endorse the findings of Buckley but it also aims to address new areas with particular regard to how the Annulment Process might become more transparent, less threatening as a process, and offer a more caring approach to those females who choose the Annulment route.

The study will look closely at how a Catholic female applying for an Annulment might perceive the male Catholic Clergy who deal with their application. Buckley (2002) acknowledges this as an issue that invites further research:

“The kind of pastoral care offered by the clergy depends very much on the fundamental mind set of the priest in a given situation. If he comes from a legalist position, it does not mean that he does not have compassion for the person or wish to minister God’s love to the person, but it does mean he begins with the law as the will of God for that person. He will be seeking ways in which that person can be enabled to fulfil the law and fit into the system. However, if his fundamental position is that of personalism, then he begins, not with the law, but with the person and seeks to discern how far he can lead that person towards the ideal expressed in the law. Inevitably the position of the priest will convey itself to the person from the very beginning and I think that many of the difficulties expressed by the laity can be attributed to the fact that the vast majority of the clergy have been trained in the legal mind set.”  
(Buckley, 2002, p: 119)

In the interviews that follow later in the study, we will see that the personality of the priest(s) or their ‘mind set’ as Buckley (2002) calls it, is a very influential factor in the Annulment Process. I have, therefore, dedicated a chapter on how the Catholic priest might be perceived by the female applicant with regard to popular perception of Catholic priesthood at present (2009). The role and influence of the male Catholic priest is central to the Marriage Annulment Process (in England). It is the male cleric who examines the evidence for granting Annulments. From this position of power they make the final judgement, based on gathered evidence, as to which marriages are eligible for Annulment.

For a considerable length of time, perhaps since the mid - 1960's, the image of Catholic Priesthood in the western church has been challenged (Wills 2000, Cornwell, 2004, Bouchin 2006, *et al*). This challenge to the priestly image gained further impetus in the early 1980's when incidents came to light that showed priestly abuse of trust and power, most notably in their relationships with women and minors. Writers such as Cornwell (2004) and Wills (2000) have called into question the credibility of Catholic priesthood by virtue of the fact that so few men view it as a viable vocation or career. The issue of priestly abuse of power and trust has also invited comment from feminist church writers such as Mary Farley - O'Dea (2007) and Virginia Goldner (2007). Marie Evans Bouclin (2006) notes:

“For many women trying to rebuild their lives after an abuse of power (priestly), the experience can be a conscious raising about their oppressed status within the church. The women who shared their stories of clergy exploitation with me admitted they considered leaving the church because of the way they had been treated.”  
(Bouclin, 2006 p:36)

The reader will see from the interviews conducted for this study, and from the letters and email communications received, that a female Catholic making application for an Annulment of marriage might be justified in asking the question: “What right have male celibate clerics to make decisions over my failed marriage and to put me through a process that is intrusive, distressing and drawn out. Priests are hardly in a position of perfection themselves?” It is for this reason that a chapter on Catholic priesthood is included in this study. Bouclin (2006) claims that the current Church teaching on priesthood needs serious reconsideration:

“This paradigm of priesthood supports a system that allows for the abuse of clerical power and is discriminatory toward all women.”  
(Bouclin, 2006 p: 37)



Bouclin has addressed the issue of the perceived abuse of women by Catholic clergy and at the time of writing this study the Catholic Church is dealing with the scandal of child abuse by clergy in the Church in Ireland. As a priest myself I would acknowledge that this is not a good time for the image of Catholic priesthood. When speaking about the child abuse scandal in Ireland the Pope Benedict XVI himself admits:

“That the abuse had led to a breakdown in trust in the Church’s leadership and damaged its moral credibility.”  
(Richard Owen, *The Times*, 17<sup>th</sup> February 2010, p: 38)

Fr Timothy Radcliffe OP writing for the Catholic Journal “*The Tablet*” is aware of Catholic feeling at this time and as a prolific public speaker he admits to coming away from public speaking events: “exhausted at the anger that is out there towards the Catholic church from its very own people” (Radcliffe, *The Tablet*, December 2009). The *Times* journalist David Sharrock who has reported consistently on the Irish abuse scandal claims: “The lives of thousands of Irish people have been devastated” (Sharrock, *The Times*, 16<sup>th</sup> February 2010, p: 34). Fr Timothy Radcliffe OP attributes much of the anger to what he regards as the “Pharisee approach” that has so often been employed by the Church to point out the sins of others and to call them to account whilst failing to address its own sinful issues (*The Tablet*, December 2009).

The Annulment Process itself, has been classified by certain authors as a Process open to abuse (Catoir 2002, Hegy & Martos 2002, Haring 1990, *et al*) This study will examine through interviews and questionnaires, the possibility for a female to experience an abuse of clerical power by participating in the Catholic Annulment Process. The female applicant might experience negativity in a number of areas with

regard to the Annulment Process. The researcher lists examples below that are addressed in the study:

- A lack of information available regarding the process.
- Who is the best person to approach for help in starting the process? Let us bear in mind the words of Buckley (2002) cited earlier: “The kind of pastoral care offered by the clergy depends very much on the fundamental mind - set of the priest in a given situation”. In other words the character of the priest the female approaches sets the tone of how the process might proceed or not as the case may be.
- If the divorced female is a practicing Catholic and belongs to a Catholic parish this too is not always a place to find support and help from fellow parishioners. Interviews conducted for this study show that females have experienced feelings of isolation and a sense of failure when their marriage breaks down and these feelings have been compounded by comments and negativity from fellow parishioners (McTaggart, 2000, Naylor, Masters Dissertation, 2002)

From reading the interviews contained in this study the reader will be able to discern that the Annulment Process is not an easy option for any applicant. Once an Annulment Application has been registered the work of the Marriage Tribunal begins in earnest. The person who is making the Application for an Annulment will be interviewed by a Tribunal Auditor (usually a lay - person) in order to collate the information needed by the Diocesan Tribunal. The applicant will be interviewed on two or three separate occasions. Each of these interviews can take up to two to three hours. The petitioner (applicant) will face questions about their childhood, their family life, their courtship and questions regarding life with their partner in the early

stages of the marriage (Nottingham Diocesan Marriage Tribunal Questionnaire, 2008). Through the researcher's own study of this subject (1996 - 2009) it is clear that applicants find the interview stage an unpleasant experience and an intrusive one; they are often particularly worried about the Tribunal contacting the ex - husband and his family and friends as witnesses. The five interviews conducted for this study will illustrate this fact.

This study intends to provide recommendations as to how this might be changed and to give guidance as to how the interviews might be made a more acceptable experience. As part of this study the researcher compiled a questionnaire for the various Diocesan Marriage Tribunals of England and Wales. A total of 20 questionnaires were sent out and a total of 16 were returned. The questionnaire intended to find out:

1. The level of Pastoral Care and Communication the Tribunals afforded their clients (petitioners).
2. The type of training and the length of training given to the Tribunal Auditors - bearing in mind the sensitive nature of their work.
3. The questionnaire intended to ascertain the level of continuity present across the various Diocesan Tribunals.

The questionnaire and the responses to it are discussed in this study, as are the observations and the recommendations. The researcher concluded that the majority of the Tribunals fell below the mark in areas such as communication, sensitivity and the provision of adequate emotional support. There also appears to be a lack of continuity in the way Tribunals handle the process of Marriage Annulment (Coriden 2000, Jenks 2002).



It is a common factor that females who apply to have their marriage investigated, with a view to Annulment, are already weary. They will often show signs of loneliness, rejection and speak of being a failure. They approach the Tribunal in an attempt to rebuild their life and to seek closure for the past and, if the Church is important to them, to feel part of the worshipping community once again. This situation needs to be dealt with sensitively by the Tribunals. However, experience shows that this is often not the case. The theologian Bernard Haring (1990) gives the following illustration:

“A sensitive, well - educated Italian woman told me her story. She had then been waiting three years for a statement on her nullity plea to a Church marriage tribunal. Her husband had three doctorates and was a total slave to his career. This may perhaps also explain his sexual impotence. He was incapable of consummating the marriage, and at the same time incapable of showing affection to his wife. She stuck it out for five years in the hope of being able to ‘cure’ him: in vain. She obtained a civil divorce without any difficulty. The Church marriage tribunal, however, demanded three times in the course of the three years an examination to see if her hymen was intact. Each time the result was the same: it was. When the third examination in three years was asked for, her father wanted to leave the Church in protest. She was eventually able to dissuade him by talking to him affectionately. Her argument was: ‘These poor petty - minded lawyers aren’t the Church. They are the sad result of the wrong kind of education and they deserve pity.’ She got married at last when her nullity decree came through - after four years of waiting. I could only boggle at her composure and patience. I am not surprised if many others are simply not capable of this kind of patience and this kind of generous forgiveness.”  
(Haring, 1990, p: 16 - 17)

Not all Catholics who divorce go on to apply for an Annulment, in fact, the number who do is relatively small (Hegy & Martos 2000, Wills 2000, Coriden 2000, *et al* ).

This could be due to a variety of reasons most notably:

- That the Catholic Church is not really that significant to them, they might view themselves as a ‘nominal Catholic’.

- They might have considered it but may have received a poor reception from the priest they approached.
- As we will see later in the study, certain people do not want a Marriage Annulment because - if they have children - they fear it will brand their offspring illegitimate. However strenuously the Church denies this to be the case it is difficult for people to see otherwise.
- The Annulment Process could also be viewed as a Catholic divorce and usually for most people the civil divorce might have been one too many.

These reasons are by no means exhaustive and there may be others that prevent Catholics from applying for Annulment.

It is not the researcher's intention in this study to examine in any great detail the religious significance of marriage or its theological roots, this has already been adequately addressed by the study of Buckley (2002). However, religious belief and practice will inevitably have influence. If we can refer to the quote of Haring (1990) above we see that at least two clear 'camps' of belief exist in the Catholic Church with regard to the marriage question of divorce and re - marriage. There will be the legalistic camp where Canon Lawyers will seek out the hard facts with which to judge whether or not the marriage was valid or not. The questionnaires returned to the researcher from the various Marriage Tribunals clearly illustrate the fact that they are little concerned with managing emotions. The National Board of Catholic Women state in their handbook: "A Guide to the Annulment Process" (2000) that the: "Tribunals do not offer a marriage counselling service." Other literature will present the Annulment Process and explain it from a purely legalistic slant without any reference to emotional complications that might be experienced on the part of the applicant (Rice 2004, Smith Foster 1999, West 2000, *et al*)



The reader will see in this study that the researcher compiled a questionnaire for female Catholics with questions pertinent to Catholic marriage break up. From the responses given (Appendix F) the reader might see that a cold legalistic approach also exists among certain Catholic female parishioners of differing age groups. Certain responses indicate a very 'hard line' approach to those in their faith community who have experienced a broken marriage.

The religious influence in this study emerges in what we could refer to as the more 'liberal approach' to Catholic females who have experienced divorce and wish to marry again in the ceremonies of the Catholic Church. We have already viewed an opinion of Fr Bernard Haring (1990) on Tribunal procedure and the reader will see from some of the responses to the researcher's questionnaire (Appendix F) certain females avoided the legalistic approach in their responses and called upon the Church to be more compassionate in her dealings with broken marriages and divorce. For a sizeable number of Catholic writers and parishioners the official teaching of the Catholic Church on marriage does not sit easily with other aspects of her teaching and the reader will see that these are discussed at some length further into the study. The Canon Lawyer James Coriden might be accused of having non - legalistic tendencies when it comes to speaking about marital issues within the Catholic Church, similar to opinions expressed by female respondents who answered the researchers questionnaire. Coriden (2000) refers his readers to the teachings of Jesus Christ when it comes to dealing with division:

"Lose no time; settle with your opponent while on your way to court with him. (Matthew 5:25)  
and  
'When you are going with your opponent to appear before a magistrate, try to settle with him on the way lest he turn you over to the judge.'  
(Coriden 2000, p: 169)

This author offers his opinion with regard to the practice of the Catholic Marriage

Tribunals:

“The tribunal process is inadequate because it is unavailable in many parts of the world. Even where good, functioning tribunals exist, the procedure is cumbersome, distasteful, removed from the local community, and sometimes expensive. The annulment procedure often gives rise to serious misunderstandings, for example, that a marriage never existed, that the children are illegitimate, or even scandal, for example, when long - term or multiple marriages are declared invalid. The process frequently pursues and resolves the wrong question. An ancient Roman law procedure for the determination of the *Status personarum*, slave or free, citizen or foreigner, is used by the church to determine whether a person is bound by marriage or free to marry. But very often divorced Catholics come to ask, not for the declaration of their free status, but to be reconciled to the Church. They seek God’s forgiveness and a return to full sacramental communion.”

(Coriden 2000, p: 169)

From a female perspective this study will examine why the Annulment Process in the English Catholic Church is, in the words of Coriden (2000), a “cumbersome, distasteful, and removed from the local community” experience.

Let us take the word ‘cumbersome’. From the researcher’s questionnaire responses and from interviews it might be cumbersome in areas regarding:

- Information available about the process, is there sufficient or is it lacking?  
How does one go about initiating the process?
- What is the time scale and what will it involve?
- Will there be support available and good channels of communication?
- How is it going to affect my life and that of my family?
- If I go through all of this process and don’t get the desired outcome how will I feel?



How might the process be 'distasteful'? Female interviews undertaken for this study (Appendix L) show that the initial interviews for commencing with the Annulment Process probed deeply into the applicant's life. The Tribunal Auditors asked a range of intimate questions relating to their childhood, their experience of their parents marriage, their period of engagement/courtship and finally questions regarding the early years of their married life. The process might also be considered 'distasteful', as this study will show, when the applicant realises that the Annulment Process involves the Tribunal making contact with the ex - husband and giving him, and his family and friends, the opportunity to make their statements regarding the marriage. How does the Female Applicant manage the emotions involved in this area especially knowing that it could be a potentially confrontational situation?

How might the Annulment Process be 'removed from the local community'? This study will show, through the interviews and responses to the research questionnaires, that a good number of practicing Catholics do not themselves adequately understand just what a Marriage Annulment is, or what it might entail, neither are they familiar with Marriage Tribunals. The reader will see that at least two of the females (Appendix L) interviewed for this study felt isolated and lonely - 'removed from the community' - whilst going through the Annulment Process. They felt they that they could not talk about it with family, especially their children, fellow parishioners or non - Catholic friends. They felt that family or Catholic friends would not be entirely familiar or knowledgeable regarding the process and that non - Catholic friends might find them and the process peculiar or even ridiculous.

## METHODOLOGY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The research question that this study seeks to address is the “Female Perception of the Annulment of Marriage in the Catholic Church.” It further develops a study that the researcher began for a Masters Degree that was completed in 2002. The title of that study (Derby, 2002) was: “The Nature of the Psychological Impact of the Marriage Annulment Process within the Catholic Church on Female Participants.”

The researcher acknowledges that the study undertaken for the Masters Degree was limited. The research centred on interviews with four female participants who had been through the annulment process within the Catholic Church. It is the researcher’s intention to widen the spread of study in this area for the PhD and the reader will see below the components of the study. In certain areas of the study the researcher has employed a ‘journalistic’ approach (Wisker 2001, Bryman 2008, *et al*) for two reasons: 1) To attempt to better hold the reader’s attention to the study material and 2) To explain sections of material as they are read rather than leaving them to the final conclusion section.

The chosen research method for the study is qualitative, as it has characteristics that are more appropriate to addressing the research question than quantitative methodology. Qualitative methodology, as opposed to quantitative, allows the researcher to explore an issue whilst recognising that there may be no one right answer (Bell 2000, McLeod 2001, Bryman 2008, *et al*). The research was also phenomenological in that:

“The question grows out of an intense interest in a particular problem or topic. The researchers excitement and curiosity inspire the search.”  
(Moustakos, 1994, p:104).

The phenomenological elements evident in this study might be summarized thus:



- i. “It seeks to reveal more fully the essences and meanings of human experience.
- ii. It seeks to uncover the qualitative rather than the quantitative factors in behaviour and experience.
- iii. It engages the total self of the research participant, and sustains personal and passionate involvement.
- iv. It does not seek to predict or to determine causal relationships.
- v. It is illuminated through careful, comprehensive descriptions, vivid and accurate renderings of the experience, rather than measurements, ratings or scores”.

(Moustakos 1994, p:105)

As a Catholic Parish Priest still in active ministry (2009) the researcher is in close contact with all elements involved in this particular study and to date (2009) the researcher has twenty years of pastoral experience in dealing with Catholic Marriage issues. In this sense the research methodology that is used is also ‘Problem Based’ or ‘Inquiry Based’ research and problem solving (Wisker 2001)

“Many dissertations and theses develop out of a concern with real - life problems, which spring from practice.... Essentially, problem - based or inquiry - based learning, or research, in this case, involves the researcher conceptualising the problem or underpinning question, and then all literature searches, experimental work, questionnaires, and so on, and other methods of finding out and scrutinising data and information, spring from there. Everything that you set out to discover springs from the problem or question posed.”  
(Wisker 2001, p: 216 - 217)

This is true for the researcher who has yet to encounter a female Catholic who is reasonably satisfied with the Annulment Process in the Catholic Church in England. For the researcher this is the ‘burning’ question that Wisker (2001) speaks of ‘Why should women feel like this?’ In setting out the pattern and flow of the study the researcher sought out material and situations that would possibly challenge his own



personal bias toward the Catholic Marriage question following the advice given by McLeod (1998):

**“2. Inductive analysis: allowing conclusions to arise from a process of immersion in the data, rather than imposing categories or theories decided in advance. A willingness on the part of the researcher to ‘bracket - off’ his or her assumptions about the phenomena being studied.”  
(McLeod 1998 p: 78)**

To challenge his own view on the Catholic Annulment Process and to broaden the scope of research since completion of the Masters Degree (2002) the researcher used the following methods to address the study:

**1) Research Questionnaire Section A & B (Appendix A & D)**

This first questionnaire was designed for practicing female Catholics. The questionnaire asked for their comments on issues such as the masculine tense being used in the readings and prayers of the Catholic Church services. The participants were asked if they thought a woman was as capable as a man in fulfilling the role of priest in the Catholic Church. The questionnaire and the findings are discussed in detail further in the study.

- The questionnaire had a part A and a part B. Part B of the questionnaire asked for the participants view specifically on the Catholic teaching regarding marriage and marriage break - up with particular reference to how divorce is handled in the Catholic Church. As with all questionnaires the researcher was careful to validate the purpose of the questionnaire - how would it inform the study? (Bryman 2008). At this stage the researcher wished to ascertain, albeit in a limited way, whether:
- Females felt the Catholic Church to be a male - dominated patriarchal church, especially considering that it is a male priesthood that deals with Marriage Annulments.

- Do the majority of females agree with Catholic teaching regarding marriage.
- What is their pastoral perspective on females who have experienced divorce and re - marriage within the Catholic Church.
- Do they feel it right for the Catholic Church to investigate marriage break - up with a view to granting an Annulment and declaring the marriage null and void.

The researcher hoped the responses would give a broader insight as to how female Catholic parishioners view the Church and specifically her teaching on marriage.

## 2) Research Questionnaire to the Catholic Marriage Tribunals of England and Wales (Appendix H & I)

A research questionnaire was devised for the Marriage Tribunals across England and Wales. It was sent to 21 dioceses (the researcher did not include his own diocese) that included tribunals such as Leeds, Birmingham, Westminster, Liverpool etc. The return rate of the questionnaires was satisfactory with 16 completed questionnaires returned. As the reader will see from the returns (Appendix H) questions were asked regarding:

- Time scale - how long does it take a diocese to Annul a marriage once the process has begun.
- What, if any, emotional and pastoral care is available to the petitioner.
- Once the female has applied for an Annulment are the channels of communication efficient.
- What type of training do the tribunals offer to those conducting their interviews.
- How are distressed or emotional applicants dealt with.

The responses to the questionnaire were of great importance for the researcher as they could potentially confirm or challenge his own pre - conceptions and views with regard to the working of the Diocesan Marriage Tribunals. The responses also give insight on such issues as continuity of practice, or lack of it, across the various tribunals. The tribunal questionnaire also provoked comment on the transparency of the process. All of this information is of value to the study when asking the question “What is the female perception of the Annulment Process? How might they perceive it when certain findings are presented to them?”

### 3) Research Questionnaire to Marriage Tribunal Interviewers (Appendix J)

Once the researcher had collated the responses given by the Marriage Tribunals (Appendix H) the researcher was interested in the poor level of emotional support offered by the tribunals (this will be discussed later in the study) and surprised by the lack of continuity of practice across the various tribunals. The researcher, in an attempt to validate or challenge his own perceptions on the workings of the Tribunals, devised a questionnaire to be answered by a sample of volunteers who worked as auditors (interviewers) for the Marriage Tribunals.

The researcher wanted to have some idea as to how effective the level of communication was between the volunteer Tribunal Auditors and their ‘employee’ the Marriage Tribunals. It would also be of interest to have some idea of the overall opinion the Auditors had with regard to the institution they volunteer for. The Auditor’s comments are detailed in the study.

The researcher piloted all of the questionnaires on appropriate ‘Critical Friends’ in an effort to test them for:

- ✓ Relevance to the research question.
- ✓ That they would not take up too much of the respondent’s time.



- ✓ That the respondent would be familiar with the topic.
- ✓ That they make a significant contribution to the study.
- ✓ That they be reliable.

The researcher tested reliability through the literature review and through his personal pastoral experience (1989 - 2009) and that of other practicing Catholics. Bell (2000) notes:

“Reliability is the extent to which a test or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions.”  
(Bell 2000, p: 103)

The researchers four critical friends were female and they are practicing Catholics familiar with a Catholic parish setting. The four of them usually attend church on a weekly basis and they were members of church social groups. All four of them stated that they were familiar with the content of the questions that were being asked and that they found no difficulty in providing answers. After piloting all three of the questionnaires the researcher was confident that they would contribute significantly to the study and that they would produce relevant and reliable information. The questionnaires also concurred with the criteria set out by Denscombe (2004) for what constitutes a productive questionnaire:

- “The question will not be irritating or annoying for respondents to answer.
- The respondents will have some information about the topic.
- The proposed style of questions is suited to the target group.
- The questions require respondents to answer only about themselves
- The questions are on a topic and of a kind which the respondents will be willing to answer.”

(Denscombe 2004, p: 153)

The reader will see from the study that the questionnaires produced substantial information in a number of areas and these are discussed in the body of the study. A small selection of the findings are given here:

They gave insight into:

- 1) The views of the Catholic female with regard to their role and position within the Catholic Church.
- 2) The views of Catholic females with special regard to Church teaching on marriage.
- 3) The workings and procedures of the Catholic Marriage Tribunals as lacking in transparency.
- 4) They gave a measure of the amount of client support available to those going through the Annulment Process.
- 5) A more comprehensive understanding of the communication issues present between the Petitioner and the Tribunal.
- 6) That issues exist, the majority negative ones, between the Marriage Tribunal authorities and the volunteer Auditors who work on their behalf.

Having already interviewed four females who had been through the Annulment process for the Masters Degree (2002) the researcher decided to conduct more interviews for this study so as to establish links with the responses received from the questionnaires. The interviews are with five female Catholics of varying ages who have recently (2005 - 2009) been through the Catholic Annulment Process and have first hand experience of it. The females selected for interview were not related to the researcher neither were they friends. They were sourced from different geographical areas to that of the researcher. The females selected did not know each other and the interviews took place on different days and in different months.

The main interest for the researcher and for the study was to ascertain from the accounts of these five females whether or not their experiences of the Tribunal Process differed in any way from those females interviewed for the Masters Dissertation (Naylor, 2002). The researcher wished to examine whether or not the annulment process had changed in specific areas such as: the emotional management of the client, how were the channels of communication, better, worse or no change? How did the client cope with the initial proceedings and the lengthy interview?

The researcher made contact with three of the females through work colleagues and they agreed to be interviewed. The researcher also posted the proposed study on the web pages of the "Association for Divorced and Separated Catholics" also known as 'ASDC' this site is a United Kingdom based site. This was done with the web manager's consent and encouragement. The researcher conducted a telephone interview with one user of this site and a face to face interview with another site user. The posting of the research topic on the 'ASDC' website aroused a substantial amount of interest and a number of users, whilst not wishing to be interviewed, provided the researcher with written accounts of what they had experienced as female Catholics with regard to the Annulment Process and the Catholic Church's approach to them post - divorce. These anonymous accounts are given in the appendix and are also discussed after the five client interviews. The accounts give a valuable insight into how female Catholics might perceive the Catholic Annulment Process in England and Wales. The ethical implications for conducting the interviews and managing the written accounts will be discussed in the section on ethical considerations.

The interviews that the researcher conducted for the Masters paper on this subject (Naylor, 2002) were 'semi - structured' interviews (Denscombe, 2004, Edwards & Talbot, 1997, Bryman, 2008, *et al* ). A somewhat unconscious decision was made in



this study to use a 'semi - structured' interview technique. This decision might have been influenced by the fact that two of the female interviewees were quite nervous and a more relaxed and unquestioning approach allowed them to contribute at least a little of their experience to this study.

When it comes to interview Silverman (2005) claims to identify two approaches to interview: 1) a Positivist Approach that seeks to ascertain facts or beliefs out there in the world and 2) an Emotivist Approach concerned with obtaining facts, yes, but not 'objective' facts.

“Emotionalist interviewers want to access the subject behind the person given the role of interview respondent. The particular concern is with lived experience. Emotions are treated as central to such experience.”  
(Silverman, 2005, p: 90)

The Emotivist Approach (Silverman, 2005) is the one employed by the researcher in that one is not so much interested in facts regarding the Annulment Process such as: where the client travelled for interview, where she sat, what the time was etc as these are only useful if they give some insight into the clients emotional state. This study asks the female participant to share their feelings and reactions with regard to the Annulment Process before, during and after the process.

To open the interview the researcher would ask the participant, after the usual exchange of pleasantries, if they would like to share their experience of how they perceived the Catholic Marriage Annulment Process. It is the researcher's opinion that the semi - structured interview technique was successful for this study as it allowed the participant to share as much or as little of their experience as they liked and it allowed them to begin at any point they liked. The reader will see from the interviews that this was very much the case as one particular interview varies considerably in length to the other four.

**“Allowing interviewees to ‘speak their minds’ is a better way of discerning things about complex issues and, generally, semi - structured interviews and unstructured interviews have as their aim ‘discovery’ rather than ‘checking’. They lend themselves to in - depth investigations, particularly those which explore personal accounts of experiences and feelings.”**  
**(Denscombe, 2004 p: 167)**

With the interviewees consent (see ethical considerations) the researcher taped all of the interviews and transcribed them as soon as possible afterwards. The approach that the researcher used in setting up the interviews and in considering the contribution they would make to the study used the ‘Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis’ approach (Bryman 2008, McLeod 1998, Smith & Osborn 2003, *et al* ).

**“The aim of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is to explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world, and the main currency for an IPA study is the meanings particular experiences, events, states hold for participants.....it (IPA) attempts to explore personal experience and is concerned with an individual’s personal perception or account of an object or event, as opposed to an attempt to produce an objective statement of the object or event itself.”**  
**(Smith & Osborn, 2003 p: 51)**

The reader will see, hopefully, that this is certainly the case with the five participant interviews given in this study (Appendix L). The participants were not so much concerned with ‘stepping back’ and giving an emotionless objective account of the Annulment Process, rather the opposite; they spoke of it in terms of their very own lived private experience and, in the case of Participant A, this experience of the Annulment Process was entirely re - lived in the interview. This is, of course, the researcher’s own opinion and observation.

The IPA method was also suitable for this study in that:

**IPA studies are conducted on small sample sizes. The detailed case by case analysis of individual transcripts takes a long time, and the aim of the study is to say something in detail about the perceptions and understandings**



of this particular group rather than prematurely make more general claims.....

IPA researchers usually try to find a fairly homogenous sample . The basic logic is that if one is interviewing, for example, six participants, it is not very helpful to think in terms of random or representative sampling. IPA, therefore goes in the opposite direction and, through purposive sampling finds a more closely defined group for whom the research question will be significant.”

(Smith & Osborn, 2003, p: 54)

Smith & Osborn note, with regard to IPA, that it addresses a ‘defined group for whom the research will be significant’ (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The research questionnaire was designed for a community that would have knowledge or understanding of the Annulment Process, albeit in varying degrees. The researchers study was significant to the five interviewees as it involved their life experience - they had all passed through the Annulment Process in the Catholic Church.

After the five interviews had been transcribed, the researcher used computer assisted qualitative data analysis to code them and examine the content. The programme used was MAXqda (Gibbs, 2007). After consultation with the researcher’s supervisor, a decision was made to limit the use of the programme to the constructing of code lists, to highlighting the codes in different colours where they appear in the text, and to the writing of memo’s that can be linked to codes and documents (Gibbs, 2007).

After reading the interviews the researcher, with the guidance of his supervisor, devised a determined number of codes that might identify themes emerging from the interview texts. The codes were created from the researcher’s own experience of issues arising from the Catholic Annulment Process: “from being immersed in the study, and familiar with all aspects of it” (Wisker, 2001). The researcher’s codes were based on over 20 years pastoral experience of issues raised when dealing with matters concerning the Catholic Annulment Process. The researcher felt that this approach to



coding was a justifiable one and the comment by Gibbs (2007) was influential in the researchers decision:

“One of the most important issues of coding it (interviews) is to ensure that they are as analytic and theoretical as possible. You need to move away from codes that are simply descriptive and couched in the respondents views of the world to codes that suggest new, theoretical or analytical ways of explaining the data.”  
(Gibbs, 2007 p: 54)

The researcher devised thirteen codes and these are given below:

1. Physical Sensations
2. Participants life situation
3. Actions taken by participant
4. Religious influence positive / negative
5. Guilt
6. Negative emotion / perception
7. Apprehension
8. Unexpected
9. Perception of the process and interview(er)
10. Effect of process / life situation on others
11. Surprise
12. Feelings of isolation
13. Intrusive.

The researcher evidences the codes in all five of the interviews conducted. In order to validate his findings the researcher cut out excerpts from all five of the interviews. The researcher labelled 13 envelopes with the codes and on two separate occasions asked two critical friends to place the interview excerpts into what they thought to be

the appropriate code envelope. This exercise was to discover if they validated the researchers coding and to ascertain the degree of reliability. The results from this are discussed later in the study.

To conclude, the researcher devised the codes from prior knowledge and from experience regarding the issues that surround participants who choose to go through the Annulment Process in the Catholic Church. Let us take Code 10, for example, "Effect of Process / Life Situation on Others". It is not only the female going through the Annulment Process who is having the experience, the process will, inevitably, impact on others who are close to her. How does she explain it to her child(ren)? If she has a new partner - particularly a non - Catholic one - the how will he /she perceive it? Will they be supportive or not? How will other family members react? This takes the data out of the simple interview scenario into a wider ambit, provoking questions such as "What support is available for the petitioner?" "Are the Marriage Tribunals aware of the impact the process has on other relationships?" From the researcher's experience very few petitioners are aware at the outset of the kind of impact the Annulment Process might have on their family life and relationships. If they were made more aware beforehand of what it entails, and what consequences might emerge, then one might be sure that the numbers applying would diminish. The codes intend to draw issues from the data, in this case, the five interviews that could influence the recommendations of the study for a wider community; in particular the way the Catholic Marriage Tribunals operate at present (2009) in England and Wales.

## **Ethical Considerations**

The first ethical consideration that every researcher should account for is their personal approach to the study. This may be more true of a qualitative approach than a quantitative one. This study has its foundation in the researcher's own personal practice and so he inevitably has his own opinions regarding the Catholic Annulment Process (Wisker 2001, Silverman 2005, Bryman 2008, *et al*).

The researcher's opinion of Catholic Marriage Tribunals accords with the opinion of Coriden (2000), that the procedure can be "cumbersome, distasteful, removed from the local community" (Coriden, 2000, p: 169). To try and balance this opinion the researcher designed the research questionnaires to be broad in approach and to make sure that the language and content was in no way offensive or misleading (Denscombe, 2003). Before using the questionnaires the researcher piloted each of them on three separate occasions to a group of six females of differing age ranges who were practicing Catholics. They did not find the content offensive and they deemed the questionnaires to be 'user friendly'. The only changes made were grammatical ones.

Bias at interview was eliminated as the researcher used an unstructured approach in which the participants were simply asked to share their experience of the Catholic Annulment Process thus allowing them scope to answer positively or negatively.

## **Participant Questioning**

Certain participants who took part in this study, either through completing questionnaires, volunteering for interview or through letter and email communication wished to know the researcher's intention for conducting such a study. These participants were all divorced and, overall, they expressed hope that the researcher's



study might have influence on the Catholic Church authorities to change its negative stance (in their opinion) with regard to the care and treatment of divorced Catholic persons. The researcher felt this to be an ethical issue deserving of consideration. In communication with participants the researcher tried not to over emphasise the impact for change this study may or may not have. Three of the participants, in differing levels, thought the study might find its way to Rome causing the Catholic teaching on divorce and re - marriage to change - and quickly! Effort was made on the part of the researcher to explain that this would be a very unlikely scenario. A duty of care to participants in not raising their hopes is a very necessary ethical consideration.

The researcher notes the following ethical considerations and they are given in no particular order of priority:

1. Expectations of the study by participants.
2. Risk Calculation of the study.
3. Selection of interviewees.
4. Process of transcribing interviews.
5. Approval for conducting research.
6. Consent forms for interviewees - explanation of such.
7. Assure participants of anonymity.
8. Management of the interviewee - their right to remove themselves from the situation.
9. Setting for the interviews.
10. Support for the interviewee.

In addressing the ethical considerations the researcher was informed by his own pastoral practice of some twenty years. The researcher uses the guidelines given by the 'British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy'(2009) as a model for

good practice particularly their 'Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling & Psychotherapy' (2009). The ethical guidance given by Graham Gibbs (2007) was also invaluable in informing the study. Each consideration is now addressed:

### **1) Expectations of the study by participants.**

Mention has already been made of this issue. The researcher received eight email contacts from the 'Association for Divorced and Separated Catholics' (ASDC) who had learnt of the study from a posting on the ASDC website. Two of the members presumed that the study had been commissioned by Rome and that change would be effected by the study in the way in which divorce was managed in the Catholic Tradition. The researcher was transparent (BACP 2009) in informing them that the study had no authority to change the doctrinal teaching of the Catholic Church with regard to divorce and re - marriage. The researcher made it clear that the study hoped to offer practical pastoral advice to the Catholic Church in England and Wales that might enhance their pastoral practice when dealing with divorced persons applying for Annulment of Marriage - in this study female.

The questionnaires that the researcher used for this study did not provoke any expectations as far as the researcher is aware, from those who completed them. The researcher provided the respondents with the results of the questionnaire.

### **2) Risk calculation of the study.**

When the researcher initially shared the direction of this study with the university supervisor, prior to submitting it to the academic board, the study was deemed to be low risk. The questions asked in the questionnaire would be familiar to the target

group, acceptable to answer, deemed non - offensive and of particular relevance to the the study (Denscombe 2004, Wisker 2001, McLeod 1998, *et al* ).

The researcher also gave evidence of interviews that had been conducted for the Masters Dissertation (Derby, 2002) on the same topic and the supervisor gave approval for the method of interview and the component stages. The interview strategy in place was deemed well managed and committed to promoting and protecting the client's well being - noted in the BACP guidelines as 'Beneficence' (BACP, 2009, p: 3). The researcher was to remain vigilant in the interviews as the talking and sharing nature of qualitative research nearly always involves some cost to participants and should be managed as effectively as possible (Gibbs, 2007).

### **3) Selection of appropriate participants**

Care was taken by the researcher to source interviewee's that did not have association with his place of work. The candidates were a reasonable distance from the researcher's own geographical area and this same rule applied between the participants chosen: they did not know each other, they were interviewed on different days and there was reasonable geographical distance between them.

Gibbs (2007) makes an interesting point when he states that leading principles in choosing participants for interview should be that 1) It is of interest to them and 2) That it should be of some benefit not only to them but to the wider society (Gibbs, 2007 p: 101 & 103).

All of the five candidates that the researcher approached were happy to be interviewed because they had been through the Annulment Process in the Catholic Church and had found it difficult - this was not the criteria for choosing them as the researcher did not know their negative experience until interview. The participants



saw benefit in the study in the way that sharing their experiences might help others and that in the telling of their story and the publishing of it there was potential to effect change in the Catholic Church.

#### **4) Process of transcribing interviews**

The researcher transcribed all five of the interviews personally so as to remain faithful to the participant's words and to maintain confidentiality. Gibbs (2007) also highlights another concern with 'fielding out' interviews for transcribing, warning that any transcriber, other than the interviewer, could become adversely affected by the material that they are being asked to transcribe.

Once the researcher had transcribed the interview, a copy was given to the interviewee to read and examine the content for validation. If the interviewee was satisfied that the transcription was an accurate account they were then asked to sign an 'Interview Validation Form' (see Appendix N)

#### **5) Approval for conducting research**

The researcher was sponsored for this study by the Diocese of Nottingham Trustees. The approval to undertake research in this area was given by the Bishop of Nottingham. The researcher provided the trustees with a verbal guarantee that the study would not be in any way malicious or derogatory towards the Diocese of Nottingham or the Catholic Church. Any claims, findings and recommendations would be rigorously researched and presented competently and fairly. The researcher was to abide by the 'Code of Good Practice' based on the ethical recommendations given by the 'British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy' (2009). The

researcher would undertake regular supervision provided by the University of Derby throughout the course of research.

#### **6) Consent forms for interviewees**

Once the researcher had selected participants for interview, information was given about the research that was relevant to their decision to participate. Effort was made to ensure that they understood all of the research information and they were made aware that their contribution was voluntary (Silverman, 2005)

Participants were asked if they consented to their interview being audio taped on the understanding that all material that could personally identify them would be removed and that the recording would only be used for purposes of this current study, for supervision and for assessment. The researcher provided a consent form that addressed these issues and they were invited to sign and date it.

#### **7) Assure participants of anonymity**

The interview participants were asked if they agreed to their interview forming part of this study provided that it had been sufficiently anonymised. They would have chance to read the finished account and to advise on any changes they felt breached the agreement of anonymity. All five participants agreed to their interview being used for this study provided that anonymity was sufficiently guaranteed. The researcher followed closely the guidelines given by BACP with regard to client autonomy in seeking:

“freely given and adequately informed consent; engage in explicit contracting in advance of any commitment by the client; protect privacy; protect confidentiality; normally make any disclosures of confidential information conditional on the consent of the person concerned; and inform the client in advance of foreseeable conflicts of interest or as

soon as possible after such conflicts become apparent.”  
(BACP, 2009, p: 3)

### **8) Management of the interviewee**

As this study examines the Marriage Tribunal and its process of investigation it was important that the researcher provided an interview experience that put the participant at ease. The interviews that follow in the study show that the female participants had already experienced somewhat traumatic interviews with the Marriage Tribunal and the researcher wanted to distance their thinking from this, in so far as is possible, and enable them to treat his interview as a separate entity and a positive experience.

The participants already had information about the subject matter but the researcher wanted the participants to feel in control of the interview and to be the active agent (Smith, 2003). The BACP (2009) principle of autonomy is significant here - ‘respect for the client’s right to be self - governing’ and that ‘the principle of autonomy opposes the manipulation of client’s against their will, even for beneficial social ends’ (BACP, 2009 p: 3)

The researcher made it clear to the participants that they could terminate their interview at any time and for any reason.

### **9) Setting for the interview**

The researcher made sure that the setting for the interview was appropriate taking care to provide:

- A clean, spacious, airy room
- Suitable seating and adequate and appropriate distancing of chairs between interviewer and interviewee.
- To offer refreshments at the appropriate time



- To allow for comfort breaks
- The researcher made certain that some other person was in the premises when he interviewed and that the participant was aware of this.
- Approximate start and finish times were given before interview commenced
- That interview's be brought to a close after 1 hour.

The above was adapted from 'Integrative Counselling Skills in Action' (Culley, 1998)

### **10) Support for the interviewee**

Following the BACP principle of 'non - maleficence' - a commitment to avoiding harm to the client' (BACP, 2009) the researcher informed the participants that further support was available to them post interview. The researcher had in place a professional counsellor should the participants need further emotional support. The researcher also offered the participants a few minutes quiet time post interview to reflect on any issues that might need further clarification or support. The researcher did not wish for the participant to leave the interview scene distressed or unchecked and this was not the case for any of the five participants that took part in this study.

## **Chapter 1 - The Catholic Church**

### **1.1 Female perception of the Catholic Church**

The catechism of the Catholic Church (2006) states:

**“She (the Church) is called the ‘Bride of Christ’ because the Lord himself called her ‘Spouse’ (Mark 2:19). The Lord has loved the Church and has joined her to himself in an everlasting covenant.”**

**(Compendium Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2006, p: 59, no 158)**

But the Church that is referred to as ‘She’ is led by an ecclesiastical hierarchy that is solely and exclusively male:

**“The hierarchy is formed of sacred ministers: bishops, priests, and deacons. Thanks to the sacrament of Orders, bishops and priests act in the exercise of their ministry in the name and person of Christ the Head.”**

**(Compendium Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2006, p: 64, no 179)**

So, the Catholic Church is referred to as ‘She’ but to be able to validly minister as a bishop, priest, or deacon one should take note:

**“This sacrament (ordination) can only be validly received by a baptised man.”**

**(Compendium Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2006, p: 104, no 333)**

From the researcher’s own pastoral experience of working in Catholic parishes within the East Midlands area of England (1989 - 2008) opinion differs as to whether it is unjust or just that women are excluded from sacramental ordination. The researcher’s experience shows that the woman’s age also seems to have little to do with how one thinks on this matter. For example, it would be easy to presume that the older a woman is, the more traditional she might be, therefore having no problem with exclusively male leadership in the Catholic Church, having lived with it for most of her Catholic life. The researcher, in his pastoral experience has found this not to be the case (Problem - based or Inquiry - based research, Wisker, 2001, p: 216). Part 1

(Appendix A & C) of the researcher's questionnaire (to be discussed later) also appears to evidence that a Catholic woman's age does not necessarily bear influence on her religious thought or opinion.

For certain Catholic women however, the issue of apparent gender injustice in the Catholic Church is an issue that desperately needs addressing (Teague, 2001, McEwan, 2003, Poole, 2003, *et al*).

**“This long and fierce struggle of silencing women, especially in the RC tradition (note: RC read Roman Catholic), makes it very hard for women to insert their voices into the ‘received’ tradition of Church. When they do manage to get their voice heard they are often branded as confrontational and aggressive.**

**Breaking the cultural and psychological silencing of women's speech is in the foreground of this call for justice. It is in the silencing of women that the workings of high papalism stand out. For example, arguments against women's ordination have been scrutinized by scholars and found wanting. Despite the impressive body of research the arguments for women's ordination have not been accepted by those in the Church who have arrogated authority only to themselves. In the twenty-first century it is called psychological blocking. Christ, however, dubbed it ‘hardness of heart’ and the ultimate sin against the Holy Spirit.”**

**(McEwan & Poole, 2003, p: 65 - 66)**

March 1993 saw the founding of the National CWO group (Catholic Women's Ordination - UK). This group was established by women and men concerned with the apparent injustice, the Catholic Church shows, in excluding women from sacramental Ordination. This group have (2008) a highly informative website that promotes not only the ordination of Catholic women but calls for ‘inclusive’ language to be used in Prayer, the Catholic Mass and other Liturgies. The CWO aims to keep the issue of women's ordination alive in Catholic circles worldwide as a point of gross injustice to women:

**“Given the distortions in the present theology of the Church on women, it is urgent that we must listen to international women's voices today as they articulate their call to priesthood. The institutional Roman Catholic Church continues to ignore and sometimes denigrate and insult women who believe they**



have a Spirit-inspired vocation to the priesthood, which they cannot explore or test. This is not only, an institutional injustice, but serious refusal to listen to the holy Spirit; a refusal, which if continued, will have serious repercussions in the Christ-like credibility of the Church.”

(Catholic Women’s Ordination, [www.catholic-womens-ordination.org.uk](http://www.catholic-womens-ordination.org.uk). Accessed 4<sup>th</sup> April 2008)

The gender issue also extends beyond the male hierarchical ‘make up’ of the Catholic Church and moves into the liturgical language used in church worship. In the opinion of Lopez (2002) women in the Catholic Church are not in essence active ecclesial subjects but passive objects, a view also shared by McEwan (2001, ‘Making Liturgy’ page 44). Lopez (2002) notes that the majority of Catholic priests, in Europe at least, witness a larger percentage of women attending daily mass and other liturgies than males. Thus a predominantly female congregation - and yet the language of the liturgy neither celebrates nor includes their presence. Lopez (2002) comments on a Catholic Mass he recently attended where the congregation was almost entirely occupied by women:

“Estimados Hermanos, queridos feligreses, estamos reunidos como Cristianos para.....”  
(Lopez, 2002, p:68)

The English translation of the above text loses some of the influential effect the Spaniard is trying to convey. In the Spanish language the masculine tense ends in ‘O’ for singular and ‘OS’ for plural - there are six masculine ‘OS’ endings in this brief welcome address. The English translation does not do justice to the point Lopez (2002) is making:

“Dear brothers, dear faithful, we are (masculine tense) united as Christians to (masculine tense).....”  
(Translation - Lopez, 2002, p:68)

The researcher is aware from pastoral experience (1989 - 2008) that not all women have issue with priestly ordination or non - inclusive language used in the liturgy of

the Catholic Church and this can be evidenced in the questionnaire that is to be discussed at the end of this chapter. What is of interest to this study is that there is a perceived injustice and exclusion felt by certain women in the Catholic Church and that this feeling of inequality and that of women as inferior to men somehow perpetuates in the Catholic Church in the twenty-first century (Beattie, 2003)

The role of women within the Catholic Church might reflect the 'struggle' certain women believe to have experienced in secular society in the search for equal standing. One prominent Catholic - Cherie Booth (2005) shares her upbringing in a Catholic convent school with writer Peter Stanford in his book "Why I am Still Catholic" (2005). Booth was conscious of the thought and opinions of the Catholic nuns with regard to the girls in their charge. She notes that a girl's ambition should not stretch beyond:

"Doing a bit of teaching and then giving it all up  
to be a Catholic wife and mother."  
(Booth in: "Why I am Still Catholic". Stanford, 2005, p: 24)

Booth concludes that the nuns were not happy about her choice of university as they saw the London School of Economics "as a den of iniquity" (p 25).

Booth states:

"I remember even thinking this was a contradiction  
in Catholic teaching. On the one hand, we were all  
told we must make full use of our talents. On the  
other, there seemed to be all sorts of assumptions  
based on the notion that women were somehow  
inferior. By the age of 15, I'd spotted this and thought  
it was wrong. And still do. Women still do not get  
due respect in the Church....."  
(Booth in: "Why I am Still Catholic". Stanford, 2005, p: 25)

The death of Pope John Paul II (2<sup>nd</sup> April 2005) occasioned other comments on the treatment of women in the Catholic Church especially with regard to role and participation:



**“His (Pope John Paul II) unswerving resistance to modernity disappointed those who questioned the value of priestly celibacy; brilliant and pious women asking for a role in the Church were flatly ignored, and women in general praised only for meekness and maternity.”  
(Purves, The Times, April 2005, p: 19)**

**Strong reflections on this papacy came also from the ranks of his ordained ministers.**

**Kirkham (2005) gave the following reflection:**

**“In contrast to the open dialogue anticipated by the Vatican council all discussion has taken place with the tightly controlled, non-negotiable parameters that typifies totalitarianism. Such was the case over female ministry: here was a man full of adulation for the traditional roles of women but who could not bring himself even to officially acknowledge altar girls or women readers in Church. Indeed, a close reading of papal writings and actions reveal a man confused and full of contradictions.”  
(Kirkham, The Independent, April 2005 p:32)**

**What of the women who do not have issue with the patriarchal make - up of the Catholic Church and have no problem with non - inclusive language in the liturgies, where do they fit? It would be incredibly simplistic and untrue to presume that two ‘camps’ exist in the Church as regards women, those camps being the liberal progressive camp and the traditional all accepting camp. A woman might have no issue with the fact that she is unable to be ordained in the Catholic Church but might wince every time the congregation is addressed as ‘Dear brothers in Christ....’ We do, however, have to acknowledge that a substantial number of women (researchers opinion and experience 1989 - 2008) are very happy and content with how the Catholic Church functions and have no issue with gender or linguistics. This in turn frustrates women who do have issue and they find it hard that their fellow women still seem to attend and support the Catholic Church without questioning:**



“The track record of gender injustice in the Church is poor. Between 1000 and 1900 about 87 per cent of the saints were men. Women’s spiritual insights have largely been ignored through the centuries and the Church and its service to the world is poorer as a result. The latest Pastoral Plan for Westminster Diocese, for example, makes no mention of the diocesan Justice and Peace networks - all led by women - which worked so hard during the millenium year to further the understanding of the biblical Jubilee. Sr Joan Chittister sums it up for me when she says:’ the world has never known so much poverty, so much violence, so much oppression, so much institutionalised injustice. But we go to Church, we go to Church and we go to Church.”  
(Teague, 2001, p: 1)

So, what of the unquestioning one’s ‘who go to Church’? (Teague 2001) Certain authors (Beattie, 2003, McEwan, 2001, *et al*) would propose that some women do not question and accept their lot because that is how the Catholic Church has always been and there is no point in criticizing or resisting because it is not going to change. There is an attitude of accept your lot because there is a “traditional sexual hierarchy in which these (*feminist values*) are used to keep women out of so - called ‘masculine’ positions of authority and leadership.” (Beattie, 2003, p: 203).

For the researcher there is another interesting aspect to the ‘unquestioning ones’ (women), an aspect experienced in pastoral placements (1989 - 2008) and one the researcher refers to as the ‘possible Irish influence’. In the United Kingdom the Catholic Church has been influenced and benefited from the immigration and integration of Irish Catholics. Many a Catholic Parish in England owes its founding and funding to the immigrant Irish community and dedicated Mass attendance (Brown, 2006). Did the religious views and beliefs of the Irish immigrants have influence on how certain women might view their position in the Catholic Church?

Goretti Horgan (1995) writing for the Socialist Review has an interesting view - point. Horgan (1995) cites the years after the Irish Famine - 1841 - 1851 - as significant years for the Catholic Church to gain influence over Irish Catholic women. Horgan (1995) notes that in the post - famine years, work for women fell by about 75%. The consequence of this she claims was that:

“Women (as maternal providers) no longer had a clear economic role in the family. At this point the Church became involved in Irish family life, preaching the centrality of the family, the evils of all sexual activity, not aimed at the ‘procreation of children’ and holding up the Virgin Mary as the model for women. Women domesticated, became transmitters of Catholic ideology - a role they have played right up to the present.  
(Horgan, Socialist Review, Issue 182, 1995, p: 4)

It is the final words of the extract from Horgan’s (1995) piece of writing that the researcher found to be of interest in the pastoral context: “A role they have played right up to the present.” There are examples around in English pastoral placements (2008) that would give some credence to the claim that Irish women might be ‘transmitters’ of Catholic ideology. I give two case examples below from the researcher’s own actual pastoral experience. These examples may be difficult for the reader to comprehend but for the researcher they serve to illustrate the observation that Horgan (1995) might be alluding to.

### **Case Example 1**

Mrs K is an elderly lady (82 years of age) she is an Irish Catholic and came to settle in England in the 1960’s with her husband (now deceased) and young family. They bought a house within walking distance of their local Catholic Church. They would define themselves as working class. Mrs K’s children could be considered as doing well for themselves - all of them attained a university education. One of Mrs K’s sons

became a Catholic priest. A short time after the death of the father the son, who had become a priest, left active ministry in order to be with a lady he had met through his pastoral work (they are now married). This son was known to have had a few 'encounters' with female parishioners during his time as a priest. This priest openly acknowledged to some that he had been 'living a lie' for some years and that he had only chosen priesthood through family pressure (in particular the father's expectations). Mrs K refused to accept this. Mrs K put her son's departure down to the 'wicked wiles' of the female. According to Mrs K the woman 'who stole her son away' should have known her son was a priest and left well alone, he was 'forbidden fruit'. For Mrs K her son had no control over the situation and the fault lies entirely with the woman and the Diocesan authorities, who in her opinion, did little or nothing to help or support her son.

### **Case Example 2**

Mr and Mrs C came to England in the 1950's and have three sons. Mr and Mrs C are considered devout Catholics and attend Mass most days. One of their sons became a priest in the late 1980's. After practicing his priestly ministry for some 7 years he met a divorced lady on one of the Parish Missions. Fr C struggled with his feelings and came to see the researcher for advice on the course of action he should take. The researcher was friends with Fr C and so suggested he should seek counselling elsewhere but the researcher was happy to listen as a friend. Fr C was clearly troubled and torn between family pressure to stay as a priest and his emotional commitment to his lady friend.

The advice given on a friendship basis was that Fr C ought to take some time out. After a few weeks had passed Fr C returned to see the researcher. He was now in



counselling therapy. The distance between Fr C and his new found partner was proving too much. In the researcher's opinion the counselling was not proving itself beneficial to Fr C as he was simply delaying the inevitable - he wanted to be with this woman. In his own words 'he felt he was on the verge of a breakdown'. Fr C had spoken of his new love to his parents and what ensued had shocked him profoundly. Fr C whilst taking time out had stayed at his parent's home to gather his thoughts and this was when their personal war against his choice of new direction began. He recounted the following events:

- His parents had screamed at him repeatedly reminding him of the vows that he took and that he was a priest forever.
- When he came down to breakfast one particular day they were absent but they had placed literature on the breakfast table, which in his words, had been 'highly selective'. From his account this literature referred to women as 'the spawn of Satan', 'the fallen Eve', and 'the evil temptress'.
- Fr C was reminded by his parents that this lady had been married before and already had three children. She was 'second hand goods' and no way should he leave the priesthood for someone this sullied.

This was the last occasion Fr C came to visit the researcher and shortly after this meeting he left to be with the lady he had fallen in love with. Fr C subsequently married the lady contrary to his parent's wishes. As far as the researcher is aware the parents, after two years of no contact, now see Fr C but among their circle of friends (particularly those in the parishes) he is seldom referred to or spoken about.

It was at this point in the study that the researcher designed a questionnaire to address the issue of "How might women perceive their position within the Catholic Church."

The questionnaire was composed of two sections: A & B. Section B of the questionnaire forms part of a later chapter. Section A asked the following questions:

- 1. It has been suggested that the prayers used in Mass and in the Readings (English Version) often presume an entirely male congregation to be present. Do you agree with this?
- 2. Do you feel that women are treated the same as men within the structures of the Catholic Church?
- 3. In your own view does the Catholic Church address the spiritual needs of women?
- 4. Are there things you would like to see change in the Catholic Church with regard to a woman's role?
- 5. In your opinion do you think a woman could perform the role of priesthood?

On page 5 the researcher raised a caution about being too simplistic in thinking that the Catholic Church might consist of two camps with regard to a woman's thought - one that was liberal and all for change across the board and - one conservative and all accepting with regard to Church practice and tradition. This questionnaire attempts to demonstrate for the researcher and the research that two clear - cut 'camps' do not necessarily exist:

“Decide what you need to know”  
(Bell, 2000, p 131)

The questionnaire also has relevance to our understanding of how women might perceive and view the Marriage Annulment Process in the Church, in that nullity rulings are decided by male clerics.

“Ask yourself why you need this information.”

(Bell, 2000 p 131)

The content and weight of the questions asked was drawn from issues already under discussion (Silvermann, 2005) in Catholic parishes and among groups of Catholic women - 'Movement for Ordination of Women', 'Union of Catholic Mothers', 'Marriage Preparation Course', 'Justice and Peace Groups' *et al.*

“Every effort should be made to keep the questionnaire as brief as possible by restricting the scope of the questions to crucial issues related to the research, and avoiding any superfluous details or non - essential topics.”  
(Denscombe, 2004, p 151)

The type of questions asked (see above) covered issues familiar to the respondents:

“The respondents will have some information, knowledge, experience or opinions on the topic of the questions.”  
(Denscombe, 2004, p 153)

Ethical issues were considered (Wisker, 2001; Smith, 2003; *et al*) and the researcher did not feel it necessary for participants to enter their name or address but were asked only to give their age range. Care was also taken in formulating the wording of the questions and the content so as to try and avoid upset in areas that related to religious beliefs and practices. A 'journalistic' type of sensationalist questioning was avoided as participants might view this as oppressive and intrusive (Silvermann, 2005):

“Avoid the assumption that research is only newsworthy if it reveals what is hidden or secret.  
Recognise that what is usually of most interest is what is *unremarkable* to participants.”  
(Silvermann, 2005, p 300)

The questionnaire was piloted and independently checked (Wisker, 2001) on three separate occasions by Catholic women and comments and corrections invited:

- ✓ Occasion 1 - Checked for relevance and competency by two critical friends involved in research issues.



- ✓ Occasion 2 - Questionnaire piloted on a small Catholic women's group comprising of nine members. A time limit of 45 minutes was given to the group to complete the questionnaire and 15 minutes allowed for feedback. This exercise allowed the researcher to address issues raised by Denscombe's checklist (2004) such as: providing non - irritating questions, questions on which the participants will have some knowledge, questions that participants will be willing to answer (Denscombe, 2004 p 153). The group feedback was positive and all nine participants said they found the subject matter relevant and interesting.
- ✓ Occasion 3 - Grammar and spelling checked by researcher's proof - reader and slight alterations to wording made.

All three parties deemed the questionnaire relevant and judged it to be accessible and familiar to a Catholic female participant and agreed that it did not contain questioning that was liable to cause offence or distress to religious belief.

The researcher is aware of the disadvantages of questionnaires in that often:

“Recipients don't like them.”  
(Edwards & Talbot, 1997 p 73)

This particular disadvantage was addressed by inviting the 'hoped for' participants to take a questionnaire if they wished as oppose to distributing them randomly or posting them 'ad hoc'. Edwards & Talbot (1997) also caution:

“The descriptive data they produce rarely allow you to really demonstrate your skills of analysis.

You often need to chase up non - returns to ensure that your sample is appropriate.

They give only quite superficial information.”  
(Edwards & Talbot, 1997, p 73)

If a single questionnaire was to form the focal point for this research then the researcher might agree with their observations but as other methods of gaining research information are to be utilised, then the questionnaire proves a useful tool alongside the others. As Edwards & Talbot (1997) further observe:

“All good practitioner research studies start with observations.”  
(Edwards & Talbot, 1997, p: 77)

The researcher maintains that questionnaires can provide an observation tool. The questionnaire to be discussed below evolved out of the researcher's own perceptions and observations of how he perceived the female role within the Catholic Church. The questionnaire was just one tool to validate his opinions or to go some way to alter them. Thus the questionnaire compliments other research tools used, such as participant interviews and written experiential accounts. These account for the 'funnelling technique' (Smith, 2003) used to address this research question.

Once the researcher was satisfied with part A of the questionnaire the participant sample size was decided upon in consultation with the researcher's supervisor. The sample size should not be unwieldy as this is qualitative research not quantitative. The researcher spoke to a mixed age and sex congregation at a Catholic Sunday morning service (in an inner city parish in the East Midlands area of England) about the nature of the research. The researcher invited female members of the congregation to take a questionnaire away with them if they felt able and to return to a designated box in two weeks time (Bell, 2000 p 129). The researcher made 60 questionnaires available and 56 copies were taken from a table placed at the rear exit of the church. At the end of the two - week deadline 46 questionnaires had been returned to the designated box.

Two questions might now be asked - 1) Why did the researcher choose this particular congregation in which to speak about the questionnaire and offer it for distribution and 2) Why make available only 60 questionnaires?

When conducting research the researcher needs to have knowledge of the field in which they are operating (Wisker, 2001, Smith 2003, McLeod 1994, *et al*). The decision to choose this particular congregation for participation in the research topic was that (in the researcher's opinion) there was a broad age range present at Sunday worship. This broad range of congregation would not be so if, for example, the researcher had chosen a church that was sited in a retirement village or a church that was noted for its vibrant youth ministry. The purpose was to address as varied an age group as possible.

As already stated the weight of this questionnaire is slight but significant when measured against other methods of data collection that are to be used, most notably 'semi - structured interviews'. Interpretative phenomenological analysis - IPA (Smith, 2003) will be a main research tool to address further data in this research topic, in particular, the 'semi - structured interviews' and one of the recommendations of IPA is that studies should be conducted on small sample sizes. This recommendation influenced the decision to limit the number of questionnaires to 60.

“IPA through purposive sampling, finds a more closely defined group for whom the research question will be significant.”  
(Smith, 2003, p 54)

In compiling the questionnaire clarity of questioning was important (Denscombe, 2003, p: 150). Respondents were invited to circle YES / NO / DON'T KNOW and if they felt able they were invited to give a comment and space was provided for this. Respondents, from hereon referred to as Participants, were asked to circle their age range as being one of the following: 17 - 23, 24 - 30, 30 - 45, 45 - 60, 60 - 75 and



75+. The age range was broken down in this way as the researcher was interested, albeit in a limited way, to see if age had any influence on religious opinion or thought. The researcher and reader might, for example, believe that the 17 - 23 year age range be less conservative in thinking and opinion than say the participants in the 60 - 75 year age range.

The percentages of those who answered YES / NO / DON'T KNOW are given here and the comments participants made on the questions are given in full in Appendix C. Before looking at some samples of the comments given by participants one needs to give attention to what the responses will mean and what use are they to this research? (Bell, 2000, p: 121). It is the researcher's hope that they go some way to help us understand how women perceive their position and role in the Catholic Church and that any issues raised might be discussed in the recommendation section of this study. The responses will allow us to have some insight, however limited, as to what Female Participants might like to see change in the Catholic Church to make their position more acceptable.

### **QUESTION 1 (Appendix A)**

**“It has been suggested that the prayers used in Mass and the readings (English Version) often presume an entirely male congregation to be present. Do you agree with this?”**

From the table one can see that 58% of the forty six participants did not agree with this. Some 36% of the forty six participants agreed with this statement and 6% did not know. The 58% who did not find the use of the masculine language unacceptable tended to interpret phrases such as 'mankind' to be all inclusive and two participants

whilst ticking the NO box commented that they could see why some might have issue with this - participants 3 & 38.

The researcher found that the responses from the 36% who agreed that the Catholic Mass, Prayers and Readings 'presumed an entirely male congregation to be present' tended to give more critical comments. An example of this is participant 5 in the 24 - 30 year range: "I am a modern feminist Catholic, which is a virtual contradiction as Mass and all the readings refer only to men". Participants 25 & 43 referred to the Catholic Church and the Bible as being male dominated and that women were not seen as important in the Church structure.

In asking this question the researcher was aware of personal views and possible bias towards the liturgical language currently in use. As a male pastor he would have answered a definitive YES to this question. His own opinion is that the language of the liturgy, as it presently stands, (2009) is exclusive to a woman's full participation. The figure of 58% who had no issue with this was a surprise to the researcher.

## **QUESTION 2 (Appendix A)**

**"Do you feel that women are treated the same as men within the structures of the Catholic Church?"**

Some 30% of the participants replied YES to this question but interestingly three of the YES responses might just as easily have fit in the NO box. The comments given after they had ticked the YES box might have applied if they had ticked NO:

Participant 2: Ticked YES but comments: "But depends on the structure of the parish"

Participant 14: Ticked YES but appears to contradict this by adding: "Although think some women would make good priests".

Participant 18: Ticked YES. The comment appears to reveal that women are treated the same as men in the Catholic Church in certain parish structures not throughout the Catholic Church: "This depends on your parish priest though!"

The 68 % who did not feel that women were treated the same as men in the Catholic Church were not restricted in their view by age. This was a bias the researcher might have held until examining the responses - part of the thought was: the younger the age range the more liberal / radical the responses might be. The challenge to this thought was immediate in that 2 out of 3 of the participants in the 17 - 23 range felt that women were treated the same as men.

The NO responses were as follows:

2 out of 2 participants in the 24 - 30 age range responded NO.

6 out of 7 participants in the 30 - 45 age range responded NO.

9 out of 13 participants in the 45 - 60 age range responded NO.

12 out of 18 participants in the 60 - 75 range responded NO with 2 DON'T KNOW'S.

A pre - conception of the researcher was that those in the age 75+ age range would not attempt to question Church tradition and this was confirmed. The 75+ age range felt that women were treated the same as men but they gave no comment as to why they thought this.

As the reader can observe - Appendix C - this question seemed to produce robust comments from the participants as to how they fare in the structures of the Catholic Church alongside their male counterparts. The over - riding concern in the comments is the lack of a female priesthood and a Church structure that is perceived by the participants to be the exclusive domain of the male. Comments from the age ranges included:



Participant 5 (24 - 30 yrs) “Women are clear underclass throughout. We are not mentioned, are not respected.....”

Participant 8 (30 - 45 yrs) “Catholic Church male dominated throughout. There is a lack of female opinion and knowledge. Females are isolated”.

Participant 20 (45 - 60) “RC Church is male orientated - no married or women priests. Structure of the Church is dominated by men!”

Participant 33 (60 - 75) “Women can’t be ordained so their role is restricted. Women not part of the structure.”

Participant 43 (60 - 75) “Men fearful of losing control despite many great women saints. There has been no structure in the Catholic Church to allow the cream to rise to the top.”

This particular question appears to have encouraged participants to comment on an issue that is a passionate one for some within the Catholic Church today (2009). A good number of women from varying age groups find it increasingly difficult to come to terms with an institution that bars one half of the population from priestly ministry because of their sex. Female writers such as Bouchin, 2006; Johnson, 2002 ; *et al* view the Catholic Church as an institution that is forever evading the question of female ordination and one that merely offers platitudes to women to encourage them to stay with the Church:

“When Pope John Paul II visited the United States in 1979, he was met everywhere with enthusiasm verging on adulation. But when he reached Washington, and spoke to a gathering of nuns, he was met also with respectful dissent. Sister Theresa Kane was no young hothead or rebel, but the superior of the Sisters of Mercy and the elected head of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (not a wild or radical group). Appointed to greet the Pope she took the occasion to make a public request that “half of humankind” be recognised as worthy to be ‘included in all the ministries of the Church’. The Pope answered that the Virgin Mary should be the nun’s model, and Mary was not a priest.”  
(Wills, 2000, p 104)

The researcher finds the comment of participant 12 a fitting summary as to how women often feel: “Women are welcomed and encouraged but not to be the ones who write sermons!”

### **QUESTION 3 (Appendix A)**

**“In your own view does the Catholic Church address the spiritual needs of women?”**

The researcher feels that this question further develops question 1. If we accept that the language of Catholic liturgy (in this case English) uses masculine forms of address in congregational use then this question allows participants to expand their comments as to whether the use of masculine forms of address has any effect on their spirituality and worship. Spiritual needs might take into account how they feel when they come to worship in a Catholic Church and hear many prayers that refer to ‘mankind’, ‘men’, ‘man’, ‘brothers’. There is no shortage of examples that could be given to illustrate this. The example that will be given is one that the researcher is aware, from pastoral experience (1989 - 2009), women find hard to comprehend. On Sundays and Holydays the ‘Creed’ is recited by all at the liturgical celebration. The creed contains the fundamentals of Catholic belief and truths - that God came to save us through His Son Jesus Christ and that he still works through his Church by virtue of the Holy Spirit. The ‘Creed’ is the bedrock of Catholic belief and the promise and remembrance of God’s love for his people. When reciting this out loud in congregational worship - men and women alike - we arrive at the phrase:

“For us men and for our salvation he came  
down from heaven.....”  
(Sunday Missal, p: 34, 1984)

Pastoral practice and presiding at liturgies for over 19 years has provided the researcher with enough contact to be aware that not all women are comfortable or complacent enough to accept the word 'men' in this context as meaning 'humankind'. I know of certain women who seriously question why they belong to the Church at all if God only sent his Son for the salvation of men - what's the point of attending then? Miriam Winter writing in "The Church Women Want" (edited by Johnson, 2002) is aware that all too often masculine forms of address in liturgical communal worship are hurtful to women and imply exclusion or a lower state of belonging. Winter (2002) is aware that certain groups of women:

Are making a distinction between religion and spirituality, between religion that is outside of us, calling us to conformity and a more intimate spirituality shaping us from within. Spirituality can be, and very often is, right there within religion, but it is not coterminous with it. It is a segregated world for some. Growing numbers of women are saying god is speaking to me and saying this, and religion is saying that. The result is a disconnect that is personally crucifying. Feminist women's spirituality is categorically rejected, even though Catholicism embraces a variety of spiritual disciplines and there is a precedent for following the path that is spiritually right for us. Those forms of traditional spirituality that have a lengthy history and institutional approval as the only acceptable way are not always right for women. (Winter, 2002, p 29, Edited by Johnson)

The researcher knows a good number of clerics acutely aware of the embarrassment non - inclusive language causes, if only to their own self - esteem (Wills, 2000). Pastors aware of this seeming exclusivity in worship are, more often than not, swift editors when it comes to reading out prayers in public liturgies, replacing men/man to humankind or swapping 'Let us pray for our brothers and sisters' to 'Let us pray for our sisters and brothers'. This might be viewed as 'tokenism' but realistically it is the most one could expect at present and even this depends largely on the sensitivity of the male cleric or on the importance he gives such matters.



Prior to examining a selection of responses to question 3, thought must be given to diversity. The Church is a community steeped in many years of tradition, practice and thought. The feminist thought of Winter (2002) is one train of thought. From pastoral practice (1989 - 2008), the researcher is aware that there may be just as many women who do not have an issue with masculine liturgical address as there are those who do:

“When white women speak of ‘women’s experience’ without listening to the experience of the poor women or women of color, they commit the same pernicious error that they criticize men of having practiced: taking one’s own life and making it normative.”  
(Johnson, 2002, p 69)

To the question: In your view does the Catholic Church address the spiritual needs of women? 67% felt that it did, 18% felt that it did not and 15% declared that they didn’t know. For the researcher this question was the most diverse and interesting in the way that the participants chose to answer it. It was interesting in that even some of those who ticked ‘DON’T KNOW’ made a comment. The comments made by some participants endorsed opinions expressed by authors from the literature search (Rohr & Martos, 1989, Johnson, 2002, Bouclin, 2006, *et al*) which showed both writing and thought in this area to be current and topical.

For those participants who answered NO or DON’T KNOW there was perpetuation of themes and issues given in comment to the previous question:

Participant 5 (24 - 30) answered NO and commented: “Women are undervalued and under represented. I feel totally undervalued in the Catholic Church. I respect my religion it does not respect me.”

Participant 8 (30 - 45) answered NO and commented: “Out dated attitude towards women. Women priests need to be allowed to practice.”

Participant 17 (45 - 60) this participant's response appears to endorse the feminist thought and opinion of Miriam Winter (2002). The participant comments: "Improving, but spiritual needs of women are probably better met outside the Catholic Church."

Participant 20 (45 - 60) responded with a DON'T KNOW and seemed to imply that with the Catholic Church in its present condition it wasn't fully possible to meet a woman's spiritual needs: "As the Catholic Church is dominated by men in the hierarchy it is difficult for them to understand women's spiritual needs."

Of the 67% who felt their spiritual needs were addressed they could not see a difference in the spiritual needs of men or women:

Participant 3 (17 - 22) "Feel it addresses spiritual needs of most people, male or female."

Participant 26 (60 - 75) "Are women's spiritual needs different from men?"

Participant 42 (60 - 75) "From my experience I feel my needs are met."

In asking this question the researcher had a presumption that participants might address the liturgical language issue as this is a vehicle for conveying things spiritual - communal worship, spoken prayer, the Catholic Mass. It seems however, that influences from question 2; "Do you feel that women are treated the same as men within the structures of the Catholic Church?" merged into this question. This does not come as any surprise for the researcher as he knows it to reflect the current thought in Catholic Communities, at the very least in England and America (Cornwall, 2004, Wills, 2000).

A recent conversation (July 2008) the researcher had with a senior Catholic cleric bears this out. Female Catholics have seen the ordination of women in other Christian faiths, in particular the Anglican denomination, and they see it 'works' or at the very

least they think it does and they want it to become a reality within the Catholic Church. This senior cleric recounted that his predecessor in the parish had commented publicly that the female minister in the neighbouring parish was the finest and most effective advertisement for female ordination he had ever encountered. He summed it up by publicly telling his Catholic congregation that she was the finest priest he had ever met. She was female. The female members of the congregation have forever remembered this priest's remarks and raise the issue at Church discussion groups; that issue being the desire for the ordination of women in the Catholic community. The senior cleric declared that women's ordination in the Catholic Church alongside the abolition of priestly celibacy are issues that are set to stay - they will be with us until such time they are adequately and satisfactorily addressed. The following two questions 4 and 5 evidence this.

#### **QUESTION 4 (Appendix A)**

**“Are there things you would like to see change in the Catholic Church with regard to a woman's role?”**

In asking this question the researcher imagined that the participants might comment on situations in the Catholic Church's structure that appear to undermine a woman's role or indeed totally exclude them. Examples of this are not difficult to find given that the very make - up of the Catholic Church is a patriarchal one (Hampson, 1990, Beattie, 2003, Johnson, 2006 *et al*). Would their comments address the lack of women's involvement in Church governance or their complete alienation from certain places or experiences?

The researcher's own perception of the woman's role within the Catholic Church is one of personal struggle. Pastoral experience has borne this out for me on occasions



that are too numerous to mention (1989 - 2008) and like the feminist theologian Daphne Hampson (1990) I am surprised so many of them have not abandoned the Church years ago. When commenting on the papacy of Pope John Paul II John Cornwell recalls a symposium set up by the Pope:

“Some journalists who do the Vatican beat were quick to point out that several days earlier the pope had held an international symposium to review the developments since the Second Vatican Council: Women and the media had been excluded from the symposium. As in two earlier sessions of review, one dealing with anti - Semitism and another with the Inquisition, the symposium organizers managed to disappoint expectations and offer insult. Some 250 ‘experts’ were welcomed at the Vatican II review, but only two women observers out of forty were invited.”  
(Cornwell, 2004, p 186)

Comments on a woman’s role in the Catholic Church might not even involve such lofty discussion about their lack of involvement in governance, as it seems to be lacking in areas further down the scale. The researcher remembers an elderly lady recently asking why it was that only men took the offertory collection at Mass? She went on to add: “Is it that women can’t be trusted?”

The question addressing change in the Catholic Church regarding women was answered in the following way: 63% ticked YES for change to take place, 28% ticked NO and 9% DON’T KNOW. In the age range 24 - 45 there were seven saying YES, one saying NO and one DON’T KNOW. In the age range 45 - 75 there were twenty one saying YES, eight saying NO and two saying DON’T KNOW. Finally, in the 75+ range two said NO and one said YES.

The researcher expected a substantial amount of comments to range around the issue of women and priesthood as this seemed to be a theme that was rolling through the previous questions. Of the participants who ticked YES:

Participant 8 (30 - 45) agrees with Cornwell's observation (above, 2004) as she comments: "Women having more of an opportunity to have active roles within the hierarchy of the Catholic Church."

Participant 9 (30 - 45) continued this line of thought: "That the hierarchy within the Church take on more women within their structures to gain a balanced view of life."

Participant 17 (45 - 60) shares the view of writers like Bouchin (2006) and Johnson (2002) that within the structures of the Catholic Church women are only suitable for non - decision making roles at all levels. Participant 17 comments (on what she would like to see): "Greater number of women represented in the higher/senior positions within the Catholic Hierarchy - can't imagine many women in the Vatican except in Admin!"

Participant 15 (45 - 60) appears to acknowledge that there is small hope for the women priest debate and so goes for the removal of priestly celibacy so that a woman can at least approach the priesthood through wifely support: "Possibility for women to support priests through marriage."

The researcher felt that the overall theme emerging from the comments was the perception from the participants that women were sidelined when it comes to decision making in the Catholic Church. Almost all of those who ticked NO to this question failed to comment on why they felt this way. Of those who did Participant 18 (45 - 60) thought: "Women are already involved in many areas within the Church."

Participant 32 (60 - 75) appeared content for women to continue to be the subordinate party to men within the Catholic Church fulfilling the role of server and administrator as she comments (women): "They are, in lay man's terms, a wonderful help!"

#### **QUESTION 5 (Appendix A)**

**“In your opinion do you think a woman could perform the role of priesthood?”**

In looking at the comments to this question a reminder of this chapter’s title is useful:

“How might women perceive their position in the Roman Catholic Church?” In asking question 5 it is not the intention of the researcher to enter into the realms of theological debate regarding the participants comments. The interest is in how their comments shed light on how they perceive their position and role within the Catholic Church. When commenting on the papal encyclical “Mulieris dignitatem” (On the Dignity and Vocation of Women) of Pope John Paul II, Johnson (2002) says:

“Many who read John Paul II’s endorsement of women’s equality with men as image of God wonder why it does not lead him to posit equality in all ministries of Church life and governance. The reason is that he is still using the traditional dualistic view that men and women embody human nature in two contrasting ways, which means that they each possess special characteristics, which means that they must play distinct social roles.”  
(Johnson, 2002, p 52)

In this context the distinct social roles mean that a woman cannot be ordained a priest. According to Johnson (2002) Pope John Paul II in the encyclical ‘Mulieris dignitatem’ (2002) encourages women to take as their role model the Virgin Mary whose qualities, according to Johnson, he counts as: “the self offering totality of love; the strength that is capable of bearing the greatest sorrows; limitless fidelity and tireless devotion to work; the ability to combine penetrating intuition with words of support and encouragement.” Johnson’s (2002) ‘take’ on the words of the Pope are interesting and offer an important and cautionary opinion. This opinion of Johnson’s (2002) contrasts radically with that of Participant 32 and her comment to question 4 (above) that women are just ‘a wonderful help!’

“Whatever may be the praiseworthy value of this list of virtues, the fact that they are ‘feminine’ applied to women but not men, make them suspect.



They are the habits of the helper, the auxiliary, the handmaid, not that of the resister of oppression let alone the self - actualising, creative leader. In situations of abuse, such sentiments can even be dangerous to life and limb. Assigning them to women in the private domain may challenge women to develop a spiritual life, but it also serves to deny them opportunities for equal partnership in society.”  
(Johnson, 2002, p: 54)

On the questionnaire 68% of the participants ticked YES to a woman being able to perform the role of priest and 30% ticked NO, just 2% ticked DON'T KNOW. Of the participants who answered YES many are of the opinion (Wills 2000, Cornwell 2004, Johnson 2002, *et al*) that the denial of a female Catholic priesthood is an affront to equality and to the potential women might bring with them. The arguments against ordaining a woman are also an insult to their intelligence (Will 2000, Cornwell 2004). The researcher felt that ‘written anger’ came across very clearly in several of the YES participant comments:

Participant 5 (24 - 30) “Women (*sic* are) more than capable of performing the role of priesthood. Its about time women were treated as equals and trusted. It is appalling how women are treated in this day and age, especially in the Church.”

Participant 7 (30 - 45) addressed the gender issue present in pastoral ministry: “Jesus showed great respect for women and the role they play in society. Many women do not feel able to approach a male priest. This might be different if the priest were female. Women are now equal in so many ways, apart from in the Catholic Church.”

Participants 20 (45 - 60) and 25 (45 - 60) chose to address priestly celibacy in the comments:

Participant 20: “Firstly the Church should let priest’s marry then agree that women would make excellent priests.”

Participant 25: If priests were allowed to marry and women were allowed to be priests maybe there would not be such a shortage of clergy.”

Overall the participants who answered YES to the question made supportive comments regarding a woman’s capability to perform the role of priest.

Among the NO participants the predictions of Johnson (2002) are all too evident. Johnson (2002) accused Pope John Paul II’s encyclical ‘Mulieris Dignitatem’ of making the women: “the helper, the auxiliary, the handmaid.” Participant 18 (45 - 60) doubts the attention span of her sex: “My personal opinion is that I would not like to see this (women priests). Women could have more distractions than a man.”

Participant 23 (45 - 60) was against a woman becoming a priest but seemed easy with the helper/handmaid role: “But a woman could share and support the duties of a priest if allowed to marry one.”

Participant 32 (60 - 75) seems to feel that males are more spiritually blessed than women and comments; “The role of priesthood is sacred and belongs to the male.”

For the majority, (68% of the participants) women being ordained for priesthood in the Catholic Church would be a positive step forward and there is clearly frustration that this has not been allowed to happen. What of the NO participants? Interestingly

participant 27 (60 - 75) who answered YES gives a good observation as to the future:

“Of course, (that women should be ordained) but it will take time to convince most people and even most women!” Glover - Wetherington (1996) gives a telling

comment on this when speaking of other Christian Churches where female ordination is allowed:

“Attitudes can be seen as more complex than simply ‘for’ or ‘against’. Not only do congregations have members who differ with one another in the perceptions of women as clergy, individual

church members can have multifaceted attitudes. So even when lay people say they are willing to have women perform any particular ministerial functions these same laity often prefer to have a male as their own pastor.

The minority of laity who do not want women clergy at all are willing to be more vocal and aggressive in their resistance. They are able to have a marked effect on the decision of the congregation as a whole. People whose perception support the idea of women in ministry are usually more concerned about keeping harmony in the congregation than they are about taking a stand in favour of calling a woman pastor.”

(Glover - Wetherington, 1996; Ed by Moessner p 74 - 75)



## **1.2 Clergy as an essential part of the Catholic Church**

The researcher feels that it is necessary to include a section on the perception of Catholic priesthood. In section 1.1 we read comments by female participants some of whom asked that priestly celibacy be abolished so that a married clergy might better understand the needs of family. Certain participants also expressed a desire for a female priesthood so that women might have the option of being ministered to by a woman.

When a Catholic marriage breaks down and one party seeks to have the marriage declared null by the Church (to be discussed in the following chapters) that marriage will be examined by a tribunal made up almost exclusively of male clerics (Nottingham Diocesan Yearbook, 2009).

What then is the formation of the Catholic priest with regard to marriage and family life? In the Christmas address of Pope Benedict XVI to the Roman Curia (Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2006) the Pope spoke of his trip to Valencia, Spain. He informs his listeners that this visit was under the ‘banner of the theme of marriage and the family’. He speaks of how beautiful it was to listen to the testimonies of certain members of the congregation and he notes:

“.....couples - blessed by a numerous throng of children - who introduced themselves to us and spoke of their respective journeys in the Sacrament of Marriage and in their large families.”  
([www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches), 2006, p 4)

When addressing the virtue of staying married in the face of trials and tribulations he asks the question: “Can a man bind himself forever?” He answers this by saying:

“Can he say a ‘yes’ for his whole life? Yes, he can. He was created for this.”  
([www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches), 2006, p 5)

If this is so fundamental to human existence - 'he was created for this' why then is this not an option for the ordained Catholic male priest? Pope Benedict XVI appears to contradict himself in this very same speech when he later describes what he expects from his priests:

**“The true foundations of celibacy can only be contained in the phrase *Dominus pars* - You are my land. It can only be theocentric. It cannot mean being deprived of love, but must mean letting oneself be consumed by passion for God.....celibacy must be a witness to faith: faith in God materializes in that form of life which only has meaning if it is based on God. Basing one’s life on him, renouncing marriage and the family, means that I accept and experience God as a reality and that I can therefore bring him to men and women.”**  
([www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches), 2006, p 8)

The above can be interpreted as stating that a married couple’s relationship with God will be inferior to that of a male priest. The Pope creates confusion with his words, as earlier on in the address, he claimed that the Sacrament of Marriage as being one in which ‘Christ had bound them together.’ Is this less of a bond than the one a priest is encouraged to form? What is the difference?

Gary Will (2000) comments at length on priestly celibacy and the many, often strange, arguments that are given to endorse it, explain it, justify it and lend it credence. Among them he notes the defence argument of Pope Paul VI for celibacy. Pope Paul VI claimed celibacy makes a priest more detached from the world and therefore more readily available to his ‘flock’ when called upon:

**“Here, subtly, the old disparagement of marriage reasserts itself almost against the Pope’s conscious intent. Only the nobler life can bless the less noble one, the one not able to maintain itself in terms of its own value and dignity. In practical terms, just how true is the Pope’s ‘greater availability’ argument? Do any of us feel we must find an unmarried doctor, since no other will be able to give our health his full attention? Do we seek out unmarried counsellors, teachers, leaders?  
.....For that matter, can we honestly claim that married**

Protestant ministers, Orthodox priests or Rabbis are less caring than are Catholic priests? Are they less available, accessible, committed, successful in dealing with people? .....If addressing the needs of the faithful were the real concern, access to them would be more readily achieved by, for instance, having women priests in whom other women could confide more easily.”

(Wills, 2000 p 147 - 148)

When examining the role of the priesthood in the Catholic Church (2008) one observes that the position of the celibate priest appears to have been undermined by sexual scandal concerning parishioners of both sexes and paedophilia. The paedophile scandal to date (2009) has had a profound impact on the credibility and social standing of priests in ministry Wills, 2000; Cornwell; 2004, Bouclin, 2006; *et al.*

When addressing the paedophile crisis in the United States John Cornwell notes:

“At the height of the scandal, in April 2002, Business Week published a Gallup Poll, dated 27<sup>th</sup> March, indicating that some 80 per cent of Catholics were thinking of cutting off charitable contributions to the Church.”

(Cornwell, 2004 p 221 - 222)

Catholics in the United States, during this period, were rightly cautious in fearing that their financial contributions would be used to pay substantial law suits to save errant Catholic priests rather than care for the genuine financial needs of their parishes and schools. Cornwell (2004) offers some disturbing statistics and facts:

“During the lifetime of a 52 year old individual born in 1950, some 4,400 Catholic Priests in the United States had been credibly accused of sexually attacking some 11,000 minors.....It was to emerge that 80 per cent of the victims were boys, typically aged thirteen and upwards. Two - thirds of these children were attacked more than once.....About 90 per cent of the attacks were explicitly and directly genital, as opposed to inappropriate stroking and kissing, with a quarter of that number involving penetration..... Typically, too, only 14 per cent of the cases brought to the attention of the perpetrators dioceses were reported to the police.”

(Cornwell, 2004 p 222)



The Catholic Church at present (2009) would seem to be a difficult place for a priest to live out his calling. Catholics are well aware of the falling numbers of men putting themselves forward for the Catholic priesthood. When the researcher began seminary training in 1983 there were 22 candidates training for priesthood in his diocese. Today, 2009, there are only 4. The Catholic Bishop of Nottingham recognises this shortage in his Pastoral Letter for Vocation Sunday 2006:

“With such a foundation of hope, (the Church) why is it that Vocations Sunday can often be a time of fear for the future shape of a Church with fewer priests? Put simply, it is because fewer men are answering the call to priesthood.”  
(Bishop McMahon, 2006, p: 2)

Eamon Duffy, Professor of Christian History, Cambridge University notes the following with reference to the Irish Catholic Church:

“Scandals are rocking the Church throughout the Western World, successive and apparently endless revelations of clerical sexual misdemeanour, above all the abuse of children. ....(this) has contributed to a widespread withdrawal of confidence in what had seemed an unshakeable pillar of Irish identity. Congregations have thinned, media coverage is cynically hostile, and vocations, already under pressure, have largely collapsed. In Ireland, as in America and to a lesser extent in Britain and Europe, it is a bad time to be a Catholic priest, and many feel that it is a bad time to be a Catholic.”  
(Duffy, [www.thepastoralreview.org](http://www.thepastoralreview.org), 2003 p 1. Accessed 4<sup>th</sup> March 2008)

It would seem difficult for a priest in the present climate to maintain credibility in pastoral life. The respectability of Catholic priests is under scrutiny worldwide:

“The eye of the storm was in the United States, although the problem was more widespread. In the previous (pre - 2000) six to seven years some 120 priests had been investigated in the United Kingdom for the abuse of minors, with twenty - one convictions; in France during the same period some twenty priests had been convicted of rape and molestation of children; in Catholic Ireland some 150 priests were similarly convicted, and there were cases in Italy, Austria, Spain, Mexico, Australia, Canada and parts of Africa.”  
(Cornwell, 2004, p 218)

The Catholic hierarchy (Bishops) of England and Wales are perhaps the most in tune with the priestly situation as at 2009. They would be more than aware that up until the mid 80's they could be 'choosey' about the candidates they accepted for Catholic priesthood. Ideally they preferred male candidates in the 18 - 30 year range with good academic qualifications - at least A' level standard, or even better, a university degree of some kind. Gary Wills (2000) is fairly brutal in his assessment of this situation in his opinion; "they will now consider anybody - so long as they are male." (Wills, 2000).

Speaking of statistics in the 1980's / 1990's Wills observes:

"Replacement rates tell the story. For every 100 priests who died or resigned, Italy had just 50 to take their place, Spain 35, Germany 34, France 17, Portugal 10. In the United States, the average age of diocesan priest was fifty eight in 1999, and roughly 25 per cent of the total were over seventy."  
(Wills, 2000, p 152)

The following also appears to be developing based on visible evidence:

"The priesthood is on the way to the condition of convents, where nuns are in their seventies, and young women foolhardy enough to join an order would spend most of her own time tending to her retired or ailing or dying sisters."  
(Wills, 2000, p 152)

One could say that it is demoralising for any person to work within an institution that appears to be fragmenting as well as no longer 'recruiting'. Inevitably, the increased workload that is created by the lack of cleric's and religious communities falls on those who loyally stay on. Suggestions of how the priestly dearth might be resolved tend to be shrugged off by local bishops as being beyond their remit or power:

"The priestly abuse crisis will have repercussions in the Church for decades to come for many other reasons. In Europe and North America recruitment into seminaries has plummeted. Young men are even more reluctant to consider a priestly vocation

than they were before the crisis broke. Not surprisingly Catholic mothers are not inclined to nurture a priestly vocation as they once did. And this comes at a time when the average age of the current generation of priests indicates a massive shortfall of active priests in a few years time.”

(Cornwell, 2004 p. 233)

Bishops in England have observed the downward trend in applications to the priesthood because they have had no option. The downward trend affects all areas but most noticeably in having to find funds to pay ‘lay’ salaries for posts that were once occupied by priests for considerably less pay or no salary at all. In fairness, bishops hold little sway in how best to tackle priestly shortages and recruitment for the future. Diocesan Assemblies and consultation gatherings are now frequent features as dioceses plan for the future. The assemblies and gatherings tend to follow much the same pattern from diocese to diocese (‘Leaving Safe Harbours’, Liverpool Diocese, ‘The Harvest is Rich’, Nottingham Diocese) in that they seek to address how parishes might function with the falling number of priests. The researcher has experience of one such assembly (2003) where a substantial number of parishioners used the assembly planning meetings to highlight their key fears and hopes. High priorities on this list drawn from 129 parishes were:

- Professional care for divorced and separated Catholics
- That divorced and re - married Catholics (those without an official annulment) be allowed to participate fully in the sacramental life of the Church.
- That priests who have left the priesthood to get married be allowed back to ministry because of current shortages.
- That celibacy should be a choice not a requirement to ordination.
- That women’s ordination be considered and debated openly.



Those parishioners who held hope that these issues would be given an open and fair hearing were to be disappointed. They did not get anywhere near even being allowed on the agenda for discussion. The Bishop and his advisors declared these issues to be out of limits and beyond the brief of the assembly. It was deemed that as they had no authority to effect change in these areas there was no value in discussing them. This surely negates one of the objectives of the assembly that was:

“Remembering that the Church is not here to serve herself, but here to serve God and the world.”  
(Assembly, Diocese X, 2003)

Wills (2000) and Cornwell (2004), both cited above, attribute the negative view of Catholic priesthood to the personal sins of the priest that have emerged into the public arena and also their crimes notably, paedophilia. The way that they view the Church authorities handling of such criminal behaviour has tarnished the public's view of the Catholic Church and its priesthood.

Bouclin (2006) dedicates an entire book on the subject of women dealing with what she refers to as ‘abuse of power in the Catholic Church’ (2006). Crimes such as paedophilia have finally been addressed by the Catholic Church and in some case are still on - going. Bouclin (2006) highlights an abuse (her opinion) in the Catholic Church that, according to her, very seldom comes into the public forum - that of clergy relationships with female parishioners. The case studies she gives in her book allows her to illustrate how certain women have entered into sexual relationships with Catholic Clergy only to be left ‘high and dry’ when the woman has dared to ask for some form of commitment or recognition. This, she considers, is an abuse of power:

“The objection is sometimes raised that these women could have simply said no. This indicates a serious misunderstanding of meaningful consent. When a priest engages in sexual activity with a member of his parish, for instance, it is a case of abuse of power, not consensual sexual activity, because the woman involved,

whether through naivete, social conditioning, or religious upbringing, still views the priest as God's representative.”  
(Bouclin, 2006 p 32)

Bouclin (2006) holds that this type of abuse renders it very difficult for the victim - in this case female - to attend church services where she is likely to view the priest leading the service as a potential abuser. This, she claims, can also be a conscious raising experience for women to see just how oppressed their status is within the Catholic Church. For those women participants - 68% - in the previous chapter who advocated a female priestly ministry they might accord with Bouclin's assessment of today's priesthood in the Catholic Church:

“It is disturbing to observe the impact a sacrificial type of ministerial priesthood has had on the lives of all Catholic women. ‘Sacred power’ has been used and abused to drive a wedge between women and their faith. The experience of women who have been abused by clergy raises some serious questions regarding the consistently maintained doctrine that the male hierarchical model of church is a divine institution entrusted with the salvation of all humanity. Is this kind of ‘sacred power’ willed by God? Was the patriarchal and hierarchical institution we have today instituted this way by Jesus Christ? Was it Christ's intention that only men would have access to the ‘sacred power’ received at holy orders to teach, govern, and sanctify through the administration of the sacraments, especially the eucharistic sacrifice? Considering the damage caused by a literal and legalistic understanding of a ‘sacred’ hierarchical and sacrificial priesthood, it is not surprising many Catholics have come to the conclusion that current church teaching on the priesthood needs serious reconsideration. This paradigm of priesthood supports a system that allows for the abuse of clerical power and is discriminatory toward all women.”  
(Bouclin, 2006 p: 37)

To this point the researcher is aware that the reader must surely think they have been presented with a bleak and detrimental presentation of priesthood in the Catholic Church. The reader might also assume the researcher has a negative bias towards the Catholic priesthood. As a Catholic priest in active ministry the researcher can declare

that no such bias is present in how the Catholic priesthood is presented. This perspective is given from the viewpoint of author observers and commentators. Their writings however, accord with the experience of the researcher. Wisker 2001 addresses this in 'practice based' research when she speaks of 'burning issues' that will be known to be valid and important observations to the researcher but may prove difficult for the reader. The issue with this type of commentary (Catholic priesthood) is opening it up in a fair and unbiased way to the reader but at times the extremities may cause the reader to doubt if it could really be this way? The essay of Peter Allan "The Priest, Sex and Society" (2002) in the book "*Priests in a People's Church*" (2002) looks at priesthood and asks this very question:

".....writing about priesthood today must inevitably touch on those areas of human life that are contentious or problematic.....A certain kind of theology, a certain kind of social construction encouraged a myth of priesthood. In such a myth, the priest became a strange fantasy creature who cannot be imagined engaging in the mundane business of life - going to the toilet, going shopping, making love. The social changes that we have witnessed in the last 50 years demand a reassessment, but it has proved hard to find ways of bringing together those things that mark priests out and those that constitute their solidarity with everyone else."

(Allan, 2002 p101)

It is worth noting that Allan himself is a Catholic Priest in ministry. For the researcher the observations of Allan (2002) above are perceptive. He argues that the model of priesthood has changed over the past fifty years - using the II World War as his benchmark - as have so many other things in society. In his essay he draws our attention to contemporary films such as McGovern's '*Priest*' or the serialisation '*The Lakes*' which have served to demystify Catholic priesthood and Catholic practice showing life 'as it really is' one might say. A saying familiar in Catholic circles is that the priest is no longer 'put on a pedestal' which Allan (2002) welcomes deeming this



past attitude to have removed the priest from any experience of 'ordinary life'. It was all too often the withdrawal of priests from community life, something they experienced whilst training for priesthood, that might have led some to show signs of dysfunctional behaviour simply by being lonely.

Peter Allan's essay on priesthood appears to agree with the thought of Wills (2000), Cornwell (2004), Bouclin (2006) *et al* that the negative image of priesthood is one that has perhaps come about by the Catholic priest being seen as someone who is 'set apart' from the 'real world'. One can see where this thinking comes from, the Church pays his bills, gives him a house to live in, he has no wife or children - little wonder he is viewed as different and maybe out of touch. How does the priest himself deal with this? It is fair to say that this will depend on each individual and on other factors such as social support, network of friends, social skills and so on. For some, priestly isolation has proved manageable, for others it has proven disastrous (Becket Project, 2006) resulting, as we have already read, in abuse of others and more seriously in crime - paedophilia.

The researcher feels that Allan (2002) differs slightly from other commentators in that his essay on priesthood is slightly more redemptive than others and in my opinion it should be. The global perception of Catholic priesthood might be negative in large parts but we must also acknowledge the many excellent priests who work tirelessly and selflessly for the community they serve. They are so often overlooked and under acknowledged - this too is perhaps a fault of our times:

"Every priest shares the temptations and desires that are common to all. The possibility of being a priest to others does not require sinlessness (which is not in any case an option), but a persistent attention to ensure that all the attractions, desires, lusts and temptations are held within the disciplines of holiness. This means not only that we (priests) consider them in prayer, that we offer them in

eucharist, that we acknowledge them in penance,  
but that whenever we are moving towards the  
boundaries of what is generally acceptable we  
seek greater openness rather than greater privacy...”  
(Allan, 2002 p: 111)

The purpose of this chapter on the perception of Catholic priesthood is to give some insight to the reader as to the position of the Catholic priest when we examine later in the study the question of Marriage Annulment. It is the male priest who sits in judgement and examination of Annulment Applications. It is therefore appropriate to inform the reader of how the priest might be perceived today (2009). Women applying for the Annulment in the Catholic Church will have some of the perceptions we have addressed in this chapter. The study hopes to see how these perceptions might affect the woman's thinking in regard to Church doctrine and practice and how other family and friends might be influenced.

## Chapter 2 - Catholic Marriage

### **2.1 The teaching of the Catholic Church regarding marriage.**

As we move towards addressing in more depth the research question: “Women’s perception of Marriage Annulment in the Catholic Church’ it is useful for the reader to have an idea of Catholic teaching regarding marriage. It is not my intention to go into any great depth regarding the biblical or theological history of Catholic Marriage as this has already been ably and recently addressed, in the researchers opinion, by Timothy Buckley in his study for the Catholic Bishop’s Conference of England entitled: “What binds Marriage? Roman Catholic Theology in Practice.” (2002)

A person contemplating marriage in the Catholic Church needs an awareness of the symbolism and imagery that comes with it. This imagery has early roots in the Old Testament section of the Bible in books such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Hosea. In these writings the Jewish people’s relationship with God was often described in marital terms. When the particular Jewish tribe’s relationship with God broke down it was described in terms of relationship break down between husband (God) and the wife (Jewish people). Since God is all - powerful we sense here early beginnings of it always being the woman’s fault in Judaic society - Women in modern Israel are not allowed to divorce only men are. The rabbinical courts deal with the matter and Deuteronomy Chapter 24 verses 1 - 2 still applies. Commenting on Ezekiel the scholar Raymond Brown notes:

“.....similarly, he treats violations of the covenant in the language of adultery and prostitution - Hosea 2, Jeremaih 2, Ezekiel 16.”  
(Brown, 1997, p 308)

This thinking carries forward into the New Testament and the relationship between man and wife should mirror the relationship of Christ and his Church - utter fidelity:



**“Since Christian love is purified, perfected and elevated by Christ’s love for the Church, the engaged couple should imitate this model and develop their awareness of self - giving which is always connected with the mutual respect and self denial that help this love grow.”  
(Cardinal Trujillo, 2002, p 24)**

Marriage is raised by the Catholic Church to great spiritual heights and is seen as a mystery and as something sacred (Sacrament). Even in the marriage ceremony itself the priest is charged with focusing on and highlighting the mystery element above all else even to the detriment of saying anything personal about the couple to be married:

**“The homily, which is obligatory, will have as its centre the presentation of the ‘great mystery’ being celebrated before God, the Church and society. Saint Paul uses a concise phrase in reference to family life: ‘it is a great mystery’ (Ephesians 5:32). Beginning with the proclaimed texts of the Word of God and/or the liturgical prayers, light should focus on the sacrament, hence the consequences for the life of the spouses and their families should be illustrated. Superfluous personal references to the spouses should be avoided.  
(Trujillo, A 2002, p 35)**

In the above work “Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage - Pontifical Council for the Family” (2002) Cardinal Trujillo holds the Christian marital values to be giving, sacrifice, renunciation and self - denial (p 18). These words can be a double edged sword, as evidenced by Sue Jeffels in her PhD “A theology of survival: The faith narratives of women who have survived domestic violence.” (Derby, 2002). According to Jeffels (2002) the so called marital virtues of giving, sacrifice, renunciation and self - denial often served to keep women in abusive relationships for longer than they should and this was peculiar to the Catholic Church.

The Bishop’s Pastoral Commission of Ireland produced a joint document with the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace entitled “Domestic Violence” (2000). This document urged caution on the use of certain scripture passages in the Church liturgy

as they could be interpreted as being anti - women, particularly in the context of marriage. The readings that they identified can be found in the New Testament and the recommendation of the Commission was that they be omitted from the new lectionary that is under preparation in Rome (2000). The readings they identified are: Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3: 1 - 6; Titus 2: 4 - 5; Ephesians 5: 22 -24; 1 Corinthians 11: 3 - 16; 1 Corinthians 14: 33 - 35 and 1 Timothy 2: 11 - 15. The first four of these texts are still in liturgical use in the Catholic Church and are read at public mass. Examples of two of the above are given here:

“Wives, be subject to your husbands, as you should  
in the Lord.”  
(Colossians 3:18; Jerusalem Bible; 1966, p: 348)

and

“Wives should be subject to their husbands as to  
the Lord, since as Christ is head of the Church  
and saves the whole body, so is the husband the  
head of his wife; and as the Church is subject to  
Christ, so should wives be to their husbands in  
everything.”  
(Ephesians 5: 22 - 24; Jerusalem Bible; 1966, p: 336)

The Commission (2000) recommends the removal of such texts from current worship. It cautions that if they are to be quoted in any context then they should be commented on in the light of contemporary understanding of marital relationship.

Can the Catholic Church really sustain its teaching on marriage from biblical reference? I think not and this is partly why I was loath to address it in any great detail because in the researcher’s opinion biblical sources often serve to place women in a subordinate position to men. I give below a response to my email communication with Rev Dr Joseph O’Hanlon Scripture Lecturer at Canterbury University (11<sup>th</sup> January 2008 timed 4:46pm):

“Thank you for your clarification. You are well advised not to become closely involved with the biblical stuff. But one aspect may give you some introductory material that would be somewhat relevant to your main thesis. Because you are dealing with women’s responses, it might be worthwhile noting that the biblical statements on divorce almost all deal with men only. All the Old Testament statements are about the rights of men to divorce, not women. This is true of the Pentateuch and even the very beautiful text in Malachi 2: 13 - 16 is addressed to men not to women. People don’t always realise that the Ten Commandments are enjoined on men only. Women are chattels to be looked after as one does an ass or not to commit adultery with. The New Testament texts are somewhat ambiguous. Matthew 5:31 -32 seems to contemplate divorce only for men and the same is true of Matthew 19: 3 - 9, where the question of the Pharisees contemplates divorce for men only. The discussion in Mark 10: 2 - 10 is more in line with Roman law which, unlike Jewish law, allowed women to divorce. Mark is against it and 1 Corinthians 7: 13 is like Mark. Notice, too, that 1 Corinthians 7: 26 - 31 is directed at men not women. However Paul is the first person in recorded history to say ‘Husbands love your wives’. Nobody before him, in any language or culture, is recorded as introducing love into the marital equation.”  
(email received from Dr O’Hanlon, Canterbury, 11/1/2008)

Catholic marriage is rooted in biblical material that is itself male orientated. It tries to convince people that there is a viable understanding of marriage as a love covenant in the Bible when there isn’t. What the Bible does mostly is to present marriage in a patriarchal society, but then of course, that is what the Church is.

A couple planning to marry in the Catholic Faith know that it is not something to be taken lightly. The notice they have to give to register their desire to marry is at least six months. The type of preparation the couple receive before entering into such a sacred contract varies greatly from parish to parish. The least a couple can expect is several meetings with the priest who has agreed to conduct their ceremony. The basic requirements for a couple to marry in the Catholic faith are:

- ✓ Neither of them have married before (except for the case of a former spouse being deceased)



- ✓ They have some affiliation with the parish they have chosen to celebrate their marriage.
- ✓ At least one of them should be a Baptised Catholic and ideally a practicing Catholic. A practicing Catholic (basic definition) is usually defined as someone who attends Mass every Sunday and on Holy Days unless unable to do so for genuine reason.
- ✓ That they are aware of Catholic teaching with regard to procreation and the sanctity of life.
- ✓ That they commit to Baptising any child born of the union in the Catholic faith.
- ✓ That both parties are entering the marriage freely and without reservation.
- ✓ That the couple are physically capable of consummating the union.
- ✓ That there are no psychological or mental issues that may affect the union.
- ✓ That they are of reasonable age and maturity.

Once the required preparation has been completed and the date for the marriage set then the couple are asked to sign the necessary documentation. This documentation clearly spells out the obligations of marriage in the Catholic Church:

“1. The Church teaches that marriage is an intimate and permanent partnership of the whole of life between one man and one woman which is established by God and ordered for their mutual welfare and support and for the procreation and education of children; and that marriage between the Baptised is a sacrament.

a) I the undersigned understand and accept that marriage is a lifelong, exclusive and indissoluble union.

b) I understand and accept the obligations of marriage with regard to faithfulness, mutual love and support.

c) I understand and accept the obligations of marriage with regard to the procreation and upbringing of children.

2) Marriage has its origin in the free and irreversible consent by which a man and a woman solemnly pledge on their wedding day to take each other as husband and wife.

When on my Wedding Day I am called upon to give my consent it is my intention to do so freely and without any reservation.

I do solemnly declare that the information I have given here is true, and that I have never at any time been through any form of marriage either civil or religious (apart from the marriages of which details have been given).

It is my intention to enter into marriage in accordance with the teachings of the Catholic Church.”

(Taken from the Standard Information for Marriage Sheet, in use in English Catholic Parishes as at 2009)

Once this has been read out to the bride and groom they are invited to sign and date the document and the priest counter signs. Out of all the marriage preparation meetings the researcher has conducted (1989 - 2009) every couple appeared more than willing to sign in accepting the obligations of Catholic marriage - even the non - Catholic party. One might presume here that the majority of couples, regardless of religious influence, think marriage to be an important life long commitment.

## **2.2 Female perception of Catholic Marriage**

In the first chapter 1.1 Section A of the questionnaire sought to elicit responses from female participants as to how they might view their role or position in the Catholic Church. We now look at Section B of the prepared questionnaire (Appendix D) that addresses one specific in the Catholic Church - the teaching on marriage.

In formulating the questions for Section B the researcher was aware of the need to make them relevant to the research topic (Denscombe 2004; Gibbs 2007) and that they be questions pertinent to issues and life situations with which the participants would be familiar - all participants are Catholic. The researcher's own experience and perceptions also influenced the style and content of the questions asked so that they were 'grounded in reality' (Denscombe 2004, p: 280) in so far as possible. Limitations are also considered, in that the participants total 46 in number, so whilst giving some insight on the thought of female Catholics with regard to marriage, we cannot 'generalise to the wider population' (Gibbs 2007; p: 100).

What exactly did the researcher hope to achieve with Section B of the questionnaire? In past study on Catholic marriage issues, most notably for the Masters award, the researcher had relied on conversations and interviews with female clients; this questionnaire was to widen the sample and to provide variation in age.

It is hoped that the questionnaire will aid the researcher, along with other research methods, to keep an 'open mind' (Denscombe 2004) to the study. There was need for the researcher to avoid interpretation that might be bound up 'with self', the researcher is not married, the researcher is a male Catholic cleric. Through his own admission the researcher may tend, through study that has led in this direction, towards a negative perception of Catholic marriage with particular regard to females.



The questionnaire might provide a more balanced and equitable tool for the researcher and for the direction of this research question.

### **Question 1 (Appendix D & F)**

**“Do you agree with the Catholic teaching with regard to the Sacrament of Marriage - ‘that it is a lifelong and indissoluble commitment?’”**

Some 68% of the participants agreed with this statement. Whilst stating YES we see that some of the comments do give a clause for when it might not be possible for it to be this way. Participant 5 (24 - 30 yrs) believed it to be life long but agreed women should leave the relationship if it became violent. This participant states that 97% of the time women are the victims of domestic violence.

Participants 15 (45 - 60 yrs) & 25 (45 - 60 yrs) also cite abuse or neglect as a reason for leaving the marriage even though they answered YES. Participants 8 (30 - 45 yrs); 18 (45 - 60) acknowledge the merit of lifelong commitment but note that the ideal is not always possible to achieve.

It is of interest that only five participants who answered YES made mention of religious belief and these differed markedly in the age range:

Participant 2 (17 - 23 yrs): “Commitment (to marriage) is between man, woman and God.”

Participant 3 (17 - 23 yrs): “.....it is a union made in Christ.”

Participant 10 (30 - 45 yrs): “....you say your vows of commitment in God’s church.”

Participant 28 (60 - 75) yrs: “We made our vows before God”.

Participant 41 (60 - 75 yrs) this participant was the only one to use the example of Catholic marriage as being like the relationship of Christ and the Church: “Married couples should aspire to be like Christ and the Church.”

The 28% of participants who responded NO appeared more pragmatic in their responses whilst not totally denying the principle of lifelong commitment. Participant 7 (30 - 45) appears to have either personal experience or to know of a situation that makes her doubt the potential for such binding commitment: "The saying 'you never know what goes on behind closed doors' is SO true."

Participant 11 (30 - 45 yrs) states that in a perfect world we would all want lifelong commitment but: "We don't live in a perfect world." Participant 20 (45 - 60) answers NO but might easily have been mistaken for a YES given the nature of her comment: "Couples do not 'grin and bear it' nowadays - divorce is easier." Couples who have gone through divorce might disagree with it being the easier option.

Out of the 46 participants only 7 made any comment on God, Christ or Church in relationship to marriage. The Church was mentioned by two other participants but in a critical way. Participant 8 (30 - 45): "...the Church should adopt a more realistic approach." And Participant 34 (60 - 75 yrs) believes that the injured party should: "not be condemned to a life of misery for the sake of staying married in the eyes of the Church."

### **Question 2 (Appendix D & F)**

**"When a marriage is in difficulty do you think of the Catholic Church as a place one could go to for support and counsel?"**

Another way of asking this question might be: "When a marriage is in difficulty do you think of the Catholic *Parish and your Parish Priest as a location* one could go to for support and counsel?"

The researcher broadened the question as his research (Client Interviews and Literature Search, Naylor 2009) has often indicated that not every participant would necessarily attend their local parish or feel able to approach their local parish priest. There are various reasons as to why this might be so and a limited selection are given here:

- They may not feel ‘at home’ in their parish church.
- They might not like the style of the liturgy in their parish church.
- They may attend another or other churches because of family commitments.
- There might have been a disagreement with their local parish priest that has driven them elsewhere.

It is because of reasons like those given above that the researcher has used the more global term of ‘Catholic Church’ in the question rather than localising it to specific parishes.

The findings of Sue Jeffels study “A Theology of Survival: Faith Narratives of Women who have Survived Domestic Abuse” (Derby University, 2002) proved interesting to this question and possible answers to it. In her study, the counsel and support that female victims of violence received from certain Catholic priests, appeared poor and misguided, not to mention uncharitable and potentially dangerous. Jeffels (2002) shares Betty’s story (Betty a victim of domestic abuse) of her encounter with her local parish priest:

“I tried going back to the Catholic Church but was upset by the priest’s attitude to my circumstances. He seemed to think that I should go back and try and patch things up, even though I said that I felt I was doing the right thing in leaving. He said that God would never see a broken marriage as right.”  
(Jeffels, 2002, p: 288)



Jeffels study (2002) was specific to females and domestic abuse. Question 2 on this marriage questionnaire seeks to illicit, from the participants, a response to how comfortable they might feel in seeking counsel for marital problems from the Catholic Church.

The hierarchy of the Catholic Church encourages parishes and priests to be pastorally scrupulous with its guidelines for couples preparing to marry: "Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage" (Trujillo, A, Pontifical Council for the Family, 2002). The couples are encouraged to meet other couples and to receive counsel and support in marriage preparation from couples that have been married a considerable length of time. In the meetings the couple have with the priest the very minimum they can expect are five to six sessions to prepare the necessary paper work, discuss the liturgy and to practice the ceremony in church. With such a high level of influence in their wedding preparation - when compared to a civil ceremony - would couples return to this support network when or if the marriage encounters difficulties?

To this question 48% of participants said they would approach the Catholic Church for support and 30% would not. A fairly high percentage of 22% did not know. Of those that answered YES it was not always presumed that a Catholic priest would be the one offering support or counsel. Participant 8 (30 - 45 yrs) uses the global term 'Church' as being the establishment that would offer support as opposed to naming an individual. Participant 15 (45 - 60 yrs) presumes that support would come alongside other agencies. Participant 21 (45 - 60 yrs) comments that the support would depend on who is handling the situation and that she would prefer counsel from someone in a successful and happy marriage - so not necessarily the priest.

Participant 27 (60 - 75 yrs) is charitable in answering YES to this question as she notes: "but it would depend on the priest or whether Marriage Care was available. My

own personal experience was awful!” Participant 37 (60 - 75 yrs) feels that ‘things’ are better in the Church now and that a person might get listened to, presumably she feels that this wasn’t the case at some point in the past, she also believes that it ‘depends on the priest’. Of those participants answering YES to the Church supporting a couple in difficulty, three ways of interpreting the type of support, seem to emerge:

- Certain participants said that they felt ‘Church’ would be supportive but did not explain how they would experience this Church support. Would it be the priest? or a person / couple appointed and experienced in imparting marriage guidance? Would it be an external support system endorsed by the Church?
- Other participants presumed the counsel and support would come from the priest: Participants 6, 10, 27 and 31.
- Participants 15, 21 and 33 seemed to feel that some kind of support mechanism was already in place.

The YES answers appear vague in accurately qualifying the type of support available other than that of the priest. Only one YES participant named an official Catholic body appointed to support those in difficulty, that being Participant 27, who names Catholic Marriage Care. It came as no surprise to the researcher that of those 22 participants that answered YES to this question only one cited the support group “Marriage Care”. From the researcher’s own pastoral experience (1989 - 2008) it appears very little is spoken about in church homilies, in and around the various deaneries and dioceses, regarding the vocation of marriage. Wills (2000) and Cornwell (2004) would state that this is not only the case in the English Church but in other parts of the world as well.



Wills (2000) attributes this to the fact that certain priests of the post Vatican II era (1965 To present) are reluctant to single out marriage as a homiletic subject as it is a contentious topic due to Church teaching on pro - creation, contraception, divorce and re - marriage. From pastoral experience the researcher is aware that Wills (2000) might have a valid point in this area. A priest preaching a mission week in a parish the researcher once held a position in (1998) dedicated an evening mission talk to the subject of Catholic marriage. During his input the mission giver extolled the virtues of natural family planning, the indissolubility of Catholic marriage, the centre and reason for Catholic marriage as being pro - creation and the incompatibility of divorce and Catholic teaching. This priest was more effective in emptying a church by more than half its congregation within 30 minutes than anything the researcher had witnessed before and to date.

Catholic congregations are no different in their social make up than gatherings from any other social body. As such, representation will be present in any congregation from people leading a homosexual or lesbian way of life. There will be people present who choose to opt for a single life style though not necessarily a celibate one. Parishioners will be present whose marriage experience has been rather more of a curse than a blessing. The whole area of Church teaching regarding marriage and priesthood as a vocation has been opened up to embrace others who do not necessarily fit these life choices or would want to choose them. There can be little doubt, for those working in pastoral ministry within the Church, that these are contributing factors as to why very little is heard regarding marriage from church pulpits. This situation can be seen as one of the contributing factors as to why the questionnaire participants appeared to be vague as to what support is available in the Catholic Church regarding practical support for those experiencing marital difficulties.



The comments from those participants who answered NO to seeking counsel and support from the Catholic Church seem to presume that any counsel or support would be given by the male celibate priest and this appears to influence their response of NO.

Participant 5 (24 - 30 yrs) would not approach the Catholic Church for support as she believes that it is: "biased towards the man" as it is: "run by men". Participant 7 (30 - 45 yrs) seems to believe that the Church places such importance on marriage and its indissoluble nature that it is pointless to seek help from such an establishment and she comments: "...there is no way out, even if you are in a destructive relationship."

Participant 9 (30 - 45 yrs) presumes that any support given to a couple would come from the priest and this would not be satisfactory or adequate as she comments: "Single men who have never been in a relationship cannot empathise with a marriage that is suffering difficulties." Participant 13 (45 - 60 yrs) also shares this view in commenting: "Most priests have no personal knowledge of the internal workings of a marriage, although they might be able to offer support."

Rightly or wrongly Participant 25 (45 - 60 yrs) feels the Church is biased towards men and as such men might avail of Church counsel more than a woman would: "Only if you are a man. I feel women would be told to put up with it or work at it."

Participant 34 (60 - 75 yrs) assumes that priests do not have training or qualifications to give marriage counsel and even if they did it would not be based on experience: "Priests are not qualified marriage counsellors and cannot give appropriate support because they have no experience of being married." For Participant 43 (60 - 75 yrs) the inflexibility of priests on issues of marriage would be changed for the better if they themselves were to experience marriage - this would be further improved if

women priests were allowed: "If there were married priests there might be more flexible Church laws, especially if there were women priests."

A fairly high percentage of participants - 22 % - gave DON'T KNOW as a response to this question either because they were not married - Participant 11 (30 - 45 yrs) or because they had not experienced a need or issue in this area - Participant 12 (30 - 45 yrs), Participant 18 (45 - 60 yrs). Others answered DON'T KNOW because they were not clear about what support was on offer and the form it might take, Participant 29 (60 - 75 yrs): "It would depend on the suitability of the person or persons involved in the support and counselling." Participant 35 (60 - 75 yrs) would not necessarily think of the Catholic Church as a support structure: "I have no experience but would not immediately think of the Catholic Church as a structure for support."

### **Question 3 (Appendix D & F)**

**"When a Catholic Marriage ends in divorce do you think of the Catholic Church as an organisation that would be helpful and supportive of the couple?"**

Question 2 addressed the broader issue of a Catholic Marriage experiencing difficulty pre - divorce and asking whether or not they would consider seeking support for these issues from the Church. Question 3 is a progression on from this. When a divorce becomes a consequence of marital difficulties would they still view the Catholic Church as helpful and supportive?

It is of interest to note at this point that pre - divorce (Question 2) 48% of the participants would consider the Catholic Church to be a means of support. Post divorce this response declines to only 35% thinking the Catholic Church would be supportive and helpful. Participants 2 and 3 (17 - 23 yrs) answered YES to the Church



being supportive post divorce with participant 3 claiming first hand experience that this be the case because friends of hers who have divorced turned to the Church for guidance.

Participant 6 (30 - 45 yrs) answers YES but comments that the support is dependent on the approachability of the individual Parish Priest - one would have to feel comfortable with their priest. Participant 10 (30 - 45 yrs) feels the Church to be "supportive and helpful" and she adds that no person should be punished for marital breakdown. There are only two YES responses out of seven participants in the 30 - 45 year range. In the 45 - 60 years range there are five YES responses out of thirteen participants. Out of the five YES responses in this age range (45 - 60 yrs) at least three of the five YES comments might just as easily fit the NO responses because they are given with conditional comments. Participant 20 (45 - 60 yrs) answers YES but comments: "Needs (Catholic Church) more couples who are divorced or separated to give advice to the Church." Participant 21 (45 - 60 yrs) comments: "As long as there is a mix of skills, not just the priest." Participant 23 (45 - 60 yrs) also gives an ambiguous YES when reading her comment: "Years ago would have said not, but there have been some changes of attitude but still a long way to go!!" To the researcher these do not seem to constitute unconditional YES responses to the Church being supportive post - divorce.

In the age range 60 - 75 years six participants out of eighteen answered YES to the Catholic Church being supportive and helpful post - divorce. Two of the YES responses in this category might also be seen to carry conditions. Participant 33 (60 - 75 yrs) answers YES but comments: "Although it depends on the individual priest" (presumably the type and style of acceptable support offered). Participant 37 (60 - 75 yrs) states YES and goes on to comment: "Again this depends on the individual



priest". It would appear that we have a recurring theme here (researcher's observation) that certain participants often equate the Catholic Church as being solely represented by the character and perception of the local priest or priests. Certain participants do not appear to possess a wider experience or vision that encompasses other support bodies or groups within the Catholic Church other than the male ordained cleric. The nature of the support perceived to be on offer by certain participants is bound up in the persona of the local parish priest. For participants 33 and 37 (60 - 75 yrs) the support on offer from the Catholic Church is dependent on the approachability and affable nature of their priest. This might be an issue the Catholic Church needs to address to better communicate that it does have support mechanisms that extend beyond the capability of the local parish priest and as to whether parishioners catch him on a good day.

From the group of participants that answered NO the character of the priest, again, seems pivotal as to whether or not they would seek support from the Catholic Church post - divorce. Participant 4 (24 - 30 yrs) comments: "depends on the priest and the parish" and Participant 7 (30 - 45 yrs) adds: "I think this would depend on the personality of your priest." Participant 17 (45 - 60 yrs) raises the communication difficulty that appears to be an inherent feature in certain areas of the Catholic Church and she comments: "Not aware of any support groups available for divorced / annulled Catholic's". Support groups do exist in the Catholic Church "Marriage Care" and "The Association for Divorced and Separated Catholics" being two national organisations but one might conclude that they are poorly advertised or not sought out if participants appear to know little or nothing of their existence.

Participant 36 (60 - 75 yrs) answered NO and offers a comment that reveals a sense of hurt and anger (researcher's interpretation): "My marriage broke down because of

involvement with a priest at XXXXX Cathedral (place name removed to preserve confidentiality) who do you turn to? Tell me!" Participant 38 (60 - 75 yrs) comments: "It would depend on the local church and how people reacted." This comment goes beyond taking into consideration the attitude of the local parish priest and brings into play the reaction of the parishioners. This is the first comment that has addressed the issue of how the divorcee might be perceived by the people in their own parish community post - divorce. This is an issue that occurs often in the one to one interviews that the researcher has carried out (to be discussed in a following chapter) and one noted in Mc Taggart's work "Being Catholic Today" (2000). It is very often parish communities who ostracise parishioners post - divorce, and fail in giving support.

The participants who answered DON'T KNOW totalled 24 % of the sample. Out of the ten participants who gave this as their answer eight gave comments and five out of these eight comments could be interpreted as NO responses. Participant 11 (30 - 45 yrs) comments: "I would be apprehensive about seeking support from the Church because of what I think the Catholic Church's view about divorce is." Participant 27 (60 - 75 yrs) feels that: "Disapproval is so strong that the individuals feel excluded." In answering DON'T KNOW Participant 41 (60 - 75 yrs) is of the view that the Church teaching on marriage is in itself preventative of people seeking support: "Some would ask for help others would not as the Catholic Church disapproves of divorce there can be no point in approaching it!"



#### **Question 4 (Appendix D & F)**

***“Before answering question 4 please read the following: If (for example) a murderer is evidenced to truly repent of his/her crime and fulfills the necessary penance and absolution he/she is permitted to receive the sacraments.***

***If a divorced Catholic ‘marries’ again without obtaining an annulment from the Catholic Church that person has put themselves out of communion with the Church and they are excluded from the sacraments.”***

**Do you think this is a just and fair situation?”**

One might argue that this is quite a stark and extreme example that has been chosen to illustrate the sacramental rigidity of the Church when it comes to marital issues. The researcher is aware that some readers might claim it to be an unfair example because murder is a ‘one off’ situation (hopefully) yet the divorced person is perpetuating the sin over and over again because they have failed to have their previous marriage Annulled by the Catholic Church. For a Catholic this might be a valid way to reason out the example but this train of thought is not without fault. Buckley (2002) identifies one such failing with the above reasoning: Not everyone will necessarily want to apply for an annulment even though they may stand a reasonable chance of being granted one:

**“There is a growing number of people who will not petition for an annulment because they do not wish to establish that their marriage never existed. Even when they have been told that the length of the marriage and the fact that they have a family are not insuperable obstacles if it can be established that there was something defective in the original consent, they remain adamant that they do not wish to dispose of that period of their lives in such a way. Closely linked with this is an anxiety about the status of the children after an annulment. In spite of all the reassurances to the contrary, many people**



consider that the logical consequence of an annulment is the illegitimacy of the children. Sometimes it is the children themselves who have brought pressure to bear on their parents not to proceed.”  
(Buckley, 2002, p: 157 - 158)

There appears to be no third way for a divorced and re - married Catholic without an Annulment. Certain Catholic authors have suggested other routes, Buckley 2002, Coriden 2000, however, they have not yet been adopted by the Catholic Church. The two main options are refrain from the sacraments or apply for an Annulment.

What of the participants answers to this question and example? This is a question that has been asked before and to a mixed and substantially greater number of participants than we have here. When speaking of divorced and re - married Catholics (without an Annulment) Haring (1990) suggests that the mind of the modern day Catholic no longer wishes the Church to stigmatise divorcees and to exclude them from sacramental practice:

“In Germany, Austria and Switzerland the situation is such that by far the largest part of practising Catholics would be scandalised if innocent divorced people who have been remarried were excluded from the sacraments. The following picture, for example, emerged from a survey among more than 6,000 readers of the Catholic magazine *Weltbild*. Asked whether someone who was the innocent party in a divorce and had subsequently remarried should be admitted to the sacraments, 88.6 per cent said such a person should, and only 11.4 per cent said the person should not.”  
(Haring, 1990, p: 79 - 80)

Of the 46 female participants taking part in this study 58% of them felt that this situation was not a fair one. Participant 5 (24 - 30 yrs) answers NO to it not being just and fair and comments strongly: “Absolutely not! Where do human rights come into the Catholic Church? I believe Jesus never judged anyone, however, couples are judged when asking for an annulment even though there are valid reasons for asking!”

Participant 6 (30 - 45 yrs) answers NO and comments on the attitude of the local priest to her friend: "An annulment may not always be possible. My divorced friend went to her church but her priest wouldn't give her communion because she had married again." This reminds us of an issue addressed earlier - the importance participants give to the local priest as a representative of the Catholic Church and how influential the individual priest can be, an issue that Buckley identifies in his study:

"Lack of sensitivity is one thing, suffering the hostility and prejudice of fellow Catholics is another. Many members of the support groups (for divorced Catholics) reported that they had been ostracized, some even by their priest."  
(Buckley, 2002, p: 100)

Participant 12 (30 - 45 yrs) appears to adhere to the thinking of Haring (1990) above, by commenting that: "It is a sin to exclude anyone who needs communion."

Participant 15 (45 - 60 yrs) comments: "I do not believe it is right for the Church to decree on who can and who can't receive Holy Communion. Jesus called all - especially those who had made mistakes."

Participant 25 (45 - 60 yrs) seems to agree with the researcher in that the example given is rather 'hard hitting' and comments: "I think it is unbelievable! We enter into marriage for life but life is a very long time and no one can foresee what is going to happen." Participant 36 (60 - 75 yrs) answers NO and gives a short poignant comment that shows from personal experience what it is like to be divorced and Catholic: "If you are divorced as I am you are forced to live a lonely life."

Participant 42 (60 - 75 yrs) gives a NO response and comments pastorally that it: "Should be equally possible for the divorced person to repent as it is for the murderer."

Nine participants answered YES to it being a just and fair situation and these made up 21% of the total. The researcher has already noted that some thinkers might see the



divorced Catholic as perpetuating in sin and the comments given by the YES participants appear to endorse this idea. The comments given by certain participants seem to be rigorous and legalistic in approach (researcher's own view). Participant 10 (30 - 45 yrs) answers YES to it being a just and fair situation and gives the following comment: "By not obtaining an annulment they are still married in God's eyes. They should be excluded from the sacraments until they have an annulment otherwise it is a mockery to their faith." Participant 14 (45 - 60 yrs) gives a YES answer and leaves no room for doubt or uncertainty: "Either one is Catholic or they are not. Marriage in the Catholic Church is for life - it's the choice one freely makes - till death do them part!" Participant 31 (60 - 75 yrs) answers YES and follows the same line of thought as participant 14 giving the following comment: "The murderer has repented and been absolved from sin and hopefully will not do it again. The divorced Catholic is committing adultery and so in my opinion cannot be forgiven." Participant 38 (60 - 75 yrs) gives YES as her answer but appears to be unsure and comments: "But it still seems a bit hard."

The participants who gave DON'T KNOW responses accounted for 21% of the participants. Participant 11 (30 - 45 yrs) feels the situation is unfair if the divorce was not the fault of the person being excluded: "It would depend on why the person divorced. If it was not the individuals fault then I think it is unfair." Participant 13 (45 - 60 yrs) gives a similar response saying that it: "Depends on the circumstances."

Participant 28 (60 - 75 yrs) answers DON'T KNOW and gives an interesting response to the question. The participant considers the question not only from the position of the injured party (in not being able to receive the sacraments) but considers the situation for the priest: "What a question. The ideal situation would be to seek an



Annulment. I do not feel that any priest should be put in a position where they are forced to turn anyone away from the sacraments.”

Participant 39 (60 - 75 yrs) whilst giving a DON'T KNOW response seems to agree with those who gave a NO response to it being an unfair position. This participant also raises an issue that certain Catholics hold true - that Annulments are given speedily to the rich and famous. This participant comments: “Always understood Annulments are hard to obtain unless you are rich. It does not seem right that a divorced person is treated worse than a murderer.”

The researcher's own view is that the example given for question four is one that illustrates a harsh and deeply unfair situation. Those who answered YES to it being a just and fair situation (21%) raised issues for the researcher, most notably that people professing to be Christian could give such unchristian responses. The researcher is not alone in identifying this issue and it is an issue addressed by Catholic writers such as McTaggart (2000), Haring (1990), Buckley (2002) *et al.* It is the literature review that best identifies the difference in thought when it comes to matters concerning marital break down within the Catholic Church. The approaches to what constitutes appropriate pastoral care differ substantially as the literature review shows with certain thinkers employing a legalistic approach and others favouring an individual person centred way of proceeding. The researcher feels that the responses given by the participants are a good indicator in the divided thinking.

To question four, Participant 9 (30 - 45 yrs) responds NO, to the situation being unfair and comments: “None of us are perfect. Why should someone be denied the sacraments because of human error.” Participant 10 (30 - 45 yrs) answered YES to it being a fair situation and comments: “By not obtaining an Annulment they are still

married in God's eyes. They should be excluded from the sacraments until they have an Annulment otherwise it is a mockery to their faith."

**Question 5 (Appendix D & F)**

**"Marriage Annulments are the responsibility of a Tribunal - do you think this appropriate?"**

Working in diverse pastoral appointments (1989 - 2008) the researcher is aware that Catholic parishioners vary in opinion as regards the amount of influence the Catholic Church has or should have in what might be termed as an individuals 'private life'. This question seeks to elicit a response from the participants as to whether or not the granting of Marriage Annulments should be within the domain of the Diocesan Tribunals. The Catholic Church does not only attract criticism for its involvement in marital issues but is often viewed with contempt for being involved in areas such as Birth Control, Abortion, Euthanasia, Sexuality and Male only Ordination (Cornwell 2004, Wills 2000, Bouclin 2006, *et al*).

Of the forty - six participants 50% thought it appropriate that diocesan based tribunals should be responsible for examining the broken marriage to see if Annulment was a possibility. Participant 4 (24 - 30 yrs) answers YES but comments: "So long as lay people are involved." Participant 10 (30 - 45 yrs) feels that the tribunal system: "Helps both parties to have their reasons listened to justifiably." Participant 13 (45 - 60 yrs) accords with participant 4 in that the tribunal way is acceptable so long as it: "Includes lay people with marriage experience."

Participant 31 (60 - 75 yrs) states YES but cautions: "It needs to be done fairly though. Don't agree with some annulments like those gained by the rich and



powerful.” Those who answered YES to the tribunal as being appropriate for Marriage Annulments wished it so because they presumed it a trustworthy and fair experience. These participants also wished for lay people to be present on tribunals as the feeling was that unmarried Catholic clergy lack actual lived experience of marriage.

The 26% of participants who felt it inappropriate for Church Tribunals to be investigating Catholic marriage break up tended to be more liberal minded (researcher’s opinion) in their comments. Participant 5 (24 - 30 yrs) answers NO and comments: “If a couple feel they should no longer be together, it is their choice, they should inform the Church but it should be personal choice.” Participant 8 (30 - 45 yrs) feels that Catholic marriage break up should be dealt with more locally and that the Catholic Church ought to effect change with regard to marital difficulties: “Should be a matter for the couple and their local priest. The whole marriage annulment system needs to change and be more realistic towards marriage break down.” Participant 18 (45 - 60 yrs) feels that: “Its an unfair system - should consist of lay people not just priests.” Participant 23 (45 - 60 yrs) accords with participant 8 in thinking that the Church is out of date with the practicalities of marital break down: “The area of marriage annulments are archaic and man made. Just because a marriage fails it does not make you a bad person.”

Comments given by those who responded DON’T KNOW might be judged to tally with those who gave NO responses. Participant 27 (60 - 75 yrs) presumes that Church Tribunals are made up of male clerics and in answering DON’T KNOW comments: “Should not be all male. The length of time it takes needs addressing and Bishop’s should re - think the whole marriage issue.” Participant 35 (60 - 75 yrs) gives DON’T



KNOW and comments: "Tribunal is a horrible word! Cases should be looked at on an individual basis and aim to keep people in the care of a loving Church."

### **Question 6 (Appendix D & F)**

**"On the Catholic Marriage Tribunal for one particular Diocese (chosen at random) there are nine male ordained priests examining the cases. There are no lay people. Do you feel this is acceptable?"**

Forty - two out of forty six participants answered NO to this being unacceptable - a percentage of 91%. Whilst the researcher chose a diocese randomly further examination of the National Catholic Directory 2008 reveals this situation to be the norm in most of the Diocesan Tribunals. Lay people take on roles in the Tribunal as auditors or secretaries. The presence of lay people 'sitting' on tribunals and being part of the Annulment discernment and decision making process is lacking (National Catholic Directory for England and Wales, 2008).

The four participants who answered YES to this being an acceptable situation gave the following comments. Participant 10 (30 - 45 yrs) comments: "If it were not like this people would be divorcing at every opportunity without considering their Catholic faith." Participant 14 (45 - 60 yrs) answers YES but gives no comment. Participant 32 (60 - 75 yrs) feels that clergy are exempt from human error or wrongful tendency: "Some lay people could be biased." Participant 36 (60 - 75 yrs) feels that it is fine for the Catholic Tribunal to be a male clerical reserve: "Providing they are open minded and not totally dominated."

Comments given by the forty - two participants who felt this unacceptable appear to centre on two points:

- Disbelief at there being no lay involvement from either male/female.
- The priest's personal lack of experience by virtue of him not being able to marry.

Participant 4 (24 - 30 yrs) comments: "Not enough experience of marriage - all priests!" Participant 8 (30 - 45 yrs) calls into question the issue of fairness: "This purely controlled environment cannot be fair. Lay people should be involved in as well as priests - including women!" This question also appeared to raise issues for participants as to the integrity of the tribunal and its worthiness to function. Participant 17 (45 - 60 yrs) comments; "The process is farcical. It is a very flawed process overall." Participant 23 (45 - 60 yrs) asks: "Why no women on the tribunal? This is the way forward or abolish the whole thing!" Participant 34 (60 - 75 yrs) notes that: "This situation is awful. How can a group of unmarried priests pass judgment on something they have never had experience of? Of course lay people should be involved!" Participant 42 (60 - 75 yrs) states simply that: "This is not acceptable and it is very biased".

## **Chapter 3 - Female Experience of Catholic Marriage**

### **3.1 How is marital breakdown managed in the Catholic Church - Diocesan Marriage Tribunals.**

This study does not intend to examine the theology of Catholic marriage. Rather it seeks to examine the female perception of Catholic marriage and what exactly one might expect from the Catholic Church should the marriage end. When a Catholic marriage breaks down irreparably ending in divorce, then the Catholic partner needs to pursue a Marriage Annulment from the Church should they wish to marry a new partner in the Catholic marriage ceremony. Not all Catholics will take this course of action, as it is dependent on how important a role the Catholic Church plays in their life.

Before going on to examine the questionnaire that the researcher sent to the Diocesan Marriage Tribunals of England and Wales it is useful to familiarise oneself with regard to the Catholic Annulment Process. The following summary of terms is taken from: "A Guide to the Annulment Process - 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition" (2000) which was compiled by the "National Board of Catholic Women". It is the researcher's opinion that this is a concise and accurate source of information for those considering application for an Annulment.

**"What is an annulment?**

**It is a decree or ruling issued by the Church to say that what appeared to be a true marriage was, in fact, only the appearance of one....."**

**Is an annulment a Roman Catholic form of divorce?**

**No. Divorce in the civil courts signifies that the civil contract between the marriage partners has been dissolved. A decree of nullity (annulment) signifies that a true bond of marriage never existed.**

**(National Board of Catholic Women, 2000, p 4)**



**“What is a Marriage Tribunal?**

**A Marriage Tribunal in the Catholic Church is a Church court, a system of establishing all the relevant facts about what was thought to be a true marriage, and giving a judgement on those facts as to whether there was a true bond of marriage in the first place. That true bond means one which has been sealed by God and is therefore unbreakable by any human power (‘What God has joined, let no man put asunder.’). The Tribunal is not a Divorce Court, nor does it offer a marriage counselling service. Many people who approach the Tribunal have already been divorced and sought marriage counselling. The Tribunal’s first concern is not the success or failure of a marriage but particularly the circumstances before and at the time of the marriage.”**

**(National Board of Catholic Women, 2000, p 5)**

It is the paragraph above that has relevance to this study. From previous research (undertaken for the Masters Dissertation, 2002) and present research the females interviewed (Appendix L) experienced difficulty in accepting the following issues:

- That a Church professing to be Christian, ‘Christ - like’, was capable of conducting matters in such a cold and matter of fact manner: “Nor does it offer a marriage counselling service” (National Board of Catholic Women, 2000, p: 5)
- It appeared difficult for them to comprehend or accept that the grounds on which Annulment Application was examined was dependent on circumstances “before and at the time of the marriage (National Board of Catholic Women, 2000, p 5). The interviews, (Appendix L) email and letter communication conducted by the researcher shows that females have questioned the fairness of this stance. It is often the case that the unexpected shows itself after the marriage has taken place, maybe some years after, issues such as domestic abuse, alcohol related problems, gambling, violence, adultery and so on.

- The apparent secrecy surrounding the Tribunal Process also occasioned distress among applicants as did time scales and methods of communicating with the Tribunal - Client A Appendix L bears testimony to this frustration.

The Guide to the Annulment Process produced by the National Board of Catholic Women appears to be aware of the above issue and cautions:

**“If you have any queries about the length of time you are waiting, we would suggest you write to the Administrator or ‘Officialis’ of the Tribunal, but do temper the need to know about how the process is going with a certain amount of patience.”**

**(National Board of Catholic Women, 2000, p 8)**

As we progress the study to examining the questionnaire sent out by the researcher to the various National Diocesan Tribunals and the subsequent responses given by them it is of some value to look at the conclusions that Buckley’s study (2002) arrived at in examining the Annulment Process:

**“While for some the annulment process was an important part of the growth and healing for too many others it has been a harrowing experience, characterised by insensitive handling at every level, including intrusions into the most private and personal aspects of their lives, forcing them to revive painful memories from which they were desperately trying to recover. For example, for some women to have been questioned by celibate males about the intimate details of their sexual lives served only to intensify their pain and sadness. There are those who could take no more and who opted out of the process, others who are deeply embittered because their petitions failed, and others who, hearing what it entails, cannot bring themselves ever to begin the process.”**

**(Buckley, 2002, p 157)**

When compiling the questionnaire to send out to the Catholic Marriage Tribunals in England and Wales the researcher wished to address issues mentioned above. Issues that would affect a female Catholic who was considering approach to a Marriage Tribunal or a female who might be already going through the process. The researcher



obtained addresses for the Tribunal offices from the National Catholic Directory (2005) and the questionnaire was sent out to the following Diocesan Tribunals:

Arundel and Brighton  
Birmingham  
Brentwood  
Cardiff  
Clifton  
East Anglia  
Hallam  
Hexham & Newcastle  
Lancaster  
Leeds  
Liverpool  
Middlesbrough  
Northampton  
Nottingham<sup>1</sup>  
Plymouth  
Portsmouth  
Salford  
Shrewsbury  
Southwark  
Westminster  
Wrexham

A covering letter was enclosed with each questionnaire giving details of the aims and purpose of the study and a statement of fact that the study had the approval of the Bishop of Nottingham and the University of Derby (see Appendix G). A total of 20 questionnaires and covering letters were sent out and over a space of approximately two months 16 responses were returned. This might be considered a reasonable return (Denscombe 2003, Bell 2000, Silverman 2005, *et al*). In total five of the respondents enclosed samples of literature/information that they made available to clients or, as they are known to the Tribunal, 'petitioners'. Four of the responding Tribunals enclosed a covering letter with their completed questionnaire and all four requested that their letter remain anonymous. The researcher is in possession of the letters and has maintained the confidentiality of the writers.

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<sup>1</sup> The researcher is a priest of the Nottingham Diocese and for ethical reasons he did not deem it acceptable to send a questionnaire to his own Tribunal. They were also aware of the study and this may have influenced the fairness of their responses.



Opinions given in three of the letters included:

- Interest in the researcher's study and the possible outcomes.
- A request to be kept informed of the outcomes.
- An acknowledgement that the process did not seem to manage well the emotional stress that it might cause some petitioners.
- That Tribunals were often 'ill equipped' to manage certain petitioners appropriately (their opinion).
- That Tribunal resources were often stretched and limited (their personal opinion)

The fourth letter made reference to the above issues and gave a more detailed opinion as to how inadequate he personally felt with the level of emotional care that was afforded to petitioners (clients).

In constructing the questionnaire for the Diocesan Tribunals the researcher hoped to elicit information relevant to the study in the following areas:

- ✓ Level of communication with the petitioner.
- ✓ Level of emotional care given - owing to the sensitive nature of the Annulment Process (Buckley 2002, Haring 1990, Coriden 2000, *et al*)
- ✓ Level of competence of those responsible for conducting the petitioner interviews.
- ✓ How distress is managed.
- ✓ Openness of information regarding both client contact and the 'success' rate of annulments granted.

The researcher composed the questionnaire using guidelines given by Denscombe (2004) and Bell (2000). The questionnaire did not provide for Yes/No type answers and space was given under each question for comment (Appendix H). In compiling

the responses (Appendix I) the researcher assigned a letter of the alphabet to each Diocese and the letter assigned was randomly given so that confidentiality was protected and maintained. For example the reader should not presume that Diocese A = Arundel and Brighton or Diocese B = Birmingham as this is not the case.

Denscombe (2004) cautions:

“Include only those questions which are absolutely vital for the research”  
(Denscombe 2004, p: 154)

and Bryman (2008):

“The questions that you will ask in your self - completion questionnaire or structured interview should always be geared to answering your research question.”  
(Bryman 2008, p: 239)

The researcher followed these cautions in the formulation of the following questions to the Diocesan Tribunals.

### **Question 1 (Appendix H & I)**

***“Do you have any kind of process in place whereby the client may ‘feedback’ to the Tribunal how she felt during the interview process?”***

This question was deemed relevant to the study owing to the researcher’s experience and contact with client’s / petitioners to the Tribunal. A recurring comment made by petitioners (Masters Study 2002 - to current study) is that they often have no knowledge of what to expect when they turn up for the initial interview. Certain petitioners might have no problem at all with the way the interview is conducted viewing it as a necessary part of the process but for others it can be a shocking experience and one that they do not fully expect or understand.

There was an overwhelming negative response to this question with 15 of the responding diocese's answering NO to there being a process present that enabled petitioners to 'feedback' on their experience with the interview.

Only Diocese K gave a Yes response and stated that petitioners were invited to give 'feedback' at the end of the interview.

### **Question 2 (Appendix H & I)**

*“Do you provide the client with any information as to how the Tribunal process works before their interview e.g what facts will be required, how the process works, length of time?”*

Diocese's A, B, D, E, H, J, L, M, N and O all gave out information about the workings of the Annulment Process and what the petitioner might expect. The information ranged from a handout sheet to a very comprehensive booklet. Diocese's D, H and O were kind enough to enclose samples of the material they gave out to petitioners enquiring about the Annulment Process. It is the researcher's opinion that the quality of the material given out was user friendly, comprehensive and pastorally sensitive. The researcher has not included examples in the appendix so as to preserve the confidentiality of the Diocese's involved. Diocese's C, F, I, K and P responded to any queries verbally and did not provide any literature to the petitioner on the workings of the Annulment Process.

### **Question 3 (Appendix H & I)**

*“Who conducts the Tribunal Interviews in your Diocese?”*



Before examining the responses to this question an explanation of the terms used by the Tribunals will be of use to the reader:

**Judicial Vicar** - The head of the Tribunal, a priest, who is usually a Canon Lawyer.

**Petitioner** - The person who applies to the Tribunal asking it to examine the marriage to see if it was an invalid marriage.

**Respondent** - The former spouse of the petitioner. NB: In many instances the respondent, once contacted, and informed of the proceedings rarely agrees to interview or to give a statement. This may be especially the case if the respondent is not a Catholic. Civil divorce is usually the main concern for this party and Church proceedings are often of little or no consequence.

**Lay Auditor** - A person who is Catholic but not an ordained cleric. The auditor can be a male or female who volunteers to help the Marriage Tribunal by interviewing witnesses and taking down evidence.

**Witnesses** - These are people who know either the Petitioner or Respondent and who are willing to give evidence to the Tribunal.

Tribunal proceedings usually begin by a person contacting the Tribunal either directly or indirectly (through their parish priest or a priest) to begin proceedings for a Church investigation into the validity of their marriage. This is done with a view to gaining a Marriage Annulment. The process always begins with an interview. From the responses given to question 3 by the sixteen Dioceses we can see that the person who conducts the interviews varies from Diocese to Diocese.

In Diocese A it is lay auditors who conduct interviews and return the transcript to the Marriage Tribunal Office. Interviews have the potential to be very lengthy as everything the petitioner says is taken down verbatim (see Client A interview

appendix L). Once the auditor is confident that the interview script is a true reflection of what has been discussed - usually after two or three meet - up's of approximately 2 to 3 hours in length - the petitioner is asked to sign the transcript as a true and accurate account.

Diocese B - The Petitioner is interviewed by the Judicial Vicar, a cleric and witnesses are interviewed by a lay auditor.

Dioceses C, D, E, H, J, K, L, M, O and P all follow the practice of Diocese B with a cleric interviewing the Petitioner and Respondent and the lay auditors conduct the witness interviews.

Dioceses A, F, G, I, N rely on volunteer lay auditors to conduct the fact finding interviews.

From the researcher's experience and pastoral practice (1989 - 2009) it is no easy task to form an opinion on what might be termed as 'best practice' in this area. People approaching the Tribunal for Marriage Annulment will react in different ways to the circumstances before them. Let us refer back to Buckley's observation (2002) above:

“For example, for some women to have been questioned by celibate males about the intimate details of their sexual lives, served only to intensify their pain and sadness.”  
(Buckley, 2002, p: 157)

In the Participant interviews (to be examined later) Participant A had issue with the lay auditor in that the lay auditor attended the same church as she did. In appointing lay auditors it is the researcher's view that experiences like this should be avoided from the very start. A clash or misunderstanding of personalities can also cause issue as we see with other Participants in the interviews that follow later in the study (Appendix L).

The steps that might be taken to insure best practice in Tribunal interviewing and fact gathering will be discussed later on in the discussion and recommendation section of the study.

#### **Question 4 (Appendix H & I)**

*“What training, if any, would you expect those conducting Tribunal interviews to have?”*

It is the researcher’s experience and that of others (Haring, 1990; Buckley, 2002; Coriden 2000; Jenks, 2002; *et al*) who have examined the Annulment Process to some degree that it is a potentially delicate and hurtful area in a person’s life. Very few people would willingly choose to go down this road after experiencing a civil divorce.

The question above was formulated and asked to try to ascertain the level of training Tribunal Auditors received to give them competence in their task. The Auditors would most probably need skills in a number of areas but particularly in the following two:

- Competence in recording and transcribing the interview whilst setting the person at ease.
- An ability to ‘manage’ the person appropriately in what might potentially be a very distressful and emotional encounter.

It has been the researcher’s experience (1989 - 2009) that persons who apply to begin Annulment Proceedings have usually filled in their application form with a priest they know and feel comfortable with or they have made their request to commence proceedings over the phone with the Tribunal Office. When the applicant’s form has been processed they are given a time, date and place for the preliminary interview to



take place. This is where skill and sensitivity is most needed on the part of the interviewer / auditor. Let us look at the comment given by Diocese C in relation to this question:

**“Lay auditors are trained to know their task is ask, hear, record. No specialist knowledge.”  
(Diocese C, Appendix I)**

The person attending for interview for the first time will, in the main, have no knowledge that this is the brief for the auditor (Jenks, 2002). In the mind of the female petitioner (the concern of this study) there might be many issues as they travel to that first interview especially if they belong to one of the Dioceses that give out little or no information as to what the Annulment Process entails. There may be:

- Excitement that the process is finally getting under way and expect the auditor to share this feeling.
- Fear of the unexpected and the unknown.
- A need to ask questions and to find answers: How long? How much? Who is to be contacted? What are my chances?
- Seeking an Annulment “may well open old wounds for both parties” (National Board of Catholic Women, 2000, p: 6)
- A high emotional state either positive or negative might still be a symptom for the petitioner, particularly if the granting of the civil divorce has been recent.

It is the researcher’s opinion that a certain degree of counselling competence and person skills should be afforded the Auditors to deal with the unknown when conducting the preliminary interview. This is fair not only for the Auditor but for the

person presenting for their first interview. A recent 'Ad Clerum'<sup>2</sup> (February 2009) sent out to clergy in the Catholic Diocese of Nottingham asked, among other items of news, for priests to nominate people to serve as auditors on the Diocesan Tribunal:

**“The Tribunal, which examines marriages, has a need for interviewers who see and take statements from witnesses. This work is, of course, extremely confidential and a balanced and sympathetic manner is required. Please feel free to recommend people, but check with them first that they are willing.”**  
(Ad Clerum, Nottingham Diocese 2009, p: 4)

One will notice that no guidance is given as to who might be a suitable candidate. Questions remain unanswered as to: What age does the person need to be? What type of skills should they possess? What level of education should they have? Will they need to provide suitable references? Does it involve them having a Criminal Records check? Do they need to be married themselves?

The responsibility to recruit Auditors in this particular Diocese appears to rest solely on the judgement of the local parish priest as to who might be suitable. We recall that the level of training that the Auditors receive varies from diocese to diocese. A common trait that runs through their responses is just how little training the Auditors receive. One might conclude that the training is formulated so that all Auditors perform the task expressed by Diocese C response: “ask, hear, record”. Indeed, the National Board of Catholic Women (2000) note in their booklet:

**“As this is a legal process and therefore a formal one, and the gathering of evidence and the judgement have to be impartial, support such as one might expect in a social work or counselling setting is not permitted.”**  
(National board of Catholic Women, 2000, p: 11)

This might be the way of working for the Diocesan Tribunals yet it can still elicit surprise and upset in female petitioners when they find this to be the way that

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<sup>2</sup> Ad Clerum - 'To the Clergy' is a frequent newsletter (approx seven to ten times per year) sent out by the Bishop to his clergy keeping them up to date with developments in the local diocese and nationally.

Tribunals conduct the process - see interview with Participant A (Appendix L). Owing to the sensitivity of the material that an applicant is invited to share with an auditor that they may never have met before some type of emotional support might be deemed as both essential and ethical.

One Tribunal gave this response to Question 4:

**“Before Auditors begin interviewing for us they undertake an Auditors training Day where qualified Canonists explain the grounds of nullity and discuss interviewing techniques. Ongoing training is also required so that Auditors are kept up to date with the latest developments in Jurisprudence.”  
(12<sup>th</sup> May, 2005)**

This further appears to emphasise that the training afforded to Auditors concentrates, almost entirely, on enabling them to ask the right questions and accurately record the response regardless of what the emotional state of the petitioner might be. With regard to the training received the sixteen dioceses’ responded as follows (see Appendix I)

- Diocese A - They have the odd study day.
- Diocese B - Yearly training day and ‘one off’ study days.
- Diocese C - Auditors trained to know their task is to ask, hear and record. No specialist knowledge required.
- Diocese D - Very little!
- Diocese E - Auditors - a few hours of preparation.
- Diocese F - 4 half days per year.
- Diocese G - No extensive training.
- Diocese H - 1 day training to start then refresher every 18 months to 2 years.
- Diocese I - 2 day training course and observation of experienced Auditors.
- Diocese J - 1 day training.
- Diocese K - 1 day training and occasional ‘follow up’ days.
- Diocese L - Training day and annual refresher.



- Diocese M - Lay Auditors trained by Judicial Vicar\* (\* frequency not given).
- Diocese N - In service training\* (\*frequency not given)
- Diocese O - Usually professional classes: doctors, social workers etc who attend a ½ day course.
- Diocese P - Yearly training days.

It is the opinion of the researcher that the training of the Auditors is insufficient. It is also unclear as to how Auditors are deemed suitable. Inadequacies appear to be inherent in the interview process and these are born out by the Participant interviews (Appendix L) that will be examined later in the study.

#### **Question 5 (Appendix H & I)**

*“If a client finds the interview process difficult or indeed distressing - how is this managed? Do you have a system in place that helps the client deal with emotions that may come to the fore during the interview?”*

Question 5 progresses material given in response to question 4. As one will see from the interviews to be discussed later on in the study the Annulment Interview is often a very fraught experience for the petitioner. Pastoral workers in the Church are aware that the interviews:

“are not conducted in a court setting but in offices or people’s homes or other suitable places.”  
(National board of Catholic Women, 2000, p: 11)

This is an area where boundaries are all important. Questions that one might ask include: “Is there someone else in the building or in a nearby room when the Auditor is interviewing the petitioner?” “Is the person chosen to conduct the interview

suitable?” “Is a female petitioner at ease with having a male conduct her interview?”

The researcher is aware from pastoral experience in the Nottingham Diocese (1989 - 2009) that these are questions often overlooked. It has been the case that male Auditors are often alone in a building conducting an interview with a female petitioner. Should distress occur this places both parties in a vulnerable situation.

It has been mentioned already in this chapter that four of the Diocesan respondents enclosed a letter with their returned questionnaire asking for confidentiality. The issues raised by question 5 were issues they were aware of and felt uncomfortable with - particularly the emotional care, or lack of, afforded to female petitioners and a lack of professionalism in the area of boundaries. What is the procedure employed by the auditors when petitioner distress occurs during interview?

The Diocesan responses might appear rather lacking in substance with regard to distress management and adequate emotional care. Their responses are given here:

- Diocese A - Interviewer deals with it as best they can! No resources available for more personnel to deal with the issue.
- Diocese B - Interviewer (*sic* deals with it) as best they can. Provide tea break, tissues. Other than this no system.
- Diocese C - Tea break, bathroom - visit. On rare occasions details of a counsellor provided.
- Diocese D - Most cope well. Box of tissues, break.....No follow up is provided.
- Diocese E - No. Left to auditors or interviewers pastoral sensitivity.
- Diocese F - No system in place for distressed clients.
- Diocese G - Have to rely on the sensitivity of auditor.

- Diocese H - Try to create welcoming atmosphere.
- Diocese I - Tea break, walk time. Sometimes reschedule interview.
- Diocese J - Nothing formal in place. Auditor to manage situation as best they can.
- Diocese K - Yes considered in training\*. (\* researcher's note: no example given as to how)
- Diocese L - No system in place. Sympathy offered.
- Diocese M - Halt the interview.
- Diocese N - It is not therapy but help to file a petition.
- Diocese O - Take a break or in some cases refer to a counsellor.
- Diocese P - Break offered, tissues at hand. Some referred to Marriage Care or other counselling.

(Appendix I)

The Catholic Church, in its tradition and practice holds dear the qualities of charity, unconditional love, forgiveness, mercy and compassion (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994). It might be considered only reasonable, therefore, that those who approach it for help - in this instance with marriage issues - experience some of these qualities. To experience a cold clinical approach at the Annulment Interview invariably surprises petitioners. The comment from Diocese N: "It is not therapy but help to file a petition" is dismissive and presents a cold and disinterested image of Church. One might expect this type of approach in a solicitor's office but it often comes as a surprise to find it the stance of a Christian Church.



### Question 6 (Appendix H & I)

*“Is the client able to make regular contact with the Tribunal to ascertain how their case might be progressing?”*

Frequently occurring themes in this study of Female Annulment Participants include:

- ✓ Divorced Catholic Female equates to failure in the eyes of the Catholic Church and Community: “Divorce is a grave offence against the natural law” and “Divorce is immoral also because it introduces disorder into the family and into society.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church no: 2384 & 2385, 1994, p: 510 - 511)
- ✓ Annulment process is something that should not be spoken about (see participant interviews Appendix L)
- ✓ Being a divorced Catholic female can be a lonely and isolating experience (see participant interviews Appendix L, Buckley 2002, McTaggart 2000)

To date, 2009, the researcher is aware that a number of Dioceses in England and Wales have held assemblies of some kind. These assemblies have been charged with furthering the lay - persons understanding of what it is to belong to ‘Church’. They have sought to address the concerns of the laity in so far as they are able, conscious of keeping in line with Rome. In the researcher’s own Diocese of Nottingham the Bishop held an assembly in September 2003. One particular topic to receive substantial attention was the area of communication and how more effective communication might come about in the Diocese. A feature of those passing through the Annulment Process was their comments on how poor communication seemed to be with regard to Diocesan Tribunals (Naylor, Masters Study 2002 and present study). Participants in

this study also felt the Annulment Process was something covert and secretive that should not or could not be shared with others (see Participant A interview, Appendix L). It was also a process that family and friends would not truly understand. One has already seen in the literature review that defenders of the Annulment Process, as it currently stands, view the granting of a Marriage Annulment as a liberating experience. They hold it to be liberating in that the person can once again return to their sacramental life in the Church and an unpleasant past experience, their failed marriage, is no longer an issue. If this is so why do a substantial number of Catholics - researcher included - feel that the Annulment Process is shrouded in mystery? If we go to a Diocesan Year Book, Nottingham 2009, for example, one will see statistics given as to how many marriages have taken place in each parish for the year, how many Baptisms took place, how many funerals were conducted and so on. There are no statistics given to show how many broken marriages were deemed worthy of Annulment. Why should this be so? Are the petitioners correct in their thinking that it is something sordid and secretive? It seems strange that when a Diocesan Assembly such as Nottingham 2003 addresses communication in such a big way that there should be no information given in the area of successful Marriage Annulment applications. The communication issue and the experiences shared by the interview participants (Appendix L) influenced the formulation of the following two questions 6 and 7.

With reference to petitioner contact with the Tribunal the Dioceses responded thus:

- Diocese A - Yes! No problem here!
- Diocese B - Yes! Encouraged to do so.
- Diocese C - Clients told they can make contact any time for progress report.
- Diocese D - Yes but informed that over contact may delay matters.

- Diocese E - Yes.
- Diocese F - Can phone or write if they choose.
- Diocese G - They can make contact but we do not encourage it.
- Diocese H - Yes, welcome to contact us.
- Diocese I - Yes, can phone or write in.
- Diocese J - Yes by phone or email. Full time administrator employed.
- Diocese K - Yes, encouraged to make contact over any worries.
- Diocese L - Yes.
- Diocese M - Yes provided they do not become a pest!
- Diocese N - Progress report sent every 14 / 21 days.
- Diocese O - Yes by phone or email.
- Diocese P - We try to keep client informed.

(Appendix I)

In the main the Dioceses responded positively to the question regarding petitioner contact and communication. Diocese G was the only one who discouraged contact. The comment of Diocese A is of interest: “Yes! No problem here!” Does this respondent feel that there are flaws in the Annulment Process that have come to light in the answers he has given to the previous five questions?

**Question 7 (Appendix H & I)**

***“Do you publish figures in the Diocese to make known publicly how many marriages have been ‘successfully’ annulled during the year?”***

The work that the researcher has undertaken in the last twelve years with regard to female perception of the Catholic Marriage Annulment Process appears to show that



Catholic females have very little knowledge with regard to the Annulment Process (see Female Marriage Questionnaire Appendix D & F). It is the opinion of the researcher that were Marriage Annulment statistics at least published in each Diocesan Year Book - which the laity are able to purchase and access - then it would be a small advance towards raising the profile of the Annulment Process and might encourage people to have a better understanding of it, either positive or negative. It would also be complying with the wish of at least one Diocesan Assembly (Nottingham 2003) for a more direct and open approach to Church matters.

The Dioceses gave the following responses to making Annulment statistics public:

- Diocese A - No
- Diocese B - Figures sent to Bishop, Diocesan Pastoral Council and to Council of Priests.
- Diocese C - No
- Diocese D - No
- Diocese E - No
- Diocese F - No
- Diocese G - No
- Diocese H - No. Only sent to Canon Law Society Magazine. No figures published in the Diocese.
- Diocese I - No
- Diocese J - No. Only send to Canon Law Society.
- Diocese K - Published in Canon Law Society Magazine.
- Diocese L - To Diocese and Canon Law Society. Do not go to laity.
- Diocese M - No
- Diocese N - Diocesan Directory and other.

➤ Diocese O - No

➤ Diocese P - No.

(Appendix I)

The overwhelming response to the figures being available for the general public was NO they are not. Only one of the dioceses appeared to let the laity have access to the yearly Annulment figures and this was Diocese B where the statistics were sent to the Bishop, Diocesan Pastoral Council (lay involvement presumed in this) and the Council of Priests.

Not one of the respondents gave indication or reason as to why the Annulment statistics were consigned to such a limited party and a party that is almost exclusively (apart from Diocese B) male.

#### **Question 8 (Appendix H & I)**

*“Is there a percentage (even a rough guide) available as to who is more likely to approach the Tribunal: more males than females / more females than males?”*

The researcher has worked mostly with female Catholics (1995 - 2009) with regard to the Marriage Annulment Process. It has also been the researcher's experience that the majority of females have found the Process a difficult one for a variety of reasons, already given earlier in the text. In asking the final question one wishes to ascertain if the number of females applying for Annulment is greater or lesser than males. In one pastoral placement (1995 - 2000) the researcher helped seven people apply for Annulments and all seven were female. The pattern has stayed very much the same for the researcher up to the present - 2009. It is the researcher's opinion that females appear more at ease with

discussing the process and what it entails than the males do, but this is the researcher's personal experience. Further research would need to be undertaken in this area to see if this were true of other pastoral practitioners. If we look below to the diocesan responses there does not appear to be any set pattern as to who contacts the tribunal more frequently - male or female.

- Diocese A - 30 years experience says 60% are female.
- Diocese B - At present - 2005 - 60% female, 40% male.
- Diocese C - Early 80's / 90's three quarters female. To date it is about 50/50.
- Diocese D - In our opinion more females than males.
- Diocese E - 60% female 40% male.
- Diocese F - 50% male, 50% female.
- Diocese G - 50% female, 50% male.
- Diocese H - 50% female, 50% male.
- Diocese I - 50% female, 50% male.
- Diocese J - 2002 - 11 male, 19 female; 2003 - 9 male, 11 female; 2004 - 10 male, 13 female.
- Diocese K - About equal.
- Diocese L - About equal.
- Diocese M - By far the majority are female. An estimate of about 75%.
- Diocese N - 60% female, 40% male.
- Diocese O - 2003 - 50% male 50% female; 2004 - 58% male 48% female.
- Diocese P - 47% male, 53 % female.

(Appendix I)



The researcher has certain critical issues with regard to the Tribunal responses and these include:

- ❑ Professionalism of the Diocesan Tribunals.
- ❑ Questions regarding appropriate pastoral care of the petitioner.
- ❑ The purpose of Diocesan Tribunals.
- ❑ The perception of the Diocesan Tribunals positive / negative.
- ❑ Transparency of the Diocesan Tribunals.

### 3.2 Opinions on the workings of the Diocesan Tribunals from Tribunal Auditors

The researcher has had little in-depth contact with the internal workings of the Diocesan Tribunals during twenty years of pastoral ministry. The researcher has, however, referred Petitioners to his local Diocesan Tribunal with a view to helping them obtain an Annulment of their marriage. The researcher has also been approached on occasion by the Tribunal to allow interviews to take place in a private room on the researcher's premises. To avoid bias in expressing only the researcher's opinion on the Tribunal responses a further research element is now included.

The researcher devised a questionnaire for Tribunal Auditors influenced by the responses given by Diocese' A - P. The Auditors would have knowledge regarding the subject matter (Bryman 2008, p: 243) and their views on the Tribunal responses might challenge or validate conclusions held by the researcher. The guidelines given to Auditors in the Nottingham Diocesan Tribunal say of the auditors:

“You are the eyes and the ears of the Judges. It is only rarely that they (Judges) will meet a petitioner or respondent or witness. For this reason the De Fide<sup>3</sup> is a vital part of your work.

As soon as practicable after the interview please write up your report. This should always be on a separate sheet from the evidence you have gathered.”

(Nottingham Tribunal Guidelines, 2009, p: 5)

The Auditors, it would seem, are a vital link for the Tribunals. They are the fact finders or ‘eyes and ears’ (Nottingham Tribunal 2009). To test the validity of the researcher's own conclusions (Wisker 2001, p: 253) a questionnaire (Appendix J) was sent out to nine Auditors who interview, on a voluntary basis, for the Diocese of Nottingham. The researchers questionnaire was ‘piloted’ on two recently (2008) retired female Auditors to check the relevance of the questions and question style. The

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<sup>3</sup> The auditors written statement / account of the petitioner interview and encounter.

retired Auditors also checked the questions to see if they could be answered in different ways and from different view points because as Bryman (2008) cautions:

“If everyone is able to answer a question in the same way, the resulting data are unlikely to be of any interest because they do not form a variable.”  
(Bryman 2008, p: 247)

The two retired Auditors offered no corrections and both felt that the questionnaire was relevant and that it contributed to the validity and reliability of the researcher’s study (Wisker 2001, Bell 2000, Bryman 2008, *et al*).

The participants were asked only for their age and their sex - male / female so as to protect their identity. They were asked to respond to seven questions and these are set out below:

- 1) What are your initial thoughts on reading the various responses given to the questionnaire by Diocese’ A - P?
- 2) Do you feel there is adequate support available to those applying for an Annulment?
- 3) On reading the responses do you feel the ‘Annulment Process’ to be a fair one?
- 4) Do you think there is anything missing or something you would like to see taken account of?
- 5) Do you think the ‘Annulment Process’ is transparent?
- 6) Are you clear as a practicing Catholic as to what the ‘Annulment Process’ entails?
- 7) Do you feel it would be of any benefit to the ‘worshipping’ community to have statistics made available in each diocese as to how many ‘Annulments’ are granted, say, on a yearly basis?

(Appendix J)



The nine participants are practicing Catholics and are known to the researcher from various geographical pastoral placements undertaken in the Diocese of Nottingham from 1989 - 2009 (present). All of the nine participants are Auditors for the Diocese of Nottingham Marriage Tribunal and each have interview experience of five years and over. The researcher is not related to any one of the participants chosen and his contact with them over the years has been on a professional level. In the main, the professional level consisted of the researcher providing private room space on his work premises for the Auditors to conduct petitioner interviews for the Nottingham Diocesan Tribunal. The researcher was never present in the room when interviews took place.

The nine Auditors approached to take part in this study questionnaire resided in different geographical areas within the boundaries of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Nottingham: 2 Auditors resided in Lincolnshire, 2 Auditors resided in Nottingham, 3 Auditors resided in Derbyshire, 2 Auditors resided in Derby. The two Auditors from Lincoln are man and wife and both interview independently of each other for the Nottingham Marriage Tribunal. This couple answered their questionnaire jointly informing the researcher that they concurred with each other on the views and opinions given. Of the nine questionnaires sent out six were completed and returned and this included the questionnaire answered jointly by the husband and wife. The return rate might therefore be viewed as seven out of nine. Three of the respondents were male with the following ages: 49, 67, and 70. Four of the respondents were female with the following ages: 47, 50, 55 and 71.

All of the participants were provided with the questionnaire that was sent out nationally to the Diocesan Tribunals (Appendix H) and they were given a summary of their responses (Appendix I). A stamped addressed envelope was provided for their

completed questionnaire and all nine were contacted by telephone prior to sending out the questionnaire to enquire of their willingness to participate. The participants were asked to complete and return the questionnaire within four weeks. Of the nine participants contacted seven returned a completed questionnaire. The two who did not return were contacted after the four - week period had expired to share any concerns they might have with not having completed the questionnaire. Both participants gave work commitments and time constraints as reasons for not completing and they apologised to the researcher for not being able to participate.

The study will now examine the responses given to the questionnaire by the Auditors, the completed questionnaires can be viewed in Appendix K The responses were hand written by the participants and it is the researcher who has typed them up for the Appendix. The researcher is in possession of the original hand written responses. For purposes of analysis of the Auditors responses each Auditor has been assigned a letter of the Alphabet

### **Question 1**

*“What are your initial thoughts on reading the various responses given to the questionnaire (by the marriage tribunals)”*

#### **A) Male Auditor - 67 years old**

“There appears to be a degree of consistency across the responses. However, this does not mean that procedures are necessarily all good. Comments from certain Dioceses give a little concern - for example: “people who give us a great deal of trouble”, “provided they don’t become a pest”, “we do not encourage contact for feedback”.

Such comments beg the question: "Are annulments to be encouraged in appropriate circumstances or not, and if so what is each Tribunal doing to help, not only the process, but the persons involved."

**B) Male Auditor - 70 years old**

"The process is still as bad as it was 25 years ago"

**C) Female Auditor - 71 years old**

"Huge gaps in some areas - e.g: Feedback process, help for distressed, publishing of annulment figures."

**D) Female Auditor 55 years old**

"That the annulment process is as bad as I thought it might be. There seems to be very little preparatory material, little support and people are made to feel a nuisance if they have any queries during the process."

**E) Female Auditor 47 years old**

"There seems to be no uniform format for each diocese to follow."

**F) Female Auditor 50 years old, Male Auditor 49 years old - Married Couple**

"We were surprised at the lack of consistency in how different dioceses deal with the annulment process. Also surprised at the number of dioceses using Judicial Vicar or priest to conduct petitioner interviews. Amazed that only one diocese has a formal process for obtaining feedback on clients about the annulment process itself.

The lack of on-going training provided to those conducting interviews was rather alarming and the fact there is a lack of consistency amongst the different dioceses.

Our personal experience is that we did have initial training, as well as support from experienced lay auditors in the parish. We would welcome annual training/study days

- a inter-diocesan training day would be useful, to share good practice and ideas."



## **Question 2**

***“Do you feel there is adequate support available to those applying for an annulment?”***

### **A) Male Auditor - 67 years old**

**“I think that the mechanics of carrying out interviews and obtaining statements are in place. I am not sure of whether other support is available to those applying for an annulment. Presumably the local priest will have had some involvement and would also provide additional support. The Judicial Vicar and Auditors can also provide some support but certainly an Auditor would only advise on the overall process, and should not get involved in counselling.”**

### **B) Male Auditor - 70 years old**

**“No. It appears that those applying for an annulment are seen to be guilty - experience has shown the opposite is true! Efforts have been made to actively discourage people from going through the process. Support - Annulment poles apart.”**

### **C) Female Auditor - 71 years old**

**“I have never assisted in the process but have supported people (mainly women) during the ‘ordeal’ and it has always seemed to me to be very painful and lacking in sensitivity - too intrusive.”**

### **D) Female Auditor - 55 years old**

**“Definitely not. Those applying for an annulment must feel they are having to defend themselves in a court of law (being charged guilty) rather than be supported through a very emotional and difficult situation. There is a general lack of trained counsellors for people already traumatised.”**

### **E) Female Auditor - 47 years old**

“Yes on a judicial matter of fact basis. It is unclear as to how much emotional support is offered, given or requested - this could be seen as inadequate.”

**F) Female Auditor 50 years old, Male Auditor 49 years old - Married Couple**

“This obviously varies between dioceses, in terms of the amount or type of information. If information is given verbally, is it consistent? Is there consistency between the written information produced by different dioceses? Is this not something that could be done centrally, to avoid each diocese having to re-invent the wheel?

There is an argument for producing clear information on why the process is needed and how the process actually works, with the various stages. A “Frequently Asked Questions Format” could also be used as a simple way of addressing the issues that petitioners want to know about. A common question is whether annulling a marriage will mean any children born during that marriage will be termed illegitimate. For some petitioners or respondents the interview process can be a very difficult one that needs to be sensitively managed. We were pleased to see that some counselling was available, but only three dioceses mentioned this, and only one specifically referred to Marriage Care. It is important that those conducting the interview are aware that counselling support is available and can be mentioned to clients if needed.

We liked the idea undertaken by one diocese, of providing regular progress reports to the client. This means they are aware of what is happening and the clients themselves aren't having to initiate this. We also think that if the process and ideas of timescale were laid out clearly at the outset, there would probably be fewer requests from the client for updates anyway.”

**Question 3**

*“On reading the responses do you feel the ‘Annulment Process’ to be a fair one?”*

**A) Male Auditor - 67 years old**

“The Annulment Process should be seen to be a fair one across all dioceses. The responses indicate that perhaps it is not yet totally fair. Most dioceses do not appear to think that training of people conducting interviews is important. I think it is far from the case, particularly when the next question required a response on handling a sensitive or emotional interview. How does the Tribunal know the capabilities of its interviewers? Similarly, comments I already raised in question 1 above indicate to me that some Tribunals may have lost sight of what they are there to do, and there seems to be little concept of customer service.”

**B) Male Auditor - 70 years of age**

“No. Women should not have to be interviewed by men.”

**C) Female Auditor - 71 years of age**

“There seems to be a fairly good process in place but I wonder (again, from personal contact) if it is all too rigid and incisive.”

**D) Female Auditor - 55 years of age**

“No. If the majority of petitioners are women, why are they usually interviewed by a male Judicial Vicar? If most annulments are requested so the person can remarry and receive Holy Communion, why does the petitioner have to annul their first marriage (a sacrament) in order to receive another sacrament (the Eucharist) ?”

**E) Female Auditor - 47 years of age**

“I feel it is fair with regard to making a judgement and following Canon Law. It does not seem fair that there is not absolute uniformity/code of practice throughout the country.”

**F) Female Auditor 50 years old, Male Auditor 49 years old - Married Couple**



“We feel the use of judicial vicars or parish priests to conduct interviews (who are obviously male clergy) may seem intimidating to female petitioners, who might feel more comfortable talking about what are often very intimate issues, to a female member of the laity. It is also helpful if those conducting interviews have personal experience of marriage.

We feel that it is important for the client to have the opportunity to feedback their views on the process, both what worked well and what could be done more effectively. This information could then feed into the induction and ongoing training of those undertaking annulment interviews.”

#### **Question 4**

*“Do you think there is anything missing or something you would like to see taken account of?”*

**A) Male Auditor - 67 years old.**

“a) Does there need to be some indication of how Tribunals arrange finances. Do they need to be profitable, self financing or subsidised?

b) Bearing in mind the world we live in, how are interviewers able to identify themselves to petitioners and witnesses - should there be formal identity badges?”

**B) Male Auditor - 70 years old**

“Feedback - How many petitioners don’t go through with the process and why?”

**C) Female Auditor - 71 years old**

“Certainly more access to feedback and a general openness to what it is all about - my impression is that it is kept very quiet! & VERY LONG.”

**D) Female Auditor - 55 years old**

“I would like to see some feedback from petitioners.”

**E) Female Auditor - 47 years old**

“To take account of the fact that this is a process only within the Catholic faith. Some instruction, leading to a better understanding, of why, on religious grounds, this process exists could be beneficial to petitioners and practicing Catholics.

**F) Female Auditor 50 years old, Male Auditor 49 years old - Married Couple**

“An area that has not been researched in the questionnaire is the issue of what, if any, understanding the witnesses have about the annulment process. We have on occasions found witnesses to be rather antagonistic, which is clearly due to their lack of understanding about the process. This is particularly true of those who are not Catholics. Perhaps a simplified or shortened version of the annulment process information could be made available to them.

Another question is whether (or how) a petitioner can appeal against an annulment decision. This is an area where some petitioners are unclear and, as lay auditors, it is not an area where we feel knowledgeable.”

**Question 5**

***“Do you think the ‘Annulment Process is transparent?’”***

**A) Male Auditor - 67 year old**

“Probably yes, but more may need to be done in the way of communication and contacts with petitioners and witnesses to ensure that they also believe it is a transparent process.”

**B) Male Auditor - 70 year old**

“No! Keep all the helpful information hidden from those who may need it, probably because full disclosure would encourage a stampede for annulments - in the eyes of Mother Church”

**C) Female Auditor - 71 year old**

“Not really - I’m sure if you did a survey among Church going Catholics you would find it is all a bit of a mystery (the 6<sup>th</sup> Sorrowful mystery!!)”

**D) Female Auditor - 55 year old**

“No. I think information about the availability and the process of annulment is kept hidden in fear that more people would apply. I think that it is deliberately kept hidden and foreboding. If it was transparent more practicing Catholics would understand the grounds for annulment and the number of annulments and the length of time for the process would be published.”

**E) Female Auditor - 47 year old**

“I think it is very transparent to those on the ‘inside’ but very foggy to those outside the process. The ‘Annulment Process’ could be likened to any judicial process; it is wreathed in mystery and ‘make believe’. Only those experiencing the process see it more clearly and have a real understanding of it.”

**F) Female Auditor 50 years old, Male Auditor 49 years old - Married Couple**

“No, neither to the petitioner nor to the wider Catholic community.”



**Question 6**

***“Are you clear as a practicing Catholic as to what the ‘Annulment Process’ entails?”***

**A) Male Auditor - 67 year old**

**“Only by working for the Tribunal as an Auditor. I did not have much idea before that.”**

**B) Male Auditor - 70 year old**

**“Yes - but had to find out the hard way - experience! Emotional rape describes it accurately.”**

**C) Female Auditor - 71 year old**

**“No, very unclear so I suppose I shouldn’t be so judgemental but perhaps someone who does know could occasionally come round parishes and talk at masses like they do for the mission appeals and the adoption society.”**

**D) Female Auditor - 55 year old**

**“As a practicing Catholic I have never seen any information about the Annulment Process. I have a friend who began the process when her husband left her for another woman, but she could not cope with witnesses being interviewed so gave up the process.”**

**E) Female Auditor - 47 year old**

**“No. I have a small understanding of it as an auditor but further than that I wouldn’t expect to understand the Canon Law involved etc, etc.”**

**F) Female Auditor 50 year old, Male Auditor 49 year old - Married Couple**

**“Yes.”**

**Question 7**

***“Do you feel it would be of any benefit to the ‘worshipping’ community to have statistics made available in each diocese as to how many ‘Annulments’ are granted say on a yearly basis or are you content not to know this information?”***

**A) Male Auditor - 67 year old**

**“Generally the information might be helpful to those working for the Tribunal - giving an indication of workload etc - but probably not to the community as a whole. On the other hand, published statistics may actually encourage the few people who may be thinking of applying for an annulment, to actually do so.”**

**B) Male Auditor - 70 year old**

**“The more information the better:**

- How long does the process take?**
- How do dioceses compare?**
- Reasons for annulment**
- Are some more likely than others?**

**C) Female Auditor - 71 year old**

**“I definitely think more clarity and transparency would be very helpful on a regular basis. What’s all the secrecy about? Afraid of being inundated?”**

**D) Female Auditor - 55 year old**

“I believe in transparency and therefore think that statistics should be available:

- How many annulments are requested?
- How long the process takes?
- How many were granted?

Names remaining confidential, of course.”

**E) Female Auditor - 47 year old**

“I am personally content not to know this information. I don't know who would benefit from the publishing of statistics except, perhaps, those thinking of applying. It would encourage them to see that the 'Annulment Process' does work; people do often say it is not worth applying because annulments are never granted!”

**F) Female Auditor 50 year old, Male Auditor 49 year old - Married Couple**

“We were surprised how few dioceses publish statistics on the number of successful annulments.

If figures were produced, they would need to be clearly set in context to aid understanding. There would also need to be more information readily available about the annulment process, why it is there and how it works. Producing statistical information would be one way of making the process more transparent as would clearly setting out how the process works.

Other comments?

We were rather disappointed at the tone of some of the responses to your questionnaire to the Tribunals, who give the impression they saw the clients as a



nuisance and didn't feel that they should be acting in the best interests of the client!

We have had petitioners say at the end of the interview process that, whilst it was at times painful, it had nevertheless been a cathartic experience and had enabled them to address issues in their past that had never really been properly dealt with. Whilst this is obviously not the main purpose of the annulment process, it does demonstrate the process can be helpful to the client.”

Examination of the Auditors responses to the questionnaire, enable us to identify themes emerging from their comments. Male A and Couple F provided more substantial feedback than Male B, Female C, female D and Female E.

### **Question 1**

When asked for their initial thoughts on the Diocesan responses both Female E and Couple F expressed surprise with regard to how each Diocese appeared to differ with regard to conducting the Annulment Process. Female E - “No uniform format” and Couple F - “Lack of consistency”. Male A thinks there is a “degree of consistency” with how the Dioceses work but is concerned with certain comments made by some of the Tribunals. Male A thought that the Tribunals were not doing enough to help petitioners. Male B feels that the process is still as ‘bad’ as it was 25 years ago and Female D makes a similar observation. The themes that emerge from the Auditors responses to question one might be summed up as follows:

- Lack of consistency in the Tribunal’s approach to Marriage Annulment.
- Insufficient attention given to providing ‘feedback’ and emotional care/support.
- Petitioners can be seen as a nuisance.

- Concern that male clerics are used to interview female petitioners.
- Lack of training available for those conducting interviews for the Tribunals.

### **Question 2**

This asked the Auditors for comment on the support available to those petitioners applying for an Annulment of Marriage. The general consensus appears to suggest that support is inadequate for those making application. There are issues concerning:

- Guilt (F)
- Lack of sensitivity (C)
- Limited emotional support (E)
- Limited clarity for the petitioner with regard as to what an Annulment involves: “A common question is whether annulling a marriage will mean any children born during that marriage will be termed illegitimate.” (F)
- Auditor given a limited remit to interview not counsel (A)
- A seeming lack of trained counsellors (D)
- A need for explanatory literature to be made available (F)

All of the responses seem to indicate a need for improved communication and a more sensitive approach when it comes to client contact.

### **Question 3**

This question asked the Auditors if they felt the Annulment Process to be a fair one.

We see that three respondents raised the issue of male’s interviewing females seeing

this as unfair and intrusive, especially if that male is a cleric, with no experience of marriage (B, D, F).

There was comment asking for improved clarity and a separating of the components of the process - the judicial part may strive to be fair but does that come across as such to the client (A, C, F)

The issue of feedback is also mentioned again - if there is no proper feedback then the dealings with the client are unfair and inappropriate. (A and F). It is also unfair that the Auditors do not receive sufficient training to carry out the task they are called to do.

#### **Question 4**

Here the Auditors are asked to share their opinions as to whether they feel anything is lacking in the area of Marriage Annulment.

Respondents B, C and D addressed the issue of feedback. They suggested better practice in this area both from the petitioners and the tribunals.

Respondents E & F felt the Annulment Process to be an exclusively 'Catholic' issue and this in turn created problems when interviewing non - Catholic witnesses. How and why should non - Catholic parties collude with the Process? It has no standing within secular society or secular law. They felt that this issue produced a need for explanatory material to be made available.

#### **Question 5**

The Auditors are asked whether they feel the Annulment Process to be a transparent one. We bear in mind the experience of the Auditors, they are: practicing Catholics and attend different places of worship, they have also volunteered for Tribunal



Auditing for over five years (appropriate questioning, Silverman, 2005; Bryman, 2008).

Respondents B, C, D and F give very definite NO answers. Respondent D feels that information regarding the process is deliberately withheld to sway people from applying. Respondent E feels that the process is only transparent to those on the inside (presumably Tribunal staff) and it is very 'foggy' to those who know little of the process. Respondent A has the opinion that it is 'probably' transparent but acknowledges the need for better communication - a recurring theme.

### **Question 6**

This question asked the Auditors if, as practicing Catholics, they themselves understood what the Annulment Process entails.

The researcher was of the opinion that respondent C gave a recommendation for good practice in her response. Respondent C admits to being very unclear about the Process, despite being an Auditor. In her opinion talks ought to be delivered in Catholic parishes to explain the process just as they host speakers on other relevant Church topics. The researcher is aware from his own current pastoral practice and experience (1989 - 2009) that respondent C's recommendation has not been put into practice in Catholic parishes. Cornwell, 2004 and Wills, 2000, make mention of fear and malaise in the Catholic Church when it comes to addressing material that might be contentious. It is extremely difficult to extol the virtues of marriage in homiletics today (2009) when a substantial portion of any congregation will be made up of people living with broken marriages or in non - sacramental marriage contracts. We have already mentioned in this study the restrictions priests work within so as to keep the tie with Rome's authority intact but to try and avoid upsetting good parishioners

whose lives might not be quite in line with the teachings of Mother Church. This balancing act is achieved by avoiding topics that might cause upset to a large number of one's congregation:

“(Priests) by a simple inability to keep a straight face or an honest heart - to be truly concerned for those they serve - if they echo what Rome is saying about women or the priesthood, marriage or natural law. Their own integrity rebels, against the calculus of personal gain or the pressures of careerism. The arguments for much of what passes as current church doctrine are so intellectually contemptible that mere self respect forbids a priest to voice them as his own.

(Wills, 2000, p: 5)

For those unfortunate to have experienced marital break up within the Catholic Church much hurt might be resolved if a level of care, advice and direction was available pastorally, like respondent C recommends, - being brave enough to address it in parishes.

Respondent D also addresses this silence surrounding marital break up and the Annulment Process by asking why information is not available in parishes.

### **Question 7**

This asked the respondents whether yearly publication of Annulment statistics might be of benefit to the Catholic community.

Couple F expressed surprise that this isn't the case already. Respondents B, C and D feel strongly that this information should be made available to as wide an audience as possible. Although the wording differs all 6 respondents agree that publication of the statistics of marriages successfully annulled would be more productive and beneficial than not publishing them.

It is the researcher's own view that it would raise the profile of the process and enable people who wish to apply for Marriage Annulment to go forward. It is the

researcher's view that the process for Annulment that is currently operating (2009) is, as respondent C comments: "all a bit of a mystery."

If one re - examines the responses given by the various Tribunals to the research questionnaire (Appendix I) it is of no surprise to the researcher that the Auditors gave the comments above. We can deduce the following from the Tribunal responses and the auditor's comments:

- ✓ 'Feedback' from the Tribunals to the Petitioners is poor.
- ✓ There appears to be scant regard for the emotional care of petitioners.
- ✓ The tribunals see the Annulment Process as a Juridical Process. If this is to be the case more information should be made available to the petitioners contemplating Annulment of their marriage so they know just what to expect.
- ✓ There is a lack of communication between the Tribunals and the volunteer lay - Auditors who gather information on their behalf. One might question why respondents B, C and D work for the Tribunals as their opinions of the way Tribunals work might be perceived as derogatory.
- ✓ One could conclude that the way in which Auditors are trained does not equip them sufficiently to deal with petitioners who experience emotional stress. It is not satisfactory for the Tribunals to expect Auditors to be disconnected note takers who are able to ignore the need for some type of emotional management of distressed petitioners.
- ✓ A lack of training in the management of emotional distress puts both the petitioner and the auditor at risk in certain situations.
- ✓ More could be done to make the process more transparent and less threatening.



- ✓ There is a need to produce explanatory literature about the process and what it entails and this should be displayed in places that can be accessed by lay Catholics.
- ✓ A consideration ought to be given to publishing yearly statistics of Marriage Annulments just as Dioceses publish statistics regarding Baptisms, First Holy Communion, Deaths, Marriages, Confirmations, and Converts.

(Nottingham Diocesan Year Book, 2009, p: 112 - 114.)

### **3.3 Interviews with five female participants who have experienced the Catholic Marriage Annulment Process**

In this section of chapter 3 we examine the experience of five female Catholics who have experienced the Catholic Marriage Annulment Process in England. The full text of the interviews and the coding of such can be found in Appendix L

The researcher has over twenty years experience working with Catholics who have experienced the Annulment Process. The coding of the interviews was drawn from the researcher's experience and from extensive knowledge of the issues that emerge from the Annulment Process. The researcher 'piloted' his coding (Denscombe 2004, Silverman 2005, Bryman 2008, *et al*) with two critical friends on two separate occasions to ascertain if their understanding and interpretation of the codes matched that of the researcher. This exercise was undertaken to validate the codes as fit for purpose. The results of the initial exercise can be viewed in appendix M.

Both Gibbs (2007) and Denscombe (2004) caution against using the participant's vision of life as a base for establishing codes:

“There is a need to ensure that the coding one uses does not simply accept the participants views of the world”  
(Gibbs, 2007, p: 55)

After transcribing the five interviews and obtaining the participant's consent that they were a true account, the researcher read over each interview several times to familiarise himself with the text of each one before giving thought to the coding. On the first attempt at coding the researcher formulated twenty six codes but after discussion at supervision the codes were reduced to thirteen. After the 'piloting' exercise with the two critical friends, the codes were further reduced to twelve as it was decided that two of the codes - 1: Unexpected and 2: Surprise - were actually the

same code (Inter - Rater Reliability, Silverman, 2005, p: 229). A decision was made to eliminate the 'Surprise' code:

**“Eventually the researcher should be in a position to focus attention on just the key components, the most significant categories, and concentrate his or her efforts on these.”  
(Denscombe 2004, p: 120)**

Before proceeding to examine each of the five interviews and the emerging themes (Smith 2003, Silverman 2005, *et al* ) note must be made of the methodology used and previously mentioned, that is IPA, 'Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis' (Smith 2003). The researcher makes note here of two significant components of IPA before moving to examine the codes and interview content. A semi - structured interview technique was employed with all five participants and this allows the researcher:

**“To try to enter, as far as possible, the psychological and social world of the respondent. Therefore, the respondent shares more closely in the direction the interview takes, and the respondent can introduce an issue the investigator had not thought of. In this relationship, the respondents can be perceived as the experiential expert on the subject and should therefore be allowed maximum opportunity to tell their own story.”  
(Smith & Osbourne, 2003, p; 57)**

The other feature of IPA is the assumption that the researcher or analyst is interested in learning something about the respondent's psychological world. With coding in IPA (also referred to as themes) one must bear in mind that:

**“Meaning is central, and the aim is to try to understand the content and complexity of those meanings rather than measure their frequency. This involves the investigator engaging in an interpretative relationship with the transcript. While one is attempting to capture and do justice to the meanings of the respondents to learn about their mental and social world, those meanings are not transparently available - they must be obtained through a sustained engagement with the text and a process of interpretation.”  
(Smith & Osbourne, 2003 p: 64)**



The following twelve codes are those used to identify themes from the interviews with five female Catholics who have experienced the Annulment process. A brief explanation is given with each code to evidence its purpose.

### **Code 1 - Physical Sensations**

The reader will see from the five interviews differing levels of physical distress recounted by the participants.

### **Code 2 - Participant's Life Situation**

The code looks at the participant's life situation at the time of applying for an Annulment. Does the participant have a support system or are they alone? Has the participant formed a new relationship? The participant's life situation will influence the way in which they perceive the Annulment Process either positively or negatively.

### **Code 3 - Actions taken by the Participant**

This code looks at detail such as: How did the participant commence the Annulment Process? How did they find out about it? If it was unpleasant what did they do? What action did they take to keep informed about their case or did they not bother?

### **Code 4 - Religious Influence - positive / negative**

What were the religious implications for the participant when seeking Annulment of their marriage? Did the process put the Catholic religion in a positive light for the female? Did the process seem fair and compassionate, as one might expect from a Christian religion? How would they sum up the whole Annulment Process at the end - did it put the Catholic faith in a positive place in their life?

### **Code 5 - Guilt**

This code is concerned with issues of guilt the participant might experience. Issues might include: Annulling a marriage from which children were born, presenting the former partner in a less than favourable light, asking for one - sided support from witnesses, family or friends. How does the participant handle these feelings of guilt?

### **Code 6 - Negative Emotions / Perceptions**

This code aims to identify the negative emotions felt by the participant and tries to discern why they experienced a negative emotion. The code also addresses their perception of the Annulment Process to discern how and why they might perceive the process in a negative way.

### **Code 7 - Apprehension**

What makes the participant apprehensive? Is it the setting in which the interview takes place? Is the participant worried about how the process will effect their life situation? One seeks to find out if apprehension is an initial reaction, that quickly disappears, or does it stay with the Annulment Applicant throughout the process.

### **Code 8 - Unexpected**

This code examines elements of the process that come as a surprise to the applicant. It examines issues surrounding the participant's perception of what they expected the process to be like. The code seeks to discern the level of surprise the process brought to all five interviewees and to find out if there are any unexpected issues that all five of the interviewees held in common.

## **Code 9 - Perception of the Process and Interview(er)**

Code 9 has three component parts and in the researcher's opinion it is the most encompassing of all of the codes:

### **Process**

Questions could be asked such as: Did the participant find it easy to apply for an Annulment?

Where there good channels of communication?

Was the time scale what they expected?

Did they find it an enriching experience?

Was the process a cathartic one? (As one tribunal claimed it to be - appendix I)

How did they feel when they told family members, friends, or work colleagues of their intention to apply for an Annulment?

### **Interview**

Where the questions appropriate ones?

How did they perceive the interview setting?

Were there any grievances with the length of interview or other time concerns?

What did they feel like pre - interview, at interview and post - interview?

### **Interviewer**

How did the applicant rate the interviewer/

Was he / she competent to interview?

What was their impression of the interviewer's personality?

Did the interviewer set the client at ease?

Was the interviewer professional in approach - did they handle sensitive material appropriately?



### **Code 10 - What was the effect of the process on others?**

Here we examine a number of issues that are evident in previous interviews that the researcher has undertaken and in the current ones (2002 - 2009).

Had the applicant given thought to how the Annulment Process might impact on others?

Were they aware that people other than themselves would be contacted?

Were they able to share what happens at the Annulment Interview with others?

Do they feel able to explain to others why going through the Annulment Process is important?

Did they inform their current partner or children (if applicable) that they were going to undertake this process?

What reactions have they received from others when discussing the Annulment Process?

### **Code 11 - Feelings of Isolation**

This code shares elements with code 2 'Participant's Life Situation' in attempting to discern the support mechanisms that an Annulment Applicant might or might not have. Is it common for an applicant to feel that they are making the Annulment journey alone and, if so, how might change be effected to give more support? What could be changed in the process to eliminate such feelings?

### **Code 12 - Intrusive**

The final code examines the intrusive nature of the Catholic Marriage Annulment Process. Earlier in the study we have shown that the process requires details from the

applicant regarding family life, relationships, an assessment of their psychological maturity and other key issues in the applicants life.

Are applicants prepared for this?

Is the applicant able to manage this probing and questioning appropriately?

What key matters might be evident regarding good management of the applicant?

Are there any ethical considerations that need to be addressed?

Codes or themes are used to identify issues that are present in a text that keep the study focused and informed. The codes aid the researcher in extracting significant data that might otherwise be missed or judged insignificant (Gibbs 2007, Denscombe 2004, *et al*). At this stage of the study the coding of the five interviews, and the analysis of the questionnaire responses given by the sixteen marriage tribunals, are effectively informing the research on recommendations for better practice by the tribunals. The study progresses to scrutinise extracts from the five interviews with Catholic Female Annulment Applicants and their experience of the Catholic Annulment Process. The study will examine each code in turn along side extracts from each of the interviews to find out what information they give about the five participant's experience of the Catholic Marriage Tribunals procedures. Before we commence the researcher gives a brief profile on each of the participant's, conscious of safe guarding their anonymity.

### **Participant A**

A middle aged professional lady who is employed in Catholic Education. Participant A is an active member of her local Catholic parish. It was her husband who left her for another woman. Participant A brought her sister with her for the semi - structured

research interview. Participant A has decided to apply for an Annulment because she has met a widower she wishes to marry in the Catholic Church. A Catholic Marriage ceremony is important to both of them.

### **Participant B**

Participant B is in her late forties. She is Catholic but describes herself as lapsed or non - practicing. Participant B divorced her husband in her early twenties and has been with her current partner for over twenty years. Participant B married her current partner in a civil service. Participant B is applying for an Annulment because her partner is taking instruction to be received into the Catholic Faith. It is her partners wish that once he becomes a Catholic they should marry 'properly' as she says, in the Catholic Tradition. Participant B is applying for Annulment because she wants to please her current partner.

### **Participant C**

Participant C is in her late thirties. She has been married twice. She describes herself as a 'lapsed' Catholic but also sees herself as a traditional Irish Catholic in attitude. Her first marriage, when she was very young, took place in a Catholic Church. The marriage only lasted eighteen months. Just over a year later she married again in a civil ceremony and this marriage failed after two years. Participant C has been dating a single Catholic man for about three years who has never been married before. Participant C is applying for an Annulment to marry her partner in a Catholic Ceremony and to seek closure on her two previous relationships. Participant C, by her own admission, is carrying around a great deal of guilt.



### **Participant D**

Participant D is in her late fifties. She informs the researcher that she divorced her husband on the grounds of mental cruelty. She attends Church on a regular basis and she is active in a number of parish organisations. Participant D went through the Catholic Marriage Annulment Process but she failed to get her marriage Annulled. Participant D is single and she wishes to share her account of the Annulment experience to help others in some small way.

### **Participant E**

Participant E is in her mid - forties. She had two attempts at applying for an Annulment and she was successful on the second attempt. Participant E's husband left her whilst she was pregnant with their second child.

The study now moves forward to highlight extracts from the interview transcriptions and to examine the issues that emerge under the relevant codes beginning with Code 1.

### **Code 1 - Physical Sensations (Appendix L)**

Participants B, C, D and E all report physical sensations. After the second Annulment Interview Participant B reports that she felt "totally drained" and that she "went home sobbing" (Segment 14) she also says that she did not sleep after the second interview (Segment 16). The last physical sensation she reports is in Segment 25 when the last interview is over she says that she felt "drained".

For Participant C her physical sensation occurs not as a result of the Annulment Interview but from her returning back to Church. The physical sensation she

experiences is closely linked to Code 5 - Guilt - she says that she felt “a little shaky” (Segment 14) and attributes this to “good old Catholic guilt”. We remember that she has been married twice and has ‘lapsed’ from the faith for many years. The return to Church has been difficult for Participant C and she attributes “good old Catholic guilt” as the reason for “never really feeling good about yourself” (Segment 14).

Participant D recounts a physical sensation that is not linked to the Annulment Process itself but to the marital relationship she was in prior to her Annulment Application. Participant D describes herself as getting “so ill” (Segment 10) due to the family arguments that “raged every day, especially every morning at breakfast time” (Segment 10).

Participant E has experienced what she describes as “flash backs” (Segment 20) as to how awful her life situation was when her husband divorced her. Participant E acknowledges that the source of this “awfulness” could be attributed to the parishioners in her own parish who she felt to be judging her on account of her marriage break - up.

At this point we can establish that only Participant B’s physical sensations “totally drained” are linked directly to the actual experience of the Annulment Interview. Participant C & E have physical sensations that emerge from their own perception or judgment of their standing within the Catholic Church / Parish. They see themselves to be in a less than perfect situation when they self - judge against the seeming religious perfection of other practicing Catholics. It is difficult to ascertain whether they are presenting a true reflection of what they perceive other Catholic parishioners think of them or how these parishioners act towards them. It is possible that they have evidenced unpleasantness from others but it is also possible that they are reflecting a non - factual personal opinion (Smith & Osbourne 2003).

Participant D's physical sensation relates to her own family life pre - Annulment Application and so we are unable to conclude that the Annulment Process was responsible for making her "so ill".

### Code 2 - Participants Life Situation (Appendix L)

There are twenty five segments from the five interviews that are coded under this heading so a sample selection are discussed below. This Code looks at the life situation of the participant at the time of applying for an Annulment and how the Annulment Process may have effect on this.

Participant A's life situation was affected by the fact that the person who conducted her preliminary Annulment Interview worshipped in the same parish as the applicant (Participant A). Participant A says:

"Also it's very insensitive (researcher's note: Annulment Process) when the person who first conducted my interview was someone I saw every single week at Sunday Mass, who then knew some of the most intimate details about my life and you know (pause) playing the organ and looked across at me."  
(Segment 85)

Participant B wishes to obtain an Annulment so as to marry her partner in a Catholic wedding ceremony. Her partner is taking instruction to convert to Catholicism. When she first made application to begin Annulment Proceeding Participant B was doing it for her husband rather than for herself, even though she is Catholic. After her unpleasant interview experiences she now hopes to obtain the Annulment for her own reasons as well as those of her partner:

"I am not sorry I am going through the Annulment thing because I want to make P.... happy and he wants to marry in Church and so do I - me more than him I think."  
(Segment 19)

And:



**“I just hope after all this upset and interviewing they will grant me an Annulment. It would mean so much to P.... and me if we could marry in Church”.**  
**(Segment 29)**

Participant C has been married and divorced twice and is now in a relationship with a Catholic man who has never been married before. He would like to marry in Church but he is aware of the difficulties due to his fiance having been married before. Participant C is applying for an Annulment to try to give her partner the Catholic Marriage Ceremony he wants. Participant C would also like what she terms as a “new start”. She notes:

**“I kind of knew we couldn’t marry in Church because of my track record.”**  
**(Segment 8)**

Post - divorce Participant D met a gentleman through a Catholic support group for divorced and separated Catholics as things became more serious between them she decided to apply for a Catholic Marriage Annulment:

**“He wanted to leave England and live abroad in XXX. I was a bit unsure about this but the boys were grown up now and they could either go with us or continue to live in England it was their choice and they got on well with this man. Anyway it just felt right to apply so I did.”**  
**(Segment 16)**

Participant D goes on to tell us that she later broke off with the man as he wanted to leave England sooner than she was able. Participant D still carried on with the Annulment application despite their break - up.

Participant E says that she was in a mentally abusive marriage that ended when her husband left her for another woman. Participant E was pregnant at the time of his departure. Participant E tried to apply for an Annulment once the Civil Divorce was granted, but failed to initiate the proceedings due to the fact that the Parish Priest, she

approached at the time, did not believe in the Annulment Process. Participant E finally obtained an Annulment by approaching the Diocesan Tribunal in person.

Participant E appears to be profoundly affected by being labelled a 'divorcee' and she feels that the Catholic Church offers little support for divorced Catholics. Participant E has also had bad experiences with her local Catholic Clergy as she feels that they do not really believe in Annulments. To conclude Participant E senses that divorce and Annulment have set her apart from other Catholics in a negative way. She recounts an experience from one parish:

“One priest whose parish I no longer attend once took a line of scripture for his homily it was that one that goes something like; ‘Once the hand is laid to the plough don’t look back.....’ or something along those lines. Do you know what followed?”  
(Segment 18)

“Well, the wicked man, I am sorry but that’s how I feel about him, went on to preach about quitters and losers - the quitters and losers in the context of marriage. He said keep going whatever you have to put up with this implies to me that quitting your marriage even for abuse is quitting! I was stunned. What about all the poor people fleeing from abusive relationships. Are they quitters?”  
(Segment 20)

From the interview extracts above we have insight into how divorce and Annulment Application impact on a participants life situation. Issues arise that are able to have a profound effect on a person’s life particularly on a parish level. It is the researcher’s opinion that an experience like the one of Participant A has serious implications that Catholic Marriage Tribunals would do well to consider. To be interviewed and to share intimate details of one’s life with an interviewer only to discover that they attend Church regularly at your own parish. This raises questions regarding boundaries and the safe guarding of confidential material. There is also need for



Parish Priests to be trained in pastoral sensitivity so that they address issues appropriately and without causing public offence.

### **Code 3 - Actions taken by the Participant (Appendix L)**

This Code examines ways in which a participant deals with issues that arise when making an Annulment Application. The Code identified issues in the interviews with participants A, C and D.

Participant A expresses frustration in her interview with what she feels to be very poor communication with regard to her Annulment Application and she describes the actions she has taken to try to remedy the situation:

**“I get the impression it’s (Diocesan Tribunal) very old fashioned in it’s methods and ways of communicating - I have rung and had no reply. I have emailed and nothing and when I did ask if they had received my emails to see how my case was progressing she said: ‘Oh well we seem to have something wrong with our emails, the system may be up and running next week’”  
(Participant A, Segment 75)**

and:

**“Well they give us an email address in the Diocesan Year Book and nothing! I have sent two emails, written down what I wanted to ask and I’ve had no reply, not even an acknowledgment that they will be dealt with.”  
(Participant A, Segment 77)**

As well as taking action to seek out information on her case Participant A also intends to write a formal letter of complaint to the Diocesan Bishop expressing dissatisfaction with the whole “Marriage thing” which she believes to be “Absolutely dire!” (Segment 103). She also intends to persist in trying to contact the Tribunal for updates on her case (Segment 113).

Participant C recalls the researcher recommending the Annulment Process to her as a way of effecting closure on her two previous marriages and thus enabling her to marry



her current partner in a Catholic Ceremony. Client C was keen to progress her application for Annulment with some urgency:

“I know you told us to go away and think about whether we wanted to apply or not I knew there and then I did. So as soon as I walked in the door at home I rang you and asked you to set it up for me.”  
(Participant C, Segment 8)

Participant D failed to get her marriage Annulled by the Church and she decided on the following course of action:

“Well I was obviously very disappointed and I was angry and hurt but I now thought just leave it. I thought I have done what I can and if I ever want to marry again I will and just go to another Church where I am not known to receive Holy Communion. I don't know what you think about this but I now believe after all this that what goes on in this area is between me and God”  
(Participant D, Segment 34)

She concludes:

“I wouldn't go to the Church (Catholic) for any help or advice on a marriage issue I would now just get on with it and trust in God.”  
(Participant D, Segment 34)

The researcher identifies an interesting difference between the action and belief style of Participants A & D compared with Participant C and a reading of the full interview texts reflects the difference (Appendix L). Both Participants A & D have a background of teaching in Catholic Schools with good positions, their Catholic background is very much an English one. Both of them play an active role in their respective parishes and they belong to parish groups and church organisations. They feel comfortable in challenging Church authority and have a mature stance in that they are able to stand back and make a decision. Whilst they have experienced frustration they do not show any signs of intimidation and they appear comfortable with the actions they have resolved to take.

Participant C, by her own admission, is from a traditional Irish Catholic background and it appears to be one that would not challenge Church authority in any way. Participant C is seeking an Annulment to please her Catholic fiance and partly to reconcile herself with the Catholic Church. This is the Church that she feels she has let down by her past behaviour. Her actions are spontaneous and she feels she does not need to give any time to thinking about whether or not the Annulment Process is right for her - she needs it as soon as possible saying that: "Even applying for an Annulment has made me feel clean again". (Participant C, Segment 10). The researcher feels that if Participant C were to be refused an Annulment it would further compound her feelings of blame and guilt. Participant C would not have the emotional maturity or 'fight' to reassess the situation or to challenge it like Participant's A & D:

"I love being back at Church even though I am still a little shaky but that is good old Catholic guilt for you, you never feel really good about yourself."  
(Participant C, Segment 14).

#### **Code 4 Religious Influence - Positive / Negative (Appendix L)**

Code 4 attempts to identify what type of religious influence is evident in the interviews coming either from the Catholic Church as an institution or from individuals operating in the Catholic Church. There are fourteen segments from interviews with Participants A, B, C and D that have been placed in this Code category.

Participant A appears to see the religious influence of the Church, as an institution, in a negative way. In segment 64 of her interview she speaks of the Annulment Process thus: "the whole thing is quite traumatic" and she goes on to say:

"You know (pause)....I sat at Mass thinking what am I doing, you know, why am I here (pause)....because you know (pause).....this is the Church I have belonged to



for so long (pause).....how can they be like this?”  
(Participant A, Segment 64)

At this point of the interview she is questioning the institution of the Catholic Church as a whole not as represented by a particular individual. Participant A then goes on to channel her criticism down to a particular diocese - the one she belongs to:

“I feel that for the people interviewed be it myself or my witnesses there was no support at all in this Diocese. If there is I certainly wasn't directed anywhere.”  
(Participant A, Segment 73)

Participant A played a significant role in helping to organise a Diocesan Assembly and she goes on to personalise her negative opinion of her local church:

“I saw a lot of discussion that went on prior to the Diocesan Assembly and this whole marriage thing was a big issue and it wasn't covered sufficiently in the Assembly and I certainly haven't seen any mention of it in the Diocesan Plan. I intend to feed back on that believe you me!”  
(Participant A, Segment 103)

Participant B does not like the person who interviewed her and she sees the interviewer as someone who is representing the Catholic Church. She thus forms a negative impression of the larger institution as well as the individual interviewer. We also remember that she is the Catholic and her partner is taking instruction to convert to Catholicism. Participant B does not want to pass on her negativity to him. In segment 14 she states that she went home sobbing after her second Annulment interview. She has had a very negative experience in her mind of both the Annulment Process and the Catholic religion:

“I tried to be brave in front of P..... because he wants to become a Catholic and I thought well if he sees this interview thing as being part of the Catholic Church then it might put him off”.  
(Participant B, segment 14)



Participant B identifies a single interviewer as someone who is a negative religious influence and who represents the Catholic Church.

Participant C has been married twice and is seeking an Annulment to marry her current partner in a Catholic Marriage Ceremony. The segments that have been coded under this heading for Participant C might be judged to have both positive and negative traits of religious influence. Let us look at the whole of segment 10 that follows on from the researcher asking C why the Annulment is important to her:

“Well it would be a way of starting again from scratch for me. I know that might sound daft to some but to me it means so much if I got an Annulment. You see you never knew me in the parish in my first marriage and I stayed away from Church during my second one in fact you may have noticed I have not long started coming back to Church. Even applying for an Annulment has made me feel clean again. I have felt so unclean since my first marriage failed. I blame both of us for the break up as well. In fact it may have been all my fault I was young and really head strong and I suppose promiscuous. I felt if I came to Church everyone would look at me and judge me just as I was judging myself.”  
(Participant C, Segment 10)

Participant C could be said to have had a positive religious influence in that the Church has the power to grant her an Annulment thus making her feel ‘clean again’. But the observer might also conclude that these supposed positives stem from a very strong negative religious influence. It is the institutional Church that she belongs to that has made her feel guilty in the first instance. Participant C has not lived up to or fulfilled the articles of her faith in the area of marriage and sexuality: “that Marriage is a life long indissoluble commitment” and she is aware of this. After her marriage break up she did not instantly think of the Catholic Church as a place to go to for support but rather her view was: “I felt that if I came to Church everyone would look at me and judge me just as I was judging myself.”

Participant C is desperate to cleanse herself in some way and to try and 'fit' back into a Church that she feels she has failed. She has spoken of 'good old Catholic guilt' (segment 14) and she sees the obtaining of an Annulment as some antidote to this: 'I have a lot of hope that I will be able to marry in Church so if that happens I will be so happy'. (segment 24). The researcher would conclude that the whole of Participant C's life has had impressed on it a negative religious influence.

For Participant D it is a particular individual in the Catholic Church - her Parish Priest - who has provided her with a negative religious influence. Participant D followed the correct procedure when applying for an Annulment and went, in the first instance, to see her local Parish Priest. Below she explains the encounter when the researcher asks if she went to see her priest:

"I did and it was disastrous. When I mentioned Annulment I can see him now he just froze. He said that he knew nothing about them and it would be better if I did the same. So I didn't get anywhere with him. I told someone in the parish what had happened and they laughed. They said they knew a girl who had been granted an Annulment and he refused to marry her."  
(Participant D, Segment 18)

This negative experience recounted by Participant D reminds us, once again, of the opinion given by the Canon Lawyer James Coriden (2000) that the Annulment Procedure lacks continuity and that the procedure differs from place to place. Had Participant D travelled a few miles up or down the road the reception from the Parish Priest might have been a totally different experience.

### **Code 5 - Guilt (Appendix L)**

Only Participant's A and C have material coded under this heading. When the researcher admits to Participant A that he does not know any statistics with regard to how many marriages are Annulled annually, Participant A gives a response that has



been coded under this heading. The researcher states in the interview: "I don't think they publish statistics for the general public" (Segment 65) Participant A responds:

"No! Because its felt to be like some dirty little act you go through. You get things through the back door (client still very tearful) and I don't want to be like that."  
(Segment 66)

The researcher has coded this under Guilt as he judges that Participant A is feeling guilty about the Annulment Process calling it "some dirty little act you go through". Participant C is, by her own admission, daughter to traditional Irish Catholic parents. The whole of Participant C's interview might be placed under the one Code of Guilt. In her opinion her failed marriages have had immense repercussions and she speaks in terms of trying to forgive herself the hurt that she feels she has caused to others and to the institutional Church:

"So I haven't really forgiven myself yet. I felt I let my parents down, my friends down - everything really."  
(Participant C, Segment 12)

The researcher feels she has let her perceived vision of the Church judge her life and affect her self - esteem. When she says that she has let everyone down the researcher comments: "It's sad that you feel like that". (segment 13) she responds in a way that reinforces this ingrained guilt:

"Yes it is and I love being back at Church even though I am still a little shaky but that is good old Catholic guilt for you, you never feel really good about yourself. I have lived over 20 years feeling really guilty and really dirty so it is going to be hard to break that."  
(Participant C, Segment 14).

It would seem for certain Catholic females, like Participants A & C, that the Catholic teaching on marriage carries substantial psychological pressure should break up occur. In all five interviews the researcher observes this pressure. It might be summed up thus - that when a Catholic marriage breaks up the female Catholic feels a sense of



failure and this produces a sense of helplessness. There is a perceived rejection of them by the Church as an institution and this is further compounded by what they perceive their priest and fellow parishioners to think of them. The Annulment Process is not an easy option to go for neither is it a well advertised one. By its very nature it is perceived by many as a clandestine act or “some dirty little act you go through” (Participant C, Segment 66, Appendix L)

### **Code 6 - Negative Emotion / Perception (Appendix L)**

This Code has been used for forty two segments from the five interviews so the researcher will extract selective examples to illustrate the placing of the segments under this Code heading.

This Code examines the negative emotions and perceptions that might be felt by Participants when applying for a Catholic Marriage Annulment. The material that is identified as relevant to Code 6 will hopefully provide us with material to make recommendations on how better emotional management might be implemented by the various diocesan Marriage Tribunals in England and Wales.

When Participant A is reflecting on her interview experience and on the experience of her sister and brother who were interviewed as witnesses she describes the Annulment Process as being “quite traumatic” (Segment 64) she is frustrated that there is no apparent time scale as to how long it will take to obtain her Annulment and no answers as to whether it will be granted or not. Participant A shows signs of being emotionally exhausted:

“I mean I have opened my heart, I’ve upset my sister, I’ve upset my brother but nothing absolutely nothing (Participant A very tearful at this point) there’s no time limit to it, there’s no hope.”  
(Participant A, Segment 64)

Participant A feels she has gone through a process that is clandestine and unsupportive, the opposite of what she expected or wanted. Participant A wanted the Annulment Process to be open (segment 66) and positive instead she perceives it negatively:

“I want it to be open. That’s why I have (tearful) gone through this and it hasn’t made me feel any better.”  
(Participant A, Segment 66)

She has a negative perception of the authorities conducting the Annulment Process and says:

“People in positions of authority that make decisions about other people’s lives - its not fair is it?”  
(Participant A, Segment 83)

Participant A perceives the communication between the Tribunal and the Petitioner negatively and says:

“Well I am going to keep trying, ringing and writing to get updates because I am not happy.”  
(Participant A, Segment 113)

When Participant B speaks about her first interview with the Annulment Process, that lasted two and a half hours, there were questions about her childhood and she reports that:

“I was confused and I quickly became scared.”  
(Participant B, Segment 8)

The process became more emotionally upsetting for Participant B and she describes the second interview as worse “absolutely horrendous!”

“The lady asked me to remember so many details from past years and very painful ones.”  
(Participant B, Segment 10)

She says that after the second interview she was totally drained and went home sobbing (Segment 14). When the researcher states that she must have found the second interview a tough one she says that she was ready to give up, and of her

emotional state she says that she was “so angry and confused and hurt.” (Segment 16). One feels that her whole experience of the Annulment Process was emotionally negative saying that: “I just hope after all this upset and interviewing they will grant me an Annulment” (Segment 29).

Participant C’s negative emotions centre around her own feelings of guilt, that as a Catholic her marriage failed: “I have felt so unclean since my first marriage failed” (Segment 10). She did experience a negative emotion like Participant B when answering the interview questions saying that some of them “were difficult to get through” (Segment 18) and “when I did become upset” (Segment 18). The negative emotions experienced by Participant C seem to centre around herself, this does not come as any surprise as we have already identified Participant C has having issues of personal guilt.

Participant D, like, participants A & B, had negative emotions because of the Annulment Process itself as an external factor. When she was informed that her Annulment Application had been rejected she states: “Well I am not an over emotional person but I was angry and confused.” (Segment 26). Participant D decided to appeal against the decision and after a few months she was informed by letter that her appeal had been unsuccessful and reports that she: “was obviously very disappointed and I was angry and hurt.” (Segment 34). At the end of the interview she says she would caution others who might apply for an Annulment and says that when she looks back on her experience:

“It still makes me very angry and do you know I think that the Church (Catholic) has a lot to answer for if it has treated other people like it treated me.”  
(Participant D, Segment 38).

Participant E mentions very early on in her interview the negative emotional influence of two Parish Priest’s. The first one persisted in trying to encourage her to go back to



her abusive husband and the second who delayed in helping her file for an Annulment. When Participant E asked the priest how things were progressing with her petition he chided her in public accusing her of being in a rush to re - marry. She states that: “it was really upsetting” (Segment 12). Participant E finally asked a nun to help her to progress her Annulment Application and it was through this nun she found out that the priest had been holding back documentation that he should have sent off. Of her parish community and contacts she says:

“When I divorced and applying for the Annulment I felt totally worthless. I got this impression that if people spoke to me they might ‘catch’ divorce”.  
(Participant E, Segment 14)

Participant E seems to have had a poor experience with Catholic clergy and talks of one priest preaching about divorce in terms of “quitters and losers” (Segment 20) she refers to him as a “wicked man” (Segment 20). Participant E has quite a negative perception of the structure of the Catholic Church influenced by her contact with clergy and parishioners she states: “We are a welcoming Church if you haven’t had a divorce.” (Segment 28).

We can see that all five of the Participants have experienced negative emotions and perceptions of the Catholic Annulment Process through their contact with it.

#### **Code 7 - Apprehension (Appendix L)**

Only Participants A and B have segments of text is coded under this heading. Participant A has her sister L present in the interview with her. At the beginning of the interview (Segment 5) Participant A’s sister speaks about the Process in a way that is apprehensive. The researcher states that from his telephone conversation with Participant A (when arranging the interview) that their experience with the Marriage

Tribunal has not been a pleasant one (Segment 4). Participant A's sister L admits that it wasn't pleasant and states:

“I did not make a protest at the time because I was afraid that it might affect my sister's case in a negative way”  
(Participant A, Segment 5)

Participant A agrees with her sister's view point and says:

“I would suggest that a lot of witnesses might act like that they don't speak out because it might upset the apple cart.”  
(Participant A, Segment 8)

Participant A goes on in the interview to express her disappointment with the Annulment Process and her anger and frustration at what she sees as a process fraught with communication difficulties and lack of respect for the applicant and witnesses. When the researcher suggests that they write to their Diocesan Bishop about their experience Participant A's sister L is still apprehensive about that course of action and says:

“At the moment, rightly or wrongly, I have this fear of jeopardising my sister's chances of obtaining an Annulment.”  
(Participant A, Segment 69)

When speaking about the unsuitability of the interviewer assigned to her the researcher asked Participant A why she didn't ask for someone else? Participant A shows apprehension saying: “well there's a fear that any action might jeopardise the case.” (Segment 91).

Whilst the researcher has classified these segments as apprehension we can also see that there are elements of fear around. There are indicators that the Annulment Process generates fear of some kind in the applicant and we see this present in the segment taken from Participant B's interview. Participant B is apprehensive about the Annulment Process but it is also bordering on her being fearful of it:

**“I was really nervous when I turned up in fact I had been worrying about it for days and I had a really upset tummy which I think was nerves.”  
(Participant B, Segment 8)**

This apprehension stays with Participant B and she says that even after the interviews had been conducted and her case was under way she is: “still confused as to what happens now - nobody seems to tell you.” (Segment 25).

Both Participants A & B have shown clear signs of apprehension when facing the Annulment Process and this apprehension is combined with a fear towards the process and those who are in charge of it.

### **Code 8 - Unexpected / Surprise (Appendix L)**

This Code seeks to examine what elements of the Annulment Process come as a surprise or shock to the applicant. What was unexpected or shocking to them about the Annulment Process and why? Participant A’s sister L states very early on in the interview that the way the tribunal worked was in a way she did not expect: “I was a bit taken aback with the way it was conducted.” (Segment 7). She goes on to clarify this in segment 9:

**“When the tribunal interviewer telephoned me to make an appointment to see me she introduced herself on the telephone but when she came to my front door she didn’t introduce herself, she introduced the nun who came with her.”  
(Participant A, Segment 9)**

It seems that Participant A’s sister L found the whole witness interview to be a totally surprising experience: “they asked lots of questions, lots of unexpected questions.” (Segment 28). Participant A was also surprised and shocked when she experienced something totally unexpected with the person chosen by the Tribunal to conduct her interview:

**“Well it shocked me really when the interviewer came**



to the door because I immediately thought - I know you, I see you every Sunday at Mass.”  
(Participant A, Segment 87)

Participant B received an unexpected surprise straight away. Speaking about the initial meeting with her interviewer she says:

“Well I didn’t really know what to expect when I turned up for interview (coughs) but almost as soon as I sat down the interviewer told me that she would need to see me for approximately nine hours to gather the information and these sessions would take place in three interviews.”

(Participant B, Segment 6)

When the researcher asks if this came as a surprise she says:

“Well yes it did really. I didn’t know what to expect and I was really nervous when I turned up....”

(Participant B, Segment 8)

Participant B was also surprised by the life details that she was required to provide at interview:

“I mean she asked me about witnesses to my first marriage at the very beginning - I mean for goodness sake we are talking almost 31 years ago.”

(Participant B, Segment 12)

Coriden (2000) and Buckley (2002) have already identified a lack of continuity between Catholic Marriage Tribunals and these interviews provide further illustration of this. Participant B was told that her interview would take up to nine hours. In contrast to B, Participant D is surprised that her interview only lasted fifty minutes. Participant D admits that she arrived at her interview flustered having driven through the city in rush hour traffic only to be told to sit down: “and answer some of the most personal questions ever” (Segment 22). When the researcher - who is conscious that Participant D only received a fifty minute interview - asks if they requested she return again Participant D says: “No they didn’t which really surprised me.” (Segment 24).

Participant E has had poor experiences with the Catholic clergy in helping her with the Annulment Process. Participant E finally applied for an Annulment with the help of a nun. Participant E is surprised when, on the instigation of the nun, she goes to ask the priest for the return of some of her documentation that he had kept:

“Do you know though, the nun asked me to go and see the priest to get my documents back and I was amazed he must have had 7 copies of everything I had given to him. He had never sent anything off he had been stalling all the time.”

(Participant E, Segment 12).

Throughout her interview Participant E has a negative opinion of Catholic clergy and certain parishioners. This opinion is derived from her own local parishes. Participant E has very clear opinions on how things are wrong within the Catholic Church with regard to marriage and divorce. Participant E is surprised by certain attitudes she sees present in the Catholic Church:

“You know what, you do the right thing and marry in Church, and yet if you marry in a registry office there’s no problem you can have your marriage put right or walk away from it. I know people living together who go to Church and they go up to receive Holy Communion and there is no trouble and no bad thoughts against them. It’s all wrong!”

(Participant E, Segment 16).

The segments coded from these four participant interviews reveal a lack of communication between the Tribunals and the applicants. None of the four were prepared adequately or given information as to how the Marriage Annulment Process works. There is also evidence of a lack of continuity between dioceses as to how they work with regard to processing Annulments. There are also ethical issues concerning confidentiality. For Participant A to have her initial interview conducted by someone from her own parish congregation is most unacceptable.



### **Code 9 - Perception of Process and Interview(er) (Appendix L)**

This Code tries to ascertain the Applicant's perception of the Annulment Process as a whole and examines their particular opinion of the interview and the person chosen to conduct the interview. Is the Process competent? How does the Process manage the Applicant when one considers the sensitive material that is involved?

Participant A's sister L was interviewed as a witness for her sister's case. She says that she arranged the furniture ready for her interview to take place in her home. L recalls the response of the interviewer who she had never met before:

“She took one look and said ‘Oh no! This won't do! I need a table’ She was walking around with this massive great typewriter thing and she says ‘Oh look we'll sit here!’ and she says ‘You sit there and you sit there!’ I was sat at the dining table while she was opposite with this huge great typewriter typing away, which was really off putting.”  
(Participant A, Segment 14)

When Participant A's sister was interviewed a second time she was asked to repeat things:

“Just so she could type at her speed and I simply lost track of what I was saying and thinking.  
(Participant A, Segment 30)

Participant A's sister L reports that two weeks later they returned - the interviewer and the trainee - to ask her to read through the interview and sign it as a true record. L was shocked by their unprofessional attitude:

“Then she commented on the fact that I was taking my time. She said that: ‘You don't have to correct every single grammar mistake!’ I thought well if I hadn't it would not have read properly, the sense would be wrong. She got things completely the wrong way round like A...was in Nottingham and I was in Leeds.” (Researchers note: A... lived in Leeds and L... in Nottingham. )  
(Participant A, Segment 61)

Participant A is very clearly upset by what her sister L has experienced and she has an incredibly poor perception of the Marriage Annulment Process saying:



**“How can they be so unprofessional? It really upsets me as to the amateur way they go about it under the guise of professionalism (pause)....no its not even professional (pause)....its this legal umbrella but underneath it all there’s just these amateur people.”  
(Participant A, Segment 64)**

Both participant A’s sister and brother were interviewed as witnesses and it was a very bad experience for both of them. This goes to strengthen Participant A’s opinion of the Process as one that is very inadequate and she finds it hard to comprehend the experiences they have both had:

**“But why are we continuing to allow people to interview (pause)...to interview people who are vulnerable, and you know...(pause)...feeling sensitive about everything you are saying, why are we allowing people who haven’t sufficient training to interview?”  
(Participant A, Segment 69)**

If one reads through the full text of A’s interview (Appendix L) the reader will see that Participant A perceives the Annulment Process in an extremely negative way. Participant A has issues with the poorly skilled interviewers, with the poor channels of communication and with how she perceives the poor emotional treatment of vulnerable people:

**“Well someone I know used to be an interviewer and he has stopped doing it for the Tribunal because he said in his opinion it was such an unhelpful exercise. He hated being the interviewer having to ask these questions in that particular format.”  
(Participant A, Segment 110)**

Participant B had a traumatic experience of the Annulment Process, particularly with the interview and the interviewer. Participant B would describe herself as a nervous person and as someone who is quite shy:

**“This lady really did not set me at ease in fact she had a really severe way about her from the very start.”  
(Participant B, Segment 8)**

The second interview was no better for Participant B, in fact, she says that it was 'worse' describing the experience as 'absolutely horrendous' (Segment 10). It would have been most helpful, in the researchers opinion, to have given Participant B some information of what to expect when making application for an Annulment especially with regard to the relevance of the questioning:

"I mean she even asked me questions about my brothers and sisters and what their marriages were like. I couldn't believe it but the worst thing was when she asked me about my mum and dad's marriage. I mean what is the point of that they are both dead!"  
(Participant B, Segment 14)

The Marriage Tribunals might argue that this questioning gives insight into the applicant's psychological development and growth with regard to forming mature relationships but if handled inappropriately it can also be a type of question that can lead to upset, as evidenced by Participant B.

The researcher also feels that it raises significant ethical questions regarding client care. We have already seen from the Tribunal responses that the Diocesan Tribunals do not see the Annulment Process in terms of a counselling relationship. This might be so but inevitably care of client issues need to be addressed and taken into account. When dealing with personal material that is emotive, which includes Tribunal Interviews, the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy state, among other points, in their Ethical Framework that measures need to be in place to

- Respect human rights and dignity
- Alleviate personal distress and suffering
- Enhance the quality of relationship between people

(BACP, 2009, p: 2)

The experience of Participant B was clearly not managed in an appropriate way. She states that after the second interview she was 'ready to give the whole thing up'.



Participant B goes on to describe herself at this point as: 'so angry and confused and hurt that some stranger could pry so deeply into my life' (Segment 16).

Participant B found the Process extremely unpleasant and there appears to be no evidence from the interview to suggest the availability of emotional care or support for the applicant. On the third interview the interviewer is described by Participant B as being 'a bit more sociable' (Segment 21) the interviewer discloses that she is a court prosecutor. Participant B gives a good summary of her perception of the Process and the Interviewer in segment 25:

**"Its true, I really would not have liked to face that woman in court. Anyway I was so drained when the last interview was over and I am still confused as to what happens now - nobody seems to tell you. I have shared my whole life story and intimate details with a complete stranger and in my view not a pleasant woman."  
(Participant B, Segment 25)**

It would appear that Participant C does not perceive the Process or the Interviewer in a negative way. Participant C was assigned a male interviewer and she states that:

**"He was a lovely person. At first I would have liked a lady interviewer but as we got started he was really lovely. He took his time and he was very helpful with all the questions."  
(Participant C, Segment 16)**

Participant C admits that some of the questions: 'are quite difficult to get through' (segment 18) but it is evident the difference that a competent interviewer can make as she says:

**"E.....(interviewers name) was really good. When I became upset he just said ' right take your time and we can have a break if you want.' He seemed to be really experienced."  
(Participant C, Segment 18)**

Participant C did have pre - conceived ideas as to what the Process might be like but she concludes that: 'it was not as bad as I thought it would be' (segment 22).



Participant D decided to apply for an Annulment after meeting a man at a Catholic support group for divorced and separated Catholics. By her own admission she knew very little about Annulments, in fact, she didn't really know that they existed (segment 16). Thinking she was taking the right course of action she approached her Parish Priest to find out how she might apply. She says that the encounter was disastrous:

“When I mentioned annulment, I can see him now, he just froze. He said that he knew nothing about them and it would be better if I did the same.”  
(Participant D, Segment 18)

Timothy Buckley's study (2002) on the Catholic Marriage Question recognises that this is quite a common reaction from certain Catholic clerics. Buckley (2002) does not propose to answer why this is the case. The researcher is of the opinion that there could be a variety of reasons as to why some clerics react negatively to questions posed to them about the possibility of applying for a Marriage Annulment. I identify three possible reasons below:

- One might be aware in the Catholic Church that over the last thirty or forty years Annulments appear, in certain countries, to be on the increase and they appear to be granted more freely than was previously the case (Cornwell 2004, Wills 2000, Buckley 2002, Coriden 2000, *et al*). Parish Priests may have their own private agenda and reasons for thinking that this is wrong and so mobilise their own personal crusade by blocking access to Annulment information and the way of making application.
- There is also a school of thought among religious commentators that Catholic marriage has been singled out from the other six sacraments and been afforded almost obsessive attention and priority because the Catholic Church appears to be obsessed with matters sexual (Wills 2000, Bouclin 2006, Purves 2009).

- In service training for Catholic priests has been notably poor post - seminary graduation (Becket Project 2005) and some more elderly priests might feel threatened by requests for Annulment Application support because they do not know enough about it. Bouclin (2006) would even hint at more sinister reasons such as the denial of information being used to keep women in the Catholic Church in a position of subordination and often abuse.

These are three reasons the researcher offers as being particularly significant in trying to address the negativity evident among certain Catholic clerics when asked to support a female's Annulment Application. After the negativity shown her by the Parish Priest Participant D made direct contact with the Marriage Tribunal in her nearest city. Once again she was given a negative perception of the Annulment Process:

**“They (the Tribunal) gave me an appointment for my first interview. I remember it so clearly it was a Friday at 5:00pm. I had to finish teaching at school early and drive twenty minutes to the city centre. I made it for 5:00pm and I was out for 5:50pm. It wasn't a good experience I had driven through rush hour traffic then told to sit down and answer some of the most personal questions ever. That was what really sticks in my mind they were just so personal and upsetting. I would really have liked to have been given a copy of the questions earlier, it is all so secretive. I also expected to be asked to go back for another interview as fifty minutes seemed such a short time to tell someone about the state of your marriage but that was it.”**  
(Participant D, Segment 22)

Sadly, Participant D was refused an Annulment. Participant D was angry and confused about this result, especially as she had only received a fifty - minute interview slot. Participant D did appeal and was granted another interview but her application was once again refused. For Participant D the whole Process was distressing and a very negative experience. Like so many other Catholics (Buckley 2002, Coriden 2000) who are forced down this route Participant D made her own decision as to how to handle the Annulment rejection:



**“I thought I have done what I can and if ever I want to marry again I will (civil ceremony) and just go to another Church were I am not known to receive Holy Communion.”  
(Participant D, Segment 34)**

We have already made several references to Coriden (2000) who claims that there is little or no continuity between the Diocesan Marriage Tribunals. What might have been the outcome for Participant D had she used a different Tribunal? Suppose that she had been interviewed for a greater length of time, and more thoroughly, the outcome may have been completely different. In the opinion of the researcher cases like that of Participant D reduce the Annulment Process to some kind of lottery.

Participant D concludes that her experience of the Annulment Process and the interview, have put her at a stage were she: ‘wouldn’t encourage anyone to go for an Annulment’ (segment 38).

Like Participant D the perception of the Annulment Process begins negatively for Participant E on the account of her approaching her Parish Priest in the first instance.

She says:

**“He was really negative and I remember him saying that it would take at least 9 years to apply for an Annulment.”  
(Participant E, Segment 10)**

We need to think back to the three reasons given earlier by the researcher as to why the Priest may have reacted in this way. Giving a time scale of nine years is totally inaccurate and most certainly untruthful. When she approached the priest to get an update on the progress of her application she claims that his response caused her public humiliation (segment 10). Like Participant D, Participant E eventually makes an Application by going directly to her nearest Marriage Tribunal. Participant E was eventually interviewed by a nun who she describes as being ‘okay’ (segment 12) and the nun finally helped Participant E to gain her Annulment. The Process was not a smooth one and Participant E found that her Parish Priest had held back



documentation in connection with her Annulment Application. Participant E describes this discovery as 'upsetting'. Participant E does not have a very positive perception of the Annulment Process and states:

“There should be more help and support available to get out of a really horrible situation. It's like in Church, you never hear prayer intentions for divorced people.”  
(Participant E, Segment 14)

Participant E feels that even when a female obtains her Marriage Annulment that parish life is not easy and her experience is that you are still 'treated badly with resistance and criticism' (segment 28).

#### **Code 10 - Effect of Process / Life Situation - On Others (Appendix L)**

When the researcher conducted the literature search for both the Masters Degree (2002) and for this current study, there appeared to be very little information available as to how the Annulment Process affects the life of those who are close to the applicant. This could include their new partner, parents, children, friends and fellow parishioners. What happens when the applicant has to consider who to name as witnesses for their case? There is potential here either to cement relationships and friendships or to cause damage to them.

The researcher recalls one interview from the Masters Dissertation (2002) where the female participant felt that the whole Annulment Process had exerted some kind of influence over various aspects of her life. She remembered, Pre - Annulment Application, having to answer questions from her three children as to why she did not go up to receive Holy Communion like they did (she had married again in a Methodist Church). The lady had attempted to apply for an Annulment but she had given up as she found the type of questions asked of her by a Catholic Priest too intrusive and upsetting, particularly those of a sexual nature. The researcher remembers that she

equated the experience as being “Tantamount to emotional rape” (Naylor, Masters Dissertation, Derby University, Appendix 4). This participant also felt the Process affected her relationship with family and friends as she was unable to share any of the Annulment Process with them, particularly non - Catholic friends. It is for this reason that a Code for Isolation has been included. Code 10 will give us insight into how the Annulment Process might influence opinion on the Catholic Church in general.

For Participant A the Annulment Process had a profound effect on significant others. She felt that it had been a terrible experience for her sister and her brother whom she named as witnesses in her Annulment Application. When the researcher interviewed Participant A she brought her sister L along with her. L was deeply upset to be questioned in her witness statement about family life and upset for her sister Participant A. L says:

“You know they were talking about Dad at one stage and you know it brings it all back and I felt quite upset about the whole situation, for A....anyway.”  
(Participant A, Segment 22)

We see the effect the Annulment Process has had on significant others when Participant A’s sister L recounts how bad she found her witness interview and she says that their brother T....also found the witness interview frustrating. Participant A is very upset that they have had to go through this experience on her account and she says: “this whole thing is quite traumatic.” (segment 64) and concludes:

“I have opened my heart, I’ve upset my sister, I’ve upset my brother but absolutely nothing, there’s no time limit to it, there’s no hope.”  
(Participant A, Segment 64)

Participant A’s brother is a lapsed Catholic and it appears that the interview he was asked to do for A’s Annulment did little to improve his opinion or relationship with the Catholic Church:



**“My brother was brought up Catholic but he lapsed and after being interviewed as a witness for my Annulment application he said: ‘it’s just confirmed all my thoughts, it has made me feel that I made the right decision to give up on it”.**

**(Participant A, Segment 66)**

**Participant A is saddened not only by the fact that he found the interview difficult but she also knows he has moved further away from the Catholic Church and she says: “that’s such a shame, really it is so sad” (Segment 66).**

**In the case of Participant B one could say that the Process has affected the levels of honesty and openness that she has with her husband. She goes home after her interview feeling: “tired, confused and scared” (segment 8) but fears that sharing her experience with her partner P.... would put him off the Catholic faith he is about to convert to. She chooses to say nothing: “I said nothing to P...” (Segment 8).**

**Participant B feels that sharing any unpleasant aspect of the Annulment Process with her partner would be detrimental:**

**“I thought well if he sees this interview thing as being part of the Catholic Church it might put him off.”**

**(Participant B, Segment 8)**

**Applicants to the Annulment Process are often unaware of the implications that the Process, by its very nature, brings with it. To many Catholics it is an incomprehensible process and many non - Catholic acquaintances of the applicant will be totally confused. Participant B knows that this is the case with her and says:**

**“You see you can’t really share any of this with your partner or your friends. My friends are not Catholic so they really wouldn’t understand what its all about. I tried to tell one of them and she just laughed. She said ‘why are you going? You and P... are married anyway I went to your wedding at the registry office’. I tried to explain that I was hoping to marry in the Catholic Church and it was necessary to go through these interviews. She just laughed and said that if it was her she would just tell them to ‘piss off.’”**



**(Participant B, Segment 18)**

The son of Participant B was similarly confused when she tried to explain it to him and he made, what most would deem a logical conclusion, that an Annulment would make him and his sisters illegitimate (Segment 18). Participant B did not feel intellectually equipped to explain the Process to him and so found it difficult to refute his conclusion.

Participant C has also been unable to avoid bringing family members into her Annulment Application. She has been unable to find any witnesses to her previous two marriages and so she has asked her two brothers (Segment 22). It is the same for Participant D and she remembers that someone came to interview her mother, auntie and a couple of friends. It might be considered a stumbling block to potential applicants - the fact that Annulment Application makes such a profound entrance into the applicant's family life. It has potential to create divisions in families, particularly if family members are still friendly and in contact with the applicant's ex - partner.

Participant E encountered difficulties in enlisting people who might be prepared to act as witnesses in her defence. Both of E's parents were deceased and she says of other potential witnesses:

**“My auntie was a really strict Catholic and didn't believe in divorce full - stop and she said no way was she getting involved she said the whole thing was against God. No one wanted to get involved not even so - called friends, they all refused.”**

**(Participant E, Segment 12)**

For Participant E the Annulment Process changed the way she would view her 'so - called friends'. She feels that even when an Annulment is granted your life is still affected in that: “some people still don't believe in them” (Segment 16).

### Code 11 - Feelings of Isolation (Appendix L)

This Code attempts to gauge the level of support that is available to applicants who are applying for a Catholic Marriage Annulment. We have already read that Participant A refers to the process as: “some dirty little act you go through” (Participant A, Segment 66). It can be quite upsetting to witness the feelings of isolation that are expressed by four of the five interview participants.

Participant A refers to feeling isolated in eight coded segments. Participant A can be seen to experience isolation in two ways: 1) She doesn't feel that there is anyone she can talk to about her experience of the Annulment Process and 2) She feels that the lack of support and communication from the Tribunal further compounds her isolation and feelings of helplessness. Participant A's sister L was traumatised by her experience of being interviewed as a witness to her sisters marriage and says:

“I couldn't talk to anybody. I kept thinking should I go and talk to G.... (her Parish Priest), shall I go and talk to...who can I talk to? I didn't feel I could talk to anyone not even my husband who had seen me upset. I just thought I can't tell you anything about it. It was just so difficult.”

(Participant A, Segment 57)

After her own interview has taken place and her witnesses have all been interviewed Participant A still feels isolated and cut off from the Annulment Process she says: “Everything goes quiet now. I mean I have heard nothing” (Segment 64). As we can see Participant A tried several times to contact the Marriage Tribunal for an update on her case but she received no reply:

“I have rung and had no reply. I have emailed and nothing and when I did ask if they had received my emails to see how my case was progressing she said ‘Oh well we seem to have something wrong with our emails, the system may be up and running next week’.”

(Participant A, Segment 75)



Participant B had the same type of isolation as that experienced by Participant A's sister L. Participant B felt that she could not share her experience of the Annulment Process with anyone, not even her husband. Participant B found the Annulment Interviews particularly distressing not only the content of the questions asked but also issues with the personality of the interviewer:

“I didn't share any of it with P....and when he asked me why I had been crying I just told him that it was tears of tiredness that I had had a long day or something like that. I just wanted to forget the whole experience.”  
(Participant B, Segment 14)

Unfortunately for Participant B she didn't even feel that her friends could understand what she was experiencing and be in a position to offer her support:

“You see you can't really share any of this with your partner or your friends. My friends are not Catholic so they really wouldn't understand what it is all about. I tried to tell one of them and she just laughed. She said 'why are you going?'”  
(Participant B, Segment 18)

The researcher feels that an adequate and compassionate system of support should be in place for every applicant that chooses the Marriage Annulment Process. Every applicant who makes approach to the Marriage Tribunal with a view to making an application to have their marriage investigated have already experienced emotions such as: hurt, abandonment, loneliness, confusion, exclusion and quite possibly some form of depression (Masters Dissertation, Naylor, 2002). Participant D felt isolated even before she applied for an Annulment. When describing her former marriage she says: “In the first year of marriage he absolutely crushed me. I have never felt so alone as I did at that point in my life” (Participant D, Segment 10). What applicants need from the Annulment Process is competent and adequate support from the very outset rather than being immediately faced with a form of inquisition into the most intimate details of their life.



Participant E attributes a number of factors as being accountable for her feelings of isolation. She feels that she experienced rejection by her Parish Priest and fellow parishioners. She feels rejection from the Catholic Church as an institution and notes that the liturgy of the Catholic Church is prone to vindicate married couples and isolate divorced people:

“In Church no divorced people ever get prayed for that’s my experience. We pray for the Church, bishops, priests, politicians and so on but never for divorced people. My God we are the one’s that need help!”

(Participant E, Segment 16)

We will see in the discussion section of this study that this view of Participant E might well be a valid one for people attending a Catholic church. The researcher (from pastoral practice: 1989 - 2009) would entirely validate the next coded statement that Participant E makes with regard to feelings of isolation:

“When I was really depressed my doctor arranged counselling for me but other than this I had no support. I didn’t go to any Church functions, fetes, prayer groups, coffee mornings and so on because I felt a failure. I feel there is no respect for a person who has been divorced - bereaved yes, divorced no, in the Church it is a real stigma. No one talks about divorce and nothing is provided for divorced Catholics”.

(Participant E, Segment 22)

### **Code 12 - Intrusive? (Appendix L)**

It is probable that at this point of the study the reader will already have made their own conclusion that the Catholic Annulment Process is intrusive by its very nature, particularly the preliminary interviews. This Code examines segments of text that demonstrate the overtly intrusive nature of the Annulment Process as well as other elements that are relative to the Process such as clergy, parishioners and family. At the very early stages of the Annulment Process Participant A experienced a very substantial intrusion into her private life and personal space. An alarming mistake was

made by her Marriage Tribunal when the interviewer they assigned to Participant A was someone that worshipped in the same parish as she did:

“Also its very insensitive when the person who first conducted my interview was someone I saw every single week at Sunday mass, who then knew some of the most intimate details about my life and you know (pause) playing the organ and looked across at me - that’s the most insensitive thing I can imagine. Do they not consider if the interviewer is suitable for the client or look at geographical issues? I would wish for anonymity.”  
(Participant A, Segment 85)

Participant A also thinks that the interviewers should receive adequate training before they conduct Tribunal Interviews owing to the sensitivity of the material they are dealing with:

“I feel the questions they are asking should be in the hands of a very skilled communicator who could perhaps ask intrusive style questions but in a more sensitive way and style.”  
(Participant A, Segment 107)

Participant B felt the Annulment interviews to be extremely intrusive and in her opinion they asked for information about things that she would not even share with her partner or “even a priest” (Segment 10). The researcher was surprised by how much hurt Participant B felt when asked about her mother and father’s marriage. This question was considered hurtful and intrusive to Participant B:

“I mean she even asked me questions about my brothers and sisters and what their marriages were like. I couldn’t believe it but the worst thing was when they asked about my Mum and Dad’s marriage (still looking at the floor but very angry) I mean what was the point of that they are both dead.”  
(Participant B, Segment 14)

Participant D had travelled to her Annulment Interview on a busy Friday evening and had struggled through rush hour traffic to get to her appointment on time. On reading her interview one forms the impression that not only did she find the interview intrusive but also a rather bizarre situation:



**“It wasn’t a good experience I had driven through rush hour traffic then told to sit down and answer some of the most personal questions ever. That was what really sticks in my mind they were just so personal and upsetting.”  
(Participant D, Segment 22)**

For Participant E evidence of the intrusive nature of the Catholic Annulment Process came early on in the form of her own Parish Priest. When her husband had left her for some other lady she recalls:

**“The Parish Priest encouraged me to get back together with my husband and he was very persistent - in fact every time I saw him this was the only subject he talked about. As the months went on and our divorce came through, my Parish Priest still kept on encouraging me to get back together with him even though I had told him that my ex - husband was about to marry someone else.”  
(Participant E, Segment 8)**

Participant E feels that this same priest allowed others to intrude into her life when he publicly humiliated her in front of fellow parishioners. Participant E had asked him to help her apply for an Annulment and when she asked him how it was progressing, as she was leaving church, she says:

**“Well you won’t believe the reaction I still quake now when I think about it. There were other parishioners milling around and he turned on me and in a loud voice in front of these others he said ‘what’s your hurry are you that desperate to marry again!’ I was so embarrassed that I just walked off.”  
(Participant E, Segment 10)**



**Figure 1**

**CODED SEGEMENTS OF PARTICIPANT  
INTERVIEWS.**

<b>Text</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Begin</b>	<b>End</b>	<b>Segment</b>
Participant D Interview	Actions taken by Participant	34	34	I don't know what you think about this but I now believe after all this that what goes on in this area is between me and God.
Participant D Interview	Actions taken by Participant	34	34	I was helped by talking to my head teacher and he said that he knew of a divorced woman with two children - she was Catholic - and she had met a divorced man with one child. They married outside Church and they now have a child of their own and they are very happy. The head said that where love is God is and I now really believe this. I wouldn't go to the Church (Catholic) for any help or advice on a marriage issue I would now just get on with it and trust in God.
Participant D Interview	Actions taken by Participant	36	36	when I saw your note in the newsletter I thought I would come and share my story if it only helps your study or other people.
Participant A Interview	Actions taken by Participant	51	51	didn't want you to know it had even occurred.
Participant A Interview	Actions taken by Participant	75	75	I have emailed and nothing a
Participant A Interview	Actions taken by Participant	77	77	I have sent two emails, written down what I wanted to ask and I've had no reply, not even an acknowledgement that they will be dealt with!
Participant A Interview	Actions taken by Participant	103	103	we fully intend to write to the Bishop
Participant A Interview	Actions taken by Participant	113	113	Well I am going to keep trying, ringing and writing to get updates
Participant C Interview	Actions taken by Participant	8	8	When you told me about the Annulment and explained it to us I was hooked. I know you told us both to go away and think about whether we wanted to apply or not I knew there and then I did. So as soon as I walked in the door at home I rang you and asked you to set it up for me.
Participant A Interview	Apprehension	5	5	I was afraid that it might affect my sister's case in a negative way.
Participant A Interview	Apprehension	8	8	they don't speak out because it might upset the apple cart.
Participant A Interview	Apprehension	79	79	At the moment rightly or wrongly I have this fear of jeopardizing my sister's chances of obtaining an annulment.
Participant A Interview	Apprehension	89	89	But you can't in the position you are in, you can't!
Participant A Interview	Apprehension	91	91	Well there's a fear that any action might jeopardize the case.
Participant B Interview	Apprehension	8	8	I was really nervous when I turned up in fact I had been worrying about it for days and I had a really upset tummy which I think was nerves.

Participant B Interview	Apprehension	25	25	I am still confused as to what happens now -
Participant A Interview	Effect of process/life situation on others	22	22	And I got really upset at one stage. I mean some of the questions are really quite personal. You know they were talking about Dad at one stage and you know it really brings it all back and I felt quite upset about the whole situation , for A... anyway.
Participant A Interview	Effect of process/life situation on others	31	31	And T...our brother said the same thing about his interview that it was annoying.
Participant A Interview	Effect of process/life situation on others	51	51	I didn't tell you because I didn't want to upset you on holiday. I didn't want you to know it had even occurred.
Participant A Interview	Effect of process/life situation on others	53	53	I can't tell you what they said because.....
Participant A Interview	Effect of process/life situation on others	26	26	Yes, its just how its affected both of us really. I worked out quite a lot about it anyway.
Participant A Interview	Effect of process/life situation on others	36	36	gathered they were questions that A... had answered and they were asking me questions based on some of A... answers and same sort of questions that A had had.
Participant A Interview	Effect of process/life situation on others	50	50	That happened during the holiday didn't it while I was away and you didn't even tell me - did you?
Participant A Interview	Effect of process/life situation on others	64	64	I mean I have opened my heart, I've upset my sister, I've upset my brother but nothing absolutely nothing, (client A very tearful at this point) there's no time limit to it, there's no hope!
Participant A Interview	Effect of process/life situation on others	66	66	My brother was brought up catholic but he lapsed and after being interviewed as a witness for my annulment application he said "its just confirmed all my thoughts, it has made me feel that I made the right decision to give up on it."
Participant A Interview	Effect of process/life situation on others	79	79	Well when my sister hopefully gets her annulment then I am going to write to the Bishop and complain about the treatment. I had made this decision some time ago. At the moment rightly or wrongly I have this fear of jeopardizing my sister's chances of obtaining an annulment.
Participant A Interview	Effect of process/life situation on others	100	100	Well Tom my brother asked how long will this take and the interviewer raised her eyes and said: "Well at least two years!" So she actually gave a time scale.
Participant A Interview	Effect of process/life situation on others	110	110	Well someone I know used to be an interviewer and he has stopped doing it for the Tribunal because he said in his opinion it was such an unhelpful exercise. He hated being the interviewer having to ask these questions in that particular format.
Participant B Interview	Effect of process/life situation on others	8	8	I said nothing to P...(her current partner)
Participant B Interview	Effect of process/life situation on others	14	14	I tried hard to be brave in front of P... because he wants to become a Catholic and I thought well if he sees this interview thing as being part of the Catholic Church it might put him off.
Participant B Interview	Effect of process/life situation on others	18	18	You see you can't really share any of this with your partner or your friends. My friends are not Catholic so they really wouldn't understand what its all about. I tried to tell one of them and she just laughed. She said 'why are you going?



Participant B Interview	Effect of process/life situation on others	18	18	I tried with my eldest son and he got really confused he started going off that if I got an Annulment it would make him and his sisters illegitimate. I couldn't even answer this because I don't understand it all.
Participant E Interview	Effect of process/life situation on others	10	10	I asked him if he would help me to apply for an Annulment. He was really negative
Participant E Interview	Effect of process/life situation on others	10	10	It was strange though because he was so dismissive all the time. When I asked him how things were going he never gave me a straight answer. After a long time - I can't remember exactly how long - I asked him, as I was leaving Church, was any progress being made.
Participant E Interview	Effect of process/life situation on others	12	12	my auntie was a really strict catholic and didn't believe in divorce full - stop and she said no way was she getting involved she said the whole thing was against God
Participant E Interview	Effect of process/life situation on others	12	12	No one wanted to get involved not even so - called friends they all refused.
Participant E Interview	Effect of process/life situation on others	12	12	He had never sent anything off he had been stalling all the time.
Participant E Interview	Effect of process/life situation on others	14	14	I got this impression that if people spoke to me they might 'catch divorce' like it was some disease or something and these were Church going people. Can you believe it - I was even told by someone that I would burn in hell!
Participant E Interview	Effect of process/life situation on others	16	16	Even when you get an Annulment some people still don't believe in them.
Participant E Interview	Effect of process/life situation on others	18	18	The only prayer I can remember is this one, I think I've got it right, 'Let us pray for people considering Annulments that they may seek reconciliation with their partner' - you just can't believe the lengths the Church will go to
Participant E Interview	Effect of process/life situation on others	24	24	I feel (client is speaking very fast again) publicity about Annulments is seen as spreading a disease!
Participant D Interview	Effect of process/life situation on others	18	18	I did and it was disastrous. When I mentioned annulment, I can see him now, he just froze. He said that he knew nothing about them and it would be better if I did the same.
Participant D Interview	Effect of process/life situation on others	18	18	They said they knew a girl in the parish who had been granted an annulment and he had still refused to marry her.
Participant D Interview	Effect of process/life situation on others	24	24	I remember that someone came to interview my mother, auntie and a couple of friends and that was it.
Participant C Interview	Effect of process/life situation on others	12	12	I know I would be really hurt if someone said anything about my past
Participant C Interview	Effect of process/life situation on others	22	22	I haven't got any witnesses apart from my two brothers.
Participant A Interview	Feelings of isolation	49	49	And the most awful thing about it was that I couldn't talk to anyone about it.
Participant A Interview	Feelings of isolation	55	55	I couldn't talk to anybody

Participant A Interview	Feelings of Isolation	57	57	No, no. I couldn't talk to anybody I kept thinking should I go and talk to G... (note: her parish priest), shall I go and talk to... who can I talk to? I didn't feel I could talk to anyone not even my husband who had seen me upset. I just thought I can't tell you anything about it. It was just so difficult.
Participant A Interview	Feelings of Isolation	64	64	Everything goes quiet now. I mean I have heard nothing!
Participant A Interview	Feelings of Isolation	73	73	I feel that for the people interviewed be it myself or my witnesses there was no support at all in this diocese. If there is I certainly wasn't directed anywhere.
Participant A Interview	Feelings of Isolation	75	75	I have rung and had no reply. I have emailed and nothing and when I did ask if they had received my emails to see how my case was progressing she said: "Oh well we seem to have something wrong with our emails, the system may be up and running next week.
Participant A Interview	Feelings of Isolation	93	93	Do they sit on a regular basis as a Tribunal? (Sigh) There are so many questions unanswered that I feel I need to ask and get answers for.
Participant A Interview	Feelings of Isolation	105	105	I feel at the moment with my case we are talking about months and months, maybe even years!
Participant B Interview	Feelings of Isolation	14	14	I didn't share any of it with P... and when he asked me why I had been crying I just told him that it was tears of tiredness that I had had a long day or something like that. I just wanted to forget the whole experience.
Participant B Interview	Feelings of Isolation	18	18	You see you can't really share any of this with your partner or your friends. My friends are not Catholic so they really wouldn't understand what its all about. I tried to tell one of them and she just laughed. She said "why are you going?
Participant B Interview	Feelings of Isolation	18	18	So you see you can't begin to tell anyone
Participant E Interview	Feelings of Isolation	14	14	I felt totally abandoned by my Church
Participant E Interview	Feelings of Isolation	14	14	ven though my husband divorced me and I had not met any one else I didn't go to Holy Communion for years
Participant E Interview	Feelings of Isolation	16	16	In Church no divorced people ever get prayed for that's my experience. We pray for the Church, Bishop's, Priest's, Politicians and so on but never for divorced people. My God we are the one's that need help!
Participant E Interview	Feelings of Isolation	22	22	When I was really depressed my doctor arranged counselling for me but other than this I had no support. I didn't go to any Church functions, fetes, prayer groups, coffee mornings and so on because I felt a failure. I feel there is no respect for a person who has been divorced - bereaved yes divorced - no, in the Church it is a real stigma. No one talks about divorce and nothing is provided for divorced Catholics.
Participant D Interview	Feelings of Isolation	10	10	I have never felt so alone as I did at that point in my life.
Participant C Interview	Guilt	10	10	In fact it may have all been my fault
Participant C Interview	Guilt	12	12	I have needed to forgive myself.



Participant C Interview	Guilt	12	12	I have felt like a criminal and a prisoner. I
Participant C Interview	Guilt	12	12	I still sit right at the back like you said that prisoner did and I still don't take Holy Communion
Participant C Interview	Guilt	12	12	So I haven't fully forgiven myself yet. I felt I let my parents down my friends down - everything really.
Participant C Interview	Guilt	14	14	that is good old Catholic guilt for you, you never feel really good about yourself.
Participant C Interview	Guilt	14	14	I have lived over 20 years feeling really guilty and really dirty so it is going to be hard to break that.
Participant A Interview	Guilt	66	66	it's felt to be like some dirty little act you go through.
Participant A Interview	Intrusive?	25	25	But I had been through the same experience of Dad's death as L... had at the same age and we'd experienced it together and she had to go through material that was as personal and hurtful (client A very tearful at this point) as that because it was a very hurtful time in our lives.
Participant A Interview	Intrusive?	24	24	Yes, definitely I found it very intrusive.
Participant A Interview	Intrusive?	85	85	Also its very insensitive when the person who first conducted my interview was someone I saw every single week at Sunday Mass, who then knew some of the most intimate details about my life and you know (pause) playing the organ and looked across at me - that's the most insensitive thing I can imagine. Do they not consider if the interviewer is suitable for the client or look at geographical issues? I would wish for anonymity.
Participant A Interview	Intrusive?	87	87	Well it shocked me really when this interviewer came to the door because I immediately thought - I know you, I see you every Sunday at Mass!
Participant A Interview	Intrusive?	107	107	I feel the questions they are asking should be in the hands of a very skilled communicator who could perhaps ask intrusive style questions but in a more sensitive way and style.
Participant A Interview	Intrusive?	107	107	o that it is less intrusive
Participant A Interview	Intrusive?	112	112	ou can get information in far more sensitive ways in my experience.
Participant A Interview	Intrusive?	113	113	I feel at present that someone else has taken control of my life. I want to know what they are doing with this information I have given.
Participant B Interview	Intrusive?	10	10	things I wouldn't choose to share with my current partner or even with a priest.
Participant B Interview	Intrusive?	14	14	Well anyway she asked me things like I've said that I would never tell you or P....(her partner).



Participant B Interview	Intrusive?	14	14	I mean she even asked me questions about my brothers and sisters and what their marriages were like. I couldn't believe it but the worst thing was when she asked me about my mum and dad's marriage (still looking at floor but very angry) I mean what was the point of that they are both dead!
Participant E Interview	Intrusive?	8	8	The parish priest encouraged me to get back together with my husband and he was very persistent (the parish priest) - in fact every time I saw him this was the only subject he talked about. As the months went on and our divorce came through my parish priest still kept on encouraging me to get back together with him even though I had told him that my ex - husband was about to marry someone else!
Participant E Interview	Intrusive?	10	10	It was like it had become an obsession with him.
Participant E Interview	Intrusive?	10	10	There were other parishioners milling around and he turned on me and in a loud voice in front of these others he said 'what's your hurry are you that desperate to marry again!' I
Participant D Interview	Intrusive?	22	22	then told to sit down and answer some of the most personal questions ever.
Participant A Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	5	5	I was afraid
Participant E Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	8	8	I was very, very depressed
Participant A Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	14	14	which was really off putting.
Participant A Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	22	22	And I got really upset at one stage. I mean some of the questions are really quite personal. You know they were talking about Dad at one stage and you know it really brings it all back and I felt quite upset about the whole situation , for A...
Participant A Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	25	25	she had to go through material that was as personal and hurtful (client A very tearful at this point) as that because it was a very hurtful time in our lives.
Participant A Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	31	31	And T...our brother said the same thing about his interview that it was annoying.
Participant A Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	34	34	I was feeling upset by it anyway
Participant A Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	49	49	when she'd gone out I turned round and just burst into tears
Participant A Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	49	49	I thought phew that was awful!
Participant A Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	49	49	So it really upset me, it upset me for two weeks really
Participant A Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	24	24	Yes, definitely I found it very intrusive.

Participant A Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	28	28	so I was crying a bit
Participant A Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	45	45	So, having been upset and having answered all these questions which took sort of an hour or so....
Participant A Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	53	53	I can't tell you what they said because...
Participant A Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	55	55	I was really upset
Participant A Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	64	64	his whole thing is quite traumatic.
Participant A Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	64	64	I mean I have opened my heart, I've upset my sister, I've upset my brother but nothing absolutely nothing, (client A very tearful at this point) there's no time limit to it, there's no hope!
Participant A Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	66	66	That's why I have (very tearful) gone through this and it hasn't made me feel any better.
Participant A Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	66	66	Now I think that's such a shame, really it is so sad.
Participant A Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	83	83	People in positions of authority that make decisions about other people's lives - it's not fair is it?
Participant A Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	107	107	The lack of information is appalling! I am so annoyed that Parish Priests know so very little about the process when its underway.
Participant A Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	113	113	I am just not happy.
Participant B Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	8	8	I was very confused and I quickly became scared.
Participant B Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	10	10	so many details from past years and very painful ones
Participant B Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	10	10	They were things that most people would put to the back of their minds
Participant B Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	14	14	I went home sobbing
Participant B Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	16	16	I was so angry and confused and hurt
Participant B Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	29	29	I just hope after all this upset



Participant E Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	10	10	Yes it was awful
Participant E Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	12	12	It was really upsetting
Participant E Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	14	14	Yes it was upsetting.
Participant E Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	14	14	When I was divorced and applying for the Annulment I felt totally worthless.
Participant E Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	14	14	God is my judge and he would not have wanted me to stay in a marriage that was killing me in body and soul.
Participant E Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	20	20	Well, the wicked man,
Participant E Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	28	28	We are a welcoming Church if you haven't had a divorce!
Participant D Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	26	26	I was very angry and confused.
Participant D Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	34	34	I was obviously very disappointed and I was angry and hurt
Participant D Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	38	38	It still makes me very angry
Participant D Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	38	38	I think that the Church has a lot to answer for if it has treated other people like it treated me.
Participant C Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	10	10	I have felt so undean since my first marriage failed. I
Participant B Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	23	23	she scared the life out of me.
Participant C Interview	Negative Emotion/Perception	18	18	When I became upset
Participant E Interview	Participants life situation	16	16	Yes I was my husband inflicted (client speaking very rapidly at this point) Immense mental cruelty on me. He was an incredibly selfish man. Do you know I would walk to work and he would drive past me - you would do that to a stranger wouldn't you?
Participant E Interview	Participants life situation	16	16	He had many hobbies that cost us thousands of pounds. If he wasn't doing his hobby he would be on the computer all night. He gave me absolutely no emotional support or care. He was a totally selfish man.
Participant E Interview	Participants life situation	18	18	One priest whose parish I no longer attend once took a line of Scripture for his homily it was that one that goes something like: 'Once the hand is laid in the furnace don't look back' or something along those lines. Do you know



Participant E Interview	Participants life situation	20	20	what followed? I am sorry but that's how I feel about him went on to preach about quitters and losers - the quitters and losers in the context of marriage. He said keep going whatever you have to put up with this implies to me that quitting your marriage even for abuse is quitting! I was stunned what about all the poor people fleeing from abusive relationships are they quitters?			
Participant E Interview	Participants life situation	22	22	My sister was violently abused by her husband he broke her arm, kept her a prisoner, fed the dog not her. When she broke away and went for an Annulment guess what they told her?			
Participant E Interview	Participants life situation	24	24	They told her they would have to get in touch with her ex - husband to get his side of the events. This nearly killed her she just could not bear the thought of this because he was so evil and violent she had fled from him.			
Participant E Interview	Participants life situation	26	26	I don't think she would. She has been hurt so badly worse than me in fact. I'll ask her but I am sure the answer will be no			
Participant E Interview	Participants life situation	26	26	My sister never went forward to apply for an Annulment because of the threat of contacting her previous husband. She has married again in a registry office and it breaks her heart not to be able to receive Holy Communion.			
Participant E Interview	Participants life situation	30	30	I will still keep plodding on please pray for me and my sister. She has had so much hurt in her life and I will let her know about your offer to speak to her.			
Participant D Interview	Participants life situation	10	10	My husband was an only child and he was aware, at least in his mind, that he wasn't wanted as a child. He struggled with lots of issues emotionally but the main thing that scared me was his temper.			
Participant D Interview	Participants life situation	10	10	He kept us on such a tight rein he would only give me money for house keeping every month and the amount would change every time so that I had to go and beg of him if I needed more. He was very jealous and would want to know where I had been, who I had spoken to. In the first year of marriage he absolutely crushed me			
Participant D Interview	Participants life situation	12	13	Well my mother was still alive then and she was aware of how things were so we went to my mothers. My husband didn't try to persuade us to return and neither did he offer any maintenance for the children. My mother lived in XXXX and this was quite a way from XXXX were I lived with my husband. I missed my home town and I always intended to return when funds allowed it. I got a job teaching so as to help mum and also to save some money. In 1980 I filed for divorce so as to get a share of the house and this went through okay it was almost as if we ceased to exist at this stage as far as my husband was concerned.			
Participant D Interview	Participants life situation	15	15	he wanted his own way all the time even above our children's welfare.			
Participant D Interview	Participants life situation	16	16	I met a divorced man in the group and someone told me I should apply for an annulment in case we ever wanted to get married. After a while the time felt right for me to apply because things were getting serious with this man. He wanted to leave England and live abroad in XXXX. I was a bit unsure about this but the boys were grown up now and they could either go with us or continue to live in England it was their choice and they got on quite well with this man. Anyway it just felt right to apply so I did.			
Participant D Interview	Participants life situation	20	20	When I moved back home I also finished with the man I had met at the ASDC group because he was desperate to move abroad and I just couldn't go as quickly as he wanted me to so I decided, and he did, that it was better to go our separate ways.			

Participant C Interview	8	8	Participants life situation	8	I kind of knew we couldn't marry in Church because of my track record
Participant A Interview	22	22	Participants life situation	22	You know they were talking about Dad at one stage
Participant A Interview	81	81	Participants life situation	81	As a nurse I have to go on courses every year and be assessed!
Participant A Interview	85	85	Participants life situation	85	the person who first conducted my interview was someone I saw every single week at Sunday Mass,
Participant B Interview	12	12	Participants life situation	12	I was 17 at the time of that marriage and pregnant. I was married within 7 months of telling my mother I was having a baby. That was what you did in those days wasn't it?
Participant B Interview	14	14	Participants life situation	14	I mean she even asked me questions about my brothers and sisters and what their marriages were like
Participant B Interview	19	19	Participants life situation	19	I want to make P.. happy and he wants to marry in Church and so do I - me more than him I think.
Participant B Interview	29	29	Participants life situation	29	It would mean so much to P..and me if we could marry in Church.
Participant A Interview	14	14	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	14	She took one look at that and said "Oh no! This won't do! I need a table!"
Participant A Interview	14	14	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	14	Oh look we'll sit here!" and she says "You sit there and you sit there!"
Participant A Interview	18	18	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	18	I would say quite an old person. And she was supposed to be showing the nun how to do it.
Participant A Interview	30	30	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	30	Oh, I didn't get that, could you repeat that?" (Client L sighs) or "Oh what did you say?" Just so she could type at her speed and I simply lost track of what I was saying and thinking.
Participant A Interview	40	40	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	40	I felt at times that she was leading me a bit. "Did you mean this?" "Did you mean that?"
Participant A Interview	49	49	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	49	she said "I hope I haven't upset you too much"
Participant A Interview	15	15	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	15	Mmm.....What age were they, roughly, the interviewer and....
Participant A Interview	28	28	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	28	he nun started putting her arm out towards me and I thought that's not the right thing to be doing to me
Participant A Interview	31	31	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	31	Asking him to stop while she typed it up.



Participant A Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	32	32	Why couldn't it have been recorded like this for example and typed up later?
Participant A Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	59	59	Well, two weeks down the line they came back for me to read through what she'd typed. This was supposed to be verbatim of what I had said but there were so many mistakes. I sat in the dining room and they went and sat out through the conservatory into the garden and they were talking about the report they would have to make on me. Whether they thought I had said the truth or not. I did say the truth so this was a bit bad really.
Participant A Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	61	61	hen she commented on the fact that I was taking my time. She said that: "You don't have to correct every single grammar mistake!"
Participant A Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	63	63	I have since thought what if she types that incorrectly again and I have signed it. So there is that little doubt whether she's....whether what I have signed is exactly what I want to put down, because I added a few things and altered a few things.
Participant A Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	64	64	.how can they be like this? How can they be so unprofessional? It really upsets me as to the amateur way they go about it under the guise of this professional (pause).....no its not even professional (pause).....its this legal umbrella but underneath it all there's just these amateur people. There's a seventy five year old lady there, I mean my first experience of it all was with this woman in her seventies! They have no background and here is this woman training somebody else to do it but in the wrong way. They have no counselling skills, there is no easing off at the end of the interview you know where you can have some time to get yourself sorted out, its just right off we go and we are not going to speak to you! Everything goes quiet now. I mean I have heard nothing! L...was
Participant A Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	66	66	No! Because it's felt to be like some dirty little act you go through.
Participant A Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	67	67	A poor reflection on the Church isn't it?
Participant A Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	69	69	But why are we continuing to allow people to interview.... (pause) ....to interview people who are vulnerable, and you know....(pause).. feeling sensitive about everything you are saying, why are we allowing people who haven't got sufficient training to interview? Is it money? Is it lack of people volunteering to do it?
Participant A Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	71	71	I mean people in my situation, I would willingly pay for someone to do it properly. I mean people who I care for to be treated in a proper way.
Participant A Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	75	75	I get the impression with our Tribunal that the people in control have been in control a long time and they do not want to relinquish control because they have always had it! They just have the power. I get the impression its very old fashioned in its methods and ways of communicating -
Participant A Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	77	77	Well they give us an email address in the Diocesan Year Book and nothing! I have sent two emails, written down what I wanted to ask and I've had no reply, not even an acknowledgement that they will be dealt with!
Participant A Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	80	80	I don't understand how people in a profession get away without being assessed and reassessed over the years? Why aren't they going on courses and updating their people skills? They should update their knowledge on how to treat people properly - how can this be allowed to carry on? It happens to teachers, nurses, doctors.....
Participant A Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	84	84	It's the same for people they choose to conduct the interviews some of them are nuns, spinsters, how are they chosen and assessed? Doing the interviews for them could be titillation, hearing about the nitty-gritty of someone's marriage about which they have no experience.



Participant A Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	88	88	Well you should have said: "I'm sorry I don't want you, I'll have someone else!"
Participant A Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	91	91	In your experience Bill what is the time scale for my case now having got all this evidence sitting on their desks since early September and its now late August?
Participant A Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	97	97	I find it appalling that it all seems hidden.
Participant A Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	99	99	have received absolutely nothing!
Participant A Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	100	100	Well Tom my brother asked how long will this take and the interviewer raised her eyes and said: "Well at least two years!" So she actually gave a time scale.
Participant A Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	101	101	Well that was pretty bad that she did that because she really had no idea in my opinion. I think she just made that up!
Participant A Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	103	103	Well believe me we fully intend to write to the Bishop about all of this because it is absolutely dire!
Participant A Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	105	105	Well what concerns me is that I've been told that Monsignor X will deal with all this when he returns from his holiday but is he then going to wait six weeks before he writes back to me and anything gets done!
Participant A Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	107	107	Questions and answers are written down verbatim and in long hand. My goodness, it took four and a half hours to take my statement because it was all taken in long hand.
Participant A Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	109	109	With my position in the Health Service we gather information by just communicating with people following a set of guidelines.
Participant A Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	110	110	Well someone I know used to be an interviewer and he has stopped doing it for the Tribunal because he said in his opinion it was such an unhelpful exercise. He hated being the interviewer having to ask these questions in that particular format.
Participant B Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	8	8	This lady really did not set me at ease in fact she had a really severe way about her from the very start.
Participant B Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	10	10	but the second interview was worse! It was absolutely horrendous!
Participant B Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	10	10	I remember thinking why is this necessary?
Participant B Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	12	12	I mean she asked me about witnesses to my first marriage at the very beginning - I mean for goodness sake we are talking almost 31 years ago
Participant B Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	14	14	I mean what was the point of that
Participant B Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	16	16	Do you know what - after this second interview I was ready to give the whole thing up

Participant B Interview	16	16	hat some stranger could pry so deeply into my life. I had never met this woman before!
Participant B Interview	21	21	The lady was a bit more sociable and she even told me that she had been through the Annulment thing a few years ago but I don't know if the damage was done.
Participant B Interview	23	23	She also revealed that she was a prosecutor whatever that is, if it is to do with court then I certainly would not have liked to have been on the opposing side as she scared the life out of me.
Participant B Interview	25	25	Its true I really would not have liked to face that woman in court.
Participant B Interview	25	25	I have shared my whole life story and intimate details with a complete stranger and in my view not a pleasant person.
Participant B Interview	27	27	So it is just a case of waiting now to see what happens.
Participant B Interview	31	31	I really did find it so difficult.
Participant E Interview	10	10	I remember him saying that it would take at least 9 years to apply for an Annulment.
Participant E Interview	12	12	I was interviewed by a nun. The nun was okay
Participant E Interview	14	14	There should be more help and support available to get out of a really horrible situation
Participant E Interview	26	26	Canon Lawyers were very aggressive towards her.
Participant E Interview	28	28	Yes we have 'Marriage Care' groups and support but if you have had a divorce there is very little help. There is nothing about help if the divorce has happened. I mean if you didn't care you wouldn't apply for an Annulment anyway so why are you treated badly with resistance and criticism? People who don't care seem to get treated better!
Participant D Interview	16	16	I hadn't heard much about annulments then, in fact I didn't really know they existed
Participant D Interview	18	18	I did and it was disastrous. When I mentioned annulment, I can see him now, he just froze. He said that he knew nothing about them and it would be better if I did the same.
Participant D Interview	22	22	They gave me an appointment for my first interview. I remember it so clearly it was on a Friday at 5:00pm. I had to finish teaching at school early and drive 20 minutes to the city centre. I made it for 5:00pm and I was out for 5:50pm. It wasn't a good experience I had driven through rush hour traffic then told to sit down and answer some of the most personal questions ever. That was what really sticks in my mind they were just so personal and upsetting. I would really have liked to have been given a copy of the questions earlier, it is all so secretive. I also expected to be asked to go back for another interview as 50 minutes seemed such a short time to tell someone about the state of your marriage but that was it.



Participant D Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	24	24	They said that there were no grounds for annulling the marriage because of the circumstances before the marriage.
Participant D Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	26	26	They had only interviewed me for 50 minutes.
Participant D Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	28	28	he letter said that I could appeal to the Metropolitan Tribunal of XXXX if I wanted to have the case re-examined so I wrote back and said that I did
Participant D Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	30	30	Well I thought it went very well and the nun was a very kind lady s
Participant D Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	32	32	After a couple of months a letter came back saying that whilst my ex - husband and I were incompatible there appeared to be no grounds on which the marriage could be annulled.
Participant D Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	34	34	I thought I have done what I can and if I ever want to marry again I will and just go to another Church were I am not known to receive Holy Communion.
Participant D Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	38	38	I would like to see people who work for the tribunal better trained to interview and that if it is a woman being interviewed for an annulment that she be interviewed by a woman. I
Participant D Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	38	38	I wouldn't encourage anyone to go for an annulment.
Participant D Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	38	38	I think that the Church has a lot to answer for if it has treated other people like it treated me.
Participant C Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	16	16	He was a lovely person. At first I would have liked a lady interviewer but as we got started he was really lovely. He took his time and he was very helpful with all the questions.
Participant C Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	18	18	Yes they do and some of them are quite difficult to get through but E...(Interviewers name) was really good. When I became upset he just said 'right take your time and we can have a break if you want'. He seemed to be really experienced.
Participant C Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	20	20	No it didn't in fact I think it is a necessary process to get all the facts. I must also say that E...(Interviewer) pre - warned me that it might be difficult but it wasn't as difficult as I imagined having said that it was difficult to go through.
Participant C Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	22	22	Well it was not as bad as I thought it would be.
Participant A Interview	Perception of Process and Interview(er)	93	93	Do they sit on a regular basis as a Tribunal? (Sigh) There are so many questions unanswered that I feel I need to ask and get answers for.
Participant B Interview	Physical sensations	8	8	really upset tummy
Participant B Interview	Physical sensations	8	8	I was tired
Participant B Interview	Physical sensations	8	8	my head was really fuzzy with it all.



Participant B Interview	Physical sensations	14	14	I was totally drained
Participant B Interview	Physical sensations	16	16	I didn't really sleep that well after the second Interview a
Participant B Interview	Physical sensations	25	25	I was so drained when the last interview was over
Participant E Interview	Physical sensations	10	10	I still quake now
Participant E Interview	Physical sensations	20	20	Do you know I still have 'flash backs' as to how awful it all was.
Participant D Interview	Physical sensations	10	10	I got so ill
Participant C Interview	Physical sensations	14	14	I am still a little shaky
Participant C Interview	Religious Influence - positive/negative	10	10	It means so much If I got an Annulment.
Participant C Interview	Religious Influence - positive/negative	10	10	Even applying for an Annulment has made me feel clean again.
Participant C Interview	Religious Influence - positive/negative	10	10	I felt If I came to Church everyone would look at me and judge me just as I was judging myself.
Participant C Interview	Religious Influence - positive/negative	12	12	I have needed to forgive myself.
Participant C Interview	Religious Influence - positive/negative	12	12	I still sit right at the back like you said that prisoner did and I still don't take Holy Communion
Participant C Interview	Religious Influence - positive/negative	24	24	I have a lot of hope that I will be able to marry in Church so if that happens I really will be so happy.
Participant A Interview	Religious Influence - positive/negative	64	64	..this is the church I have belonged to for so long (pause)....how can they be like this?
Participant A Interview	Religious Influence - positive/negative	67	67	A poor reflection on the Church Isn't it?
Participant A Interview	Religious Influence - positive/negative	73	73	there was no support at all in this diocese
Participant A Interview	Religious Influence - positive/negative	77	77	Well they give us an email address in the Diocesan Year Book and nothing! I have sent two emails, written down what I wanted to ask and I've had no reply, not even an acknowledgement that they will be dealt with!



Participant A Interview	Religious Influence - positive/negative	103	103	I saw a lot of discussions that went on prior to the Diocesan Assembly and this whole Marriage thing was a big issue and it wasn't covered sufficiently in the Assembly and I certainly haven't seen any mention of it in the Diocesan Plan and I thought well if he sees this interview thing as being part of the Catholic Church it might put him off
Participant B Interview	Religious Influence - positive/negative	14	14	
Participant D Interview	Religious Influence - positive/negative	18	18	When I mentioned annulment, I can see him now, he just froze. He said that he knew nothing about them and it would be better if I did the same.
Participant D Interview	Religious Influence - positive/negative	18	18	They said they knew a girl in the parish who had been granted an annulment and he had still refused to marry her
Participant A Interview	Surprise	34	34	Oh I was quite taken aback by it all
Participant A Interview	Surprise	59	59	Whether they thought I had said the truth or not. I did say the truth so this was a bit bad really.
Participant A Interview	Surprise	61	61	She got things completely the wrong way round like A.. was in Nottingham and I was in Leeds. (Researchers note: A. lived in Leeds, L in Nottingham)
Participant A Interview	Surprise	69	69	But why are we continuing to allow people to interview..... (pause) ....to interview people who are vulnerable, and you know.....(pause).. feeling sensitive about everything you are saying, why are we allowing people who haven't got sufficient training to interview? Is it money? Is it lack of people volunteering to do it?
Participant A Interview	Surprise	70	70	Why not employ people like Marriage Care to do it who don't have a basic counselling qualification but they do have counselling skills and they operate within marriage settings and things?
Participant A Interview	Surprise	80	80	I don't understand how people in a profession get away without being assessed and reassessed over the years? Why aren't they going on courses and updating their people skills? They should update their knowledge on how to treat people properly - how can this be allowed to carry on? It happens to teachers, nurses, doctors.....
Participant A Interview	Surprise	81	81	As a nurse I have to go on courses every year and be assessed!
Participant A Interview	Surprise	87	87	Well it shocked me really when this interviewer came to the door because I immediately thought - I know you, I see you every Sunday at Mass!
Participant A Interview	Surprise	95	95	Really! You don't even know details of how it all works!
Participant A Interview	Surprise	99	99	I have received absolutely nothing!
Participant A Interview	Surprise	101	101	Well that was pretty bad that she did that because she really had no idea in my opinion. I think she just made that up!
Participant A Interview	Surprise	103	103	I certainly haven't seen any mention of it in the Diocesan Plan.
Participant B Interview	Surprise	8	8	Well yes it did really.



Interview				
Participant B Interview	12	12	Surprise	I mean for goodness sake we are talking almost 31 years ago. I was 17 at the time of that marriage and pregnant.
Participant D Interview	24	24	Surprise	No they didn't which really surprised me
Participant A Interview	7	7	Unexpected	I was a bit taken aback with the way it was conducted.
Participant A Interview	9	9	Unexpected	When the tribunal interviewer telephoned to make an appointment to see me she introduced herself on the telephone but when she came to my front door she didn't introduce herself, she introduced the nun who came with her.
Participant A Interview	20	20	Unexpected	I mean they started asking me the questions and I almost forgot, I had to sign a declaration with my hand on the Bible to say that I wouldn't disclose any of the questions asked.
Participant A Interview	24	24	Unexpected	Yes, definitely I found it very intrusive.
Participant A Interview	28	28	Unexpected	But they asked lots of questions, lots of unexpected questions.
Participant A Interview	11	11	Unexpected	Participant A: Which you weren't expecting.
Participant A Interview	59	59	Unexpected	but there were so many mistakes.
Participant A Interview	76	76	Unexpected	It all seems so very, very secretive.
Participant B Interview	6	6	Unexpected	Well I didn't really know what to expect
Participant B Interview	6	6	Unexpected	almost as soon as I sat down the interviewer told me that she would need to see me for approximately nine hours to gather information and these sessions would take place in three interviews.
Participant E Interview	12	12	Unexpected	the nun asked me to go and see the priest to get my documents back and I was amazed he must have had 7 copies of everything I had given to him
Participant E Interview	16	16	Unexpected	You know what, you do the right thing and marry in Church, and yet if you marry in a registry office there's no problem you can always have your married put right or walk away from it. I know people living together who go to Church and they go up to receive Holy Communion and there is no trouble and no bad thoughts against them. Its all wrong.
Participant D Interview	22	22	Unexpected	then told to sit down and answer some of the most personal questions ever.



## **Chapter 4 - Purpose and Aims of the Study.**

### **4.1 Discussion**

The study has addressed the research question: “Female Perception of the Annulment of Marriage in the Catholic Church.” The study has used the following research methods to try to ascertain how female Catholics might perceive the Annulment of Marriage in the Catholic Church:

- Research Questionnaire to gauge how women perceive their position within the Catholic Church (Appendix A, B & C).
- Catholic Clergy are an integral part of the Annulment Process and the study has included a review of what might be the present day (2009) perception of Catholic Clergy both nationally and internationally.
- Research Questionnaire to gauge Catholic women’s perception of marriage within the Catholic Church (Appendix D, E & F)
- Research Questionnaire to the Catholic Marriage Tribunals of England and Wales to illicit information on how the Annulment Process functions (Appendix H & I)
- Research Questionnaire to a sample of Tribunal Auditors seeking their views on the Tribunal comments (Appendix J & K).
- Five semi - structured interviews undertaken with Catholic Females who had experience of the Catholic Annulment Process (Appendix L).

The first research questionnaire (Appendix A, B & C) asked a sample of 46 female Catholics from an inner city parish how they perceived their role within the Catholic Church. From literature that has already been viewed we are able to form an opinion that certain Catholic females have very real issues with their position and role within a

Church structure that is operated by an entirely male hierarchy (McEwan & Poole, 2003; Bouclin, 2006; Purves, 2009; *et al*). when the questionnaire asked if they felt women were treated in the same way as men in the Catholic tradition the majority of the participants responded NO (Appendix B). There were some robust comments such as: “Women are the clear underclass throughout. We are not mentioned, are not respected” (Appendix C). And “RC Church is male orientated - no married or women priests. Structure of the Church is dominated by men” (Appendix C).

The women questioned also felt that the hierarchy of the Church should: “take on more women within their structures to gain a balanced view of life” (Appendix C). Johnson (2002) is of the opinion that for many years the only roles afforded to women in the Catholic Church have been those of “the helper, the auxiliary, the handmaid” (Johnson, 2002; p: 54). It might be observed that certain participants, when answering the question, had no problem with this supposed role of subordination and Participant 32 in the 60 - 75 age range feels that a woman’s role in the Catholic Church is to be a “wonderful help” to the male clergy (Appendix C).

If one examines the responses to the questionnaire regarding a female’s place in the Catholic Church we become aware that those who would like change to be brought about are the majority but not overwhelmingly so. A sizeable number of respondents, particularly those in the higher age range, had no issue with how women are treated in the structure and make - up of the Catholic Church. This is not a surprise for the researcher as these women would have been brought up in a Pre - Vatican II Church (pre - 1965) were it is commonly acknowledged that a woman’s opinion, with matters of Church, counted little (Teague, 2001, Johnson, 2002, Cornwell, 2004; *et al*). When speaking of a Vatican Symposium Cornwell (2004) notes that: “Some 250 ‘experts’



were welcomed at the Vatican II review, but only two women observers out of forty were invited” (Cornwell, 2004; p: 186).

The questionnaire gave evidence that certain females wanted change within the Catholic Church with regard to the role that they were expected to play. We can see that there was a call for inclusive language in the liturgy, a desire for male priests to be allowed to marry and for a female priesthood to be at least considered. For commentators like Glover - Wetherington, (1996) and Bouclin (2006) we are now in an age in the Catholic Church where the desire among women for change in the structures of the Catholic Church is a feeling of the majority not the minority. The researcher considered that the comments given to this questionnaire endorsed this opinion and certain comments voiced it angrily (Appendix C).

It is the opinion of the researcher that women who attend Catholic Churches today (2009) might do so because they have a personal faith in God, not in the establishment. Their attendance has to be tempered with tolerance as the Catholic liturgy celebrated in the United Kingdom (2009) is still conducted totally in the masculine tense. Certain people might level the accusation that women who have issues with the perceived stance of the Church towards them are being ‘over sensitive’. The researcher is of the opinion that these women are being extremely charitable and tolerant in supporting an institution that allows them so small a role.

Since writing Chapter 1.2 “clergy as an essential part of the Catholic Church” events have taken place in Ireland (2009) that have had a profound effect on the way in which the Catholic Church is perceived there and the repercussions have been felt in the Catholic Church worldwide. This year, 2009, the full extent of the priestly abuse of children in Ireland has been made very public culminating in the ‘Murphy Report’ (2009). We see in Chapter 1.2 the Pope’s praise of married couples: “blessed by a



numerous throng of children” (2006) and then face the contradiction that the very Church that encourages and supports family life is also a Church that, in the case of Ireland at least, is a Church that failed to give due care and protection to the families and children it serves. The priestly abuse in Ireland has radically tarnished the reputation of Catholic priesthood and that of the Catholic Church as an institution.

The Murphy Report (November 2009) said that:

“The Church (Catholic) had obsessively hidden allegations of child abuse in the Dublin Archdiocese from 1975 to 2004, placing the protection of its image above the welfare of the most vulnerable.”

(Sharrock, The Times, December 2009, p: 41)

For many it is this image of Church as removed from the sins of society and sitting in judgement on the morals of others that has caused most outrage particularly bearing in mind its opinion and stance on issues of marriage and sexuality. This situation has also provided non - Catholic commentators to level the age - old accusation that Christian Churches appear to be constantly taken up by sexual matters. The columnist, Richard Morrison (2009), among others observes:

“I can’t help wondering, as a humble churchgoer, why my spiritual mentors do get their garters in such a twist about sex. Whether it’s the Catholics insisting on priestly celibacy (in spite of the mountain of evidence demonstrating what ghastly perversions can grow out of such unnatural repression); or the hardline Anglican evangelicals determined to drive out homosexuals, rather as ancient communities drove out lepers”.

(Morrison, The Times, December 2009, p: 5)

If the Catholic Church is to demand high moral standards from those who marry in it then these people will surely expect the institutional Church to show the same rigorous standards that it imposes on others. The Irish abuse scandal (2009) has had a profound and irreversible impact as to how people will now view the Catholic Church and its moral proclamations. This scandal has impacted on so many decent hard

working and genuine priests to the extent that many are now publicly afraid to admit to being a Catholic priest. Fr Timothy Radcliffe OP a prominent public speaker admits:

**“Whenever I give lectures in England these days I come away exhausted with the anger against the Church.”  
(Radcliffe, The Tablet, December 2009)**

The researcher’s proof - reader, a female divorced Catholic, made the following point: **“How dare the Church or its priests turn away divorced and remarried Catholics from Holy Communion when their life, looking at the Irish abuse scandal, is far, far worse.”** (January 2010). This is inevitably the way that Catholics will react to this huge breach of trust and the hypocrisy that has surrounded it. What right do the exclusively male clergy have to examine the “nuts and bolts,” as one interview participant puts it, (Appendix L) of a female’s failed marriage so as to judge whether or not it is worthy of Annulment when the Catholic Church is seen to be guilty of such a huge breach of trust involving minors. Fr Timothy Radcliffe OP voices his concern:

**If we think about our beloved Church in recent centuries, we do seem to have been more like Pharisees, laying heavy burdens on the shoulders of the people. Often this has been associated with sexual behaviour. We have told families with large numbers of children that no contraception is permitted, and young people who cannot afford to get married that their sexual behaviour must be strictly controlled, and gay people that nothing is permitted - and that they should be ashamed of their sexuality. Regardless of the rights or wrongs of church teaching, this has been experienced by our people as a heavy burden.  
And then they discover that some priests who have been weighing them down have been sinning sexually in a far more greivous manner - like the Pharisees, not practising what we preached. You can imagine the anger of the woman who has had child after child and can cope no more, or a young gay person, when they hear what even a few priests have been up to.”  
(Radcliffe OP, The Tablet, December 2009)**



We have already seen from Cornwell (2004) that it is not only in England and Ireland that the Catholic Church inspires little respect at present (2010) he has already drawn our attention to the USA, France, Italy, Spain and other areas of the Catholic world (Cornwell, 2004 p: 218). A survey conducted by the 'Fundacion BBVA, Departamento de Comunicacion' in Spain (2006) on 2,000 participants from various social sectors found that the majority of Spanish society considered themselves Catholic. When asked in the survey: "En general, en que medida te inspira hoy confianza cada uno de los siguientes?" (In general, what is your level of confidence in each of the following?). Among the 12 choices given were Universities, United Nations, European Commission and other governing institutions. The Catholic Church was on the list and was rated 11<sup>th</sup> place, the lowest 12<sup>th</sup> place, went to Multi-National Companies. The following question asked: "En general en que medida le inspiran hoy confianza cada uno de los siguientes grupos profesionales?" (In general, what is your level of confidence in each of the following professional groups?). These groups included Doctors, Scientists, Judges, Politicians and so on. The professional group defined as Bishops, Priests and Religious, was rated second lowest at 12<sup>th</sup> place with Politicians placed 13<sup>th</sup>. This brief look at a neighbouring Catholic Country further endorses the crisis of confidence that Catholic clergy are facing at present along with the Catholic Church as an institution.

The survey also revealed that whilst 74% of the Spaniards classified themselves as Catholic this was not necessarily influencing them to accept current Church teaching: "Un 80% considera que vivir en pareja sin casarse es aceptable y un 58% acepta el matrimonio entre personas del mismo sexo." (80% considered that living together as a couple without marrying is acceptable and 58% accepted marriage between persons of the same sex.). And on marriage it states: "Existe tambien un alto grado de



interiorización del divorcio, independientemente de las circunstancias y del coste familiar que pueda comportar el 69% lo considera aceptable.” (There also exists a greater tolerance of divorce independent of the circumstances and the familial cost that comes with it with 69% considering it acceptable.).

When we examine the questionnaire responses (Appendix F) that were returned from 46 Catholic females we see clearly the influence the priest and the parish have on the Marriage Question from certain comments that are given. When asked did they agree with the Catholic teaching that marriage is a “lifelong and indissoluble commitment” we see that 68% of the respondents agree (Appendix E). This answer may not be any different from the answer given by a non - Catholic as it could be said that almost everyone, regardless of creed, enters marriage thinking it to be a life long commitment. The tone of the comments change when the questions begin to ask about the treatment one might expect to receive if a Catholic Marriage ends in divorce and furthermore, if the person wishes to marry again.

Many saw the priests as the first point of contact post - divorce but participant 27 (Appendix F) states that getting help from the priest is not always easy as so much depends on his personality. She describes her own experience of taking the priestly route as “awful”. From the majority of comments given on the Marriage Questionnaire we might conclude that Catholic females see the only source of support and contact post - divorce as being their local parish priest.

A limited number of respondents were accepting that this would be the case but certain ones were not so, with participant 5 (Appendix F) stating that she would not approach the Catholic Church for support as it is “biased towards men” and also “run by men”. Other respondents would not approach the Church for help because they could not see how celibate men could “empathise with a marriage that is suffering

difficulties” (Participant 9, Appendix F). Priests, in general, were not seen as being appropriate people to give marriage counsel as they have no personal experience of marriage. (Appendix F).

As a result of this way of thinking we might ask the questions: “How many people, in the case of this study females, are missing out on pastoral care post - divorce?” and also: “How many Catholics even bother with the Annulment Process?” Hegy (2000) makes note that since the end of the second Vatican Council in 1965 the Annulment Process attempted to modernise the way in which it dealt with applications, most notably, making use of the psychological sciences and the social sciences. Even with this perceived improvement he notes that the Process is still lacking in serving divorced Catholics:

“How efficient is the new law? Not very. Out of 262,683 Catholic divorces in the United States in 1992, only about 13 percent applied for an Annulment. The numbers are even lower elsewhere: only 4 percent of divorced French Catholics applied for an Annulment (Orsy 1997). Clearly something is not working. Having lost during the last century most of its secular power in national and international affairs, the church is holding on to its judicial power over the faithful in dissolving marriages. This need for power is obsolete, but the need for pastoral service to the divorced is real.”  
(Hegy, 2000, p: 21)

For a good number of Catholics mystery and half - truths still surround the Annulment Process and this is not surprising considering that very little information is given out publicly regarding the Annulment Process (Tribunal responses, Appendix I). We observe several comments in the Marriage Questionnaire to female Catholics (Appendix F) referring to the Annulment Process as being the preserve of the rich and famous. It is possible that this opinion was formed from cases such as that of the high profile and very public split between Congressman Joseph Kennedy and Sheila Rauch Kennedy. Joseph Kennedy succeeded in obtaining an Annulment of their marriage in



1993. A practising Episcopalian, Sheila Kennedy went on to challenge this decision arguing that there were no grounds on which to establish nullity of marriage as they had been married for twelve years, happily in her opinion, and the union had produced two boys. Sheila Kennedy was tenacious in her counter - attack going so far as to write a book entitled “Shattered Faith” (1997). About the intrusive nature of the Annulment Process she writes:

“Is it not better to leave the judgement of the intimate details of people’s lives to God and go about the work of bringing the message of Jesus to the millions who need him?”  
(Kennedy, 1997, p: 87)

Perhaps it was her tenacity that influenced the Roman Rota to reverse their decision and revoke Joseph Kennedy’s Annulment privately in 2005 and publicly in 2007. We also note from the Annulment Interviews conducted for this study (Appendix L) that certain Catholics inform their own conscience with regard to the Annulment Process. Participant D had a poor experience of the Annulment Process, being refused one. Participant D makes a decision that if she were to marry again she would do so in a civil ceremony and attend a church where she was unknown to receive the sacraments. Participant D has concluded, from her experience of the Process, that: “What goes off now is between me and God” (Appendix L).

The issue of marriage care and the subsequent treatment of divorced Catholics appears to be an almost obsessive issue for the Catholic Church. Is it a power issue? (Hegy, 2000; Bouclin, 2006). Is it through sexual immaturity? (Wills, 2000; Cornwell, 2004). Why does Catholic Marriage appear to have a higher, almost obsessive profile, than any of the other six sacraments? In the researcher’s Diocese the priests: “By order of the Bishop” (Nottingham Diocesan Ordo, 2009 / 10; p: 9) are asked to read out to their congregations a statement on marriage on the weekends of the first Sundays in February and October. The statement begins:



**“Marriage is a lifelong vocation of a man and a woman to a community of life and love open to children, and between the baptised - it is a Sacrament.”  
(Nottingham Diocesan Ordo, 2009 / 10 p: 9)**

The statement goes on to urge couples to plan their wedding with the priest at least 6 months beforehand. The couple should attend relevant courses, a National Family Planning Course, being one of them. If one of the party is not Catholic she/he is advised to support the Catholic and to have any child born of the union Baptised Catholic. The statement ends:

**“We wish to thank all those married people who show such constancy and fidelity to their vocation of marriage. May their example inspire those planning to marry in the Church.”  
(Nottingham Diocesan Ordo, 2009 / 10 p: 10)**

The researcher knows of a number of priests who simply cannot bring themselves to read out such a statement because, as Wills (2000) best describes it, “their personal integrity rebels against it.” The researcher showed the statement to a divorced female Catholic, who has obtained an Annulment, she has also put all three of her children through the Catholic Education System with all three going on to university, this she has done alone. This lady said of the statement: “that it makes you feel a failure and inadequate. You have, somehow, failed to live up to this high ideal of marriage and nothing else matters.” (January, 2010).

This statement, read publicly, sets apart so many people in the congregation as being less than perfect. What of those in the congregation who have had abusive marriages? those of the congregation whose sexuality is not considered the norm? Should these people not be at Church because their example does not inspire those planning to marry in the Church? (Nottingham Diocesan Ordo, 2009 / 10). In over twenty years as a curate and parish priest (1989 - 2010) the researcher has never once received a “By order of the Bishop” to read out a bi - yearly statement on the Sacrament of Penance,

or a statement on the Sacrament of Confirmation, nor indeed on any of the Sacraments other than Marriage. Why is marriage singled out for such exclusive treatment? The researcher would not deny that, like every other institution, the Catholic Church has the right to proclaim and defend its stance on marriage and family life. There are, however, ways in which the message might be delivered more charitably bearing in mind the life situations of some of the recipients of the message. When we come to discuss the five participant interviews we see that Participant E (Appendix L) speaks of one Catholic cleric describing those who stay married and those who have divorced in terms of “quitters and losers” (Appendix L) to speak thus in public is not only socially unacceptable it is the researcher’s opinion that it is also unchristian.

The same rule might also apply to the Marriage Tribunals who examine the grounds for the granting of Annulments. If the Catholic Church is to continue to operate Tribunals then the ways in which they function would benefit from a review - particularly in the areas of communication, transparency and better emotional care of the petitioners. This study has already made the reader aware that the Annulment Process has the potential to cause emotional distress. The female participants that were interviewed for this study were all asked to share, with a complete stranger, intimate details of their private lives. The range of questions they were asked spanned childhood memories to adult situations. They were asked questions about their parent’s marriages and questions of a sexual nature. From research experience in the area of Annulments it is generally acknowledged that the initial two or three interviews to collate personal information from the petitioner constantly cause distress, albeit in varying degrees (Coriden, 2000; Buckley, 2002; Naylor, 2002; *et al*). It could be deemed inadequate that only one of the sixteen Tribunals questioned



in England and Wales had a process whereby the petitioner could 'feedback' to the Tribunal how they had experienced the interview.

From the responses received from the sixteen Catholic Marriage Tribunals in England and Wales (Appendix I) the researcher has highlighted the following issues:

- That the Annulment Process lacks consistency.
- There is a poor level of communication between the Tribunals and the Petitioners.
- There is a lack of appropriate emotional care.
- The Annulment Process in England and Wales could be judged clandestine in approach - statistics of Annulments granted only made available to a very limited audience (Question 7, Appendix I).
- That the majority of the Tribunals are staffed solely by male clerics. This was deemed unacceptable by 91% of the females who responded to the research questionnaire on marriage (Appendix E).
- That the Auditors used by the Tribunals to interview Petitioners, Respondents and Witnesses receive little training to carry out their task of collating very personal and emotive material (Appendix I).

It has already been noted that three of the Diocesan Tribunals returned their questionnaire with a letter (asking for confidentiality). The letters acknowledged failures and inadequacies in the Tribunal system with particular regard to the lack of resources being available to Tribunals and acknowledgement of the poor emotional care afforded to Petitioners and Witnesses. Question 6 of the Tribunal questionnaire (Appendix I) asked about the Petitioner being able to contact the Tribunal for updates on their case. The response of Diocese A (Appendix I) is interesting: "Yes! No



problem here!” This might be seen as an admission or acknowledgement of flaws elsewhere.

When the researcher passed on the Tribunal Questionnaire findings to a sample of volunteer Auditors we are aware of a further divide or weakness in the Annulment Process. The Auditors were critical of the Tribunals they worked for. Their responses concurred on several occasions with the researcher’s observations. We see (Appendix K) that Auditor F was surprised by: “the lack of continuity in how the tribunals deal with the annulment process” and they were also disillusioned as to how many of the Diocese (11 out of 16) used male clerics to conduct the interviews. The Auditors (Appendix K) also expressed disappointment at the level of training that was afforded them. Five of the Auditors felt that the Annulment Process was not a transparent one with Auditor F stating: “No, neither to the petitioner nor to the wider community.”

The researcher is of the opinion that the Auditors were surprised and somewhat disappointed to read the comments made by the Diocesan Tribunals. On reading the Auditors responses (Appendix K) one might conclude that the Auditors see themselves as peripheral to the process they are volunteering to help with rather than being integral to it. Question 6 (Appendix K) asked the Auditors: “Are you clear as a practising Catholic as to what the Annulment Process entails?” Only Auditor F clearly stated “Yes” it is as though they perceive themselves more as note takers than as being a vital part of the Process. The response by Auditor B (Appendix K) to question 6 is an interesting one: “Yes - but had to find out the hard way - experience! Emotional rape describes it accurately.” With such a negative view one might wonder why such a person would wish to be associated with the Annulment Process. It is the researcher’s opinion that certain Auditors, whilst viewing the Annulment Process negatively, continue to carry out the task of interviewing because in some way they

feel that they are helping the Petitioner not the Tribunal. When we discuss the interviews with female petitioners (Appendix L) one can see from the experience of Participant C (Appendix L) that an empathic Auditor makes a substantial difference as to how a female petitioner will initially perceive the Annulment Process. Whilst Participant C (Appendix L) found the personal questions asked of her difficult she found the management of her interview to be handled appropriately by the Auditor. This was not the case with the other four interview participants (Appendix L).

We have already examined the 12 codes that were used to provide information from the interviews as to how female participants might perceive the Annulment Process in the Catholic Church. The study now discusses and identifies the issues that emerge from the coded text. All five of the participants had issue with how they perceived the Catholic Church and the Catholic community and this was particularly evident on a local parish level. Participant A was sat at Mass in her parish church and became deeply affected by the fact that she was being 'put through' the Annulment Process: "I sat at Mass thinking what am I doing, you know.....this is the Church I have belonged to for so long.....how can they be like this." (Participant A, Appendix L, Segment 64).

Participant C says: "I felt if I came to church everyone would look at me and judge me" (Participant C, Appendix L, Segment 10). Participant E feels that people in parishes know so little about the Annulment Process that they are suspect even when someone is granted one. Participant E (Appendix L) also feels that there is very little support at parish level for divorced people: "Even when you get an Annulment some people still don't believe in them. In Church no divorced people ever get prayed for, that's my experience. We pray for the Church, Bishops, Priests, Politicians and so on but never for divorced people. My God we are the one's that need help" (Participant



E, Appendix L, Segment 16). We recall that Participant A described the Annulment Process as being: “like some dirty little act you go through” (Participant A, Appendix L, Segment 66). Because so little is spoken about Divorce and the Annulment Process on a local parish level the Process is able to engender feelings of guilt, shame and isolation among females participating in the Annulment Process. This has repercussions not only with how a female petitioner might feel in her local parish but also in family life too. Participant B (Appendix L) felt unable to share her interview experience with her husband and her non - Catholic friends didn’t understand the Annulment Process. The Annulment Process even affects the witnesses. Participant A’s sister L was called on as a witness to her sister’s application and she recalls the interview experience as a traumatic one. When her interviewer had left she recalls: “I just turned round and burst into tears and I thought phew that was awful! And the most awful thing about it was that I couldn’t talk to anyone about it. So it really upset me, it upset me for two weeks really, it was going around in my head” (Participant A, Appendix L, Segment 49).

The Annulment Process has potential to cause distress to a petitioner on a parish level and to have negative effects on family and friends. Issues can be identified that relate to a lack of professionalism within the Annulment Process and these include:

- Use of inappropriate Auditors
- Poor channels of communication
- Lack of information

The Auditor that was assigned to take the interview statement from Participant A was a member of her parish and Participant A comments: “Also it is very insensitive when the person who first conducted my interview was someone I saw every single week at Sunday Mass, who then knew some of the most intimate details about my life and you



know (pause) playing the organ and looked across at me - that's the most insensitive thing I can imagine. Do they not consider if the interviewer is suitable for the client or look at geographical issues? I would wish for anonymity" (Participant A, Appendix L, Segment 85).

Not only do issues arise from assigning Auditors from inappropriate geographical areas there are also concerns regarding the interview skills of certain Auditors. Participant B was scared of her Auditor and says: "This lady really did not set me at ease in fact she had a really severe way about her from the very start" (Participant B, Appendix L, Segment 8). We also note from all five of the interview participants that levels of communication are poor. Participant's rang, emailed and wrote for updates about their petitions and these often went unanswered for unacceptable periods of time. Certain comments made by the Diocesan Marriage Tribunals (Appendix I) show that they often regard Petitioners who seek information about their case to be "nuisances" and speak of them in terms of "pestering". One Tribunal goes as far as to say that pestering is: "often the case with women" (Appendix I). This might be deemed a very unsatisfactory attitude and approach when they are dealing with a person's life situation.

One might also conclude, from the five interviews, that there is also a distinct paucity of information available to Petitioners. All five of the female interview participants did not know what to expect when they presented for the preliminary interview. This is of further interest when we recognise that all five of the participants were from different geographical locations in the United Kingdom and used different Tribunals. We see from the Tribunal Questionnaire responses in Appendix I that certain Marriage Tribunals claimed to give pre - application information as to what a Petitioner should expect. This was certainly not the case for the five participants that

the researcher interviewed. There was also a lack of continuity in what a Petitioner might expect from the interview. The interview that Participant B experienced lasted approximately nine hours over three meetings, the interview afforded Participant D was fifty minutes: “They gave me an appointment for my first interview. I remember it so clearly it was on a Friday at 5:00pm. I had to finish teaching at school early and drive twenty minutes to the city centre. I made it for 5:00pm and I was out for 5:50pm. It wasn’t a good experience I had to drive through rush hour traffic then told to sit down and answer some of the most personal questions ever. That was what really sticks in my mind they were just so personal and upsetting. I would really have liked to have been given a copy of the questions earlier, it was all so secretive. I also expected to be asked to go back for another interview as fifty minutes seemed such a short time to tell someone about the state of your marriage but that was it” (Participant D, Appendix L, Segment 22).

The experience of Participant D would have been improved at least in a small way if she had been provided with information about what to expect, the same applies for the other four participants. Other issues that emerge from the interviews are those to do with clergy. Both participant D & E give account of poor support from their local priest. The researcher asked Participant D if she approached her local priest when considering Annulment Application and she replied: “I did and it was disastrous. When I mentioned annulment, I can see him now, he just froze. He said that he knew nothing about them and it would be better if I did the same. So I didn’t get anywhere with him.” (Participant D, appendix L, Segment 18). Similarly Participant E reports an unpleasant encounter when seeking help from her local priest. The priest not only lied to her when she asked how long the Annulment Process might take (he told her nine years) he also held back documentation that she had given him in order to begin



the Process. Participant E finally engaged the help of a nun to file her application and when Participant E asked the priest to give her back her documentation she states: “I was amazed he must have had seven copies of everything I had given him. He had never sent anything off he had been stalling all the time” (Participant E, Appendix L, Segment 12).

“How do females perceive the Annulment of Marriage in the Catholic Church?”

This is the question that this research project has attempted to answer and the limitations and recommendations of the study follow in the next chapter section. Thus far I would conclude that they are able to perceive it in the following ways:

- I feel that the Annulment Process is a fearful one for female participants. Fearful because of the lack of information that is available. There is a fear of the unknown and, as it currently stands (2010), little is known about the Annulment Process by lay - Catholics. The Process can also be fearful because it exerts some kind of power over those who approach it in need. It is potentially fearful for women because it is still (2010) controlled by a male clerical hierarchy and this is particularly evident in the *Marriage Tribunals in England and Wales* that use male clerics to conduct the Petitioner interviews - 11 out of the 16 Dioceses questioned follow this procedure (Appendix I). After reading the five participant interviews one could deem it a fearful Process and also an intrusive one in that it asks for information from the petitioner that is sensitive and extremely private. Participant A & B commented that it asked for information that they would not even share with their partners (Appendix L). It instils a fear that could be likened to that of a child being called to the head - teacher’s office for some offence. I feel that the



Process, by its very nature, places the Petitioner in a position of need and weakness.

- The Annulment Process can be perceived as one that is lacking in transparency both on a personal level and on a public level. Not one of the five interview participants knew what to expect from the Annulment Process pre - interview and the same applied to those interviewed by the researcher for the Masters dissertation (Naylor, Derby University, 2002). We have seen from the Female Marriage Questionnaire (Appendix F) that very few Catholic females have accurate knowledge of the Annulment Process. Two of the respondents thought it the preserve of the rich and famous (Appendix F). The comments from the Marriage Tribunals evidence that the Process lacks transparency as the Tribunals do not provide the public with figures as to how many Catholic Marriages are Annulled on a yearly basis in England and Wales. There is no information about the Process in Catholic parishes in England and Wales and this is further evidenced by the experience of the five interview participants. Participant A described it as “some dirty little act that you through” (Appendix L) and Participant E claims that in all her time as a Catholic she has never heard it spoken about. This is also the pastoral experience of the researcher (1989 - 2010).
- The Annulment Process can be perceived as being one that is dominated by male clergy with every Diocese in England and Wales showing a disproportionate amount of clerical influence on the Tribunals when compared to the amount of lay involvement (National Catholic Directory, 2010). The Nottingham Diocesan Marriage Tribunal, for example, is composed of 3

Monsignori, one Canon and three priests (a total of seven clerics) they are assisted by one lay person, a male.

- The role of unmarried Catholic clergy in determining which marriages should be annulled and which marriages should not might also be perceived as unjust and hypocritical in the present social climate in England and Wales (2010). Recent high profile abuse scandal has shown that certain Catholic clergy are far from virtuous in matters sexual. Marie Bouclin (2006) has dedicated an entire work to the issue of women abused by Catholic clergy and Mary Frauley - O'Dea and Virginia Goldner (2007) have addressed the issue of Catholic clergy abuse in general in their work "Predatory Priests, Silenced Victims." There needs to be an admission to the fact that it is quite difficult at present (2010) to see Catholic clergy as adequate role models for sexually acceptable behaviour. The question could be raised as to what rights do they now have to decide on what constitutes a valid marriage and what doesn't and this is a possible perception that females might have when considering application for Annulment of Marriage in the Catholic Church.
- As it currently operates (2010) the Annulment Process could be perceived to be a Process that is able to have a profound negative effect on the way in which female Petitioners and their witnesses view the Catholic Church. All five of the female interview participants felt some level of hurt or disappointment with the Church. In the case of Participant A further hurt was caused by the way in which her witnesses were treated, particularly her brother and sister. Participant A was saddened by the fact that her brother's experience of the Catholic Annulment Process further endorsed his opinion that he made the right decision in leaving the Catholic Church (Appendix L).



- The Annulment Process is perceived as a frustrating one. The five interview participants are not given any time scales as to how long their petitions will take to consider. The five participants also felt hampered by poor means of communication on the part of the Marriage Tribunals (Appendix L).
- The Annulment Process also has the capacity to reinforce feelings of guilt, failure, anxiety and inadequacy. Whilst the National Board of Catholic Women (2000) caution that the Catholic Annulment Process is not to be seen as a ‘Catholic Divorce’ participants very often perceive it that way. The preliminary interviews revisit hurtful material. There is a potential to cause division among family and friends when they are called upon to act as witnesses. The very fact that the Petitioners are divorced Catholics engenders feelings of guilt and inadequacy - they have failed to live up to the Catholic teaching that: “Marriage in the Catholic Church is a life - long indissoluble contract” (Diocesan Ordo, 2010). As it currently stands the Annulment Process is able to compound negative emotional thinking.
- The Annulment Process could be perceived as being contrary to Church teaching. Whilst the Petitioners are more than aware, often painfully so, that they are divorced the intense examination of their lives by the Annulment Interview could be seen as a discriminating process. They are seeking to be reconciled with the Catholic Church in good faith after a painful experience of marriage they are trying to move forward with their lives. The Annulment Process might be perceived as an obstacle that is holding them back and barring them from something they hold precious; they would not be applying for Annulment if this were not the case. *Gaudium et Spes* a document of the Second Vatican Council states: “*True, all persons are not alike from the point*



*of view of varying physical power and the diversity of intellectual and moral resources. Nevertheless, with respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, colour, social condition, language or religion is to be overcome, and eradicated as contrary to God's intent.*" (Gaudium et Spes, no:29, 2007, p;194). All five of the interview participants felt discriminated against by the Catholic Annulment Process. Might the Annulment Process be perceived as a process that in its present form is one that is also "contrary to God's intent"? (Gaudium et Spes, 2007)

In addition to the interviews with the five female participants and the valuable information received from the research questionnaires, the study also makes use of written accounts received from female Catholics who have experienced the Annulment Process. Mention has already been made of the researcher posting his proposed study on the website of the ASDC (Association of Divorced and Separated Catholics) and the ASDC also made mention of the study in their magazine "New Vision" giving details of how to make contact with the researcher. It was from these postings that certain female Catholics shared their experience in writing. Eleven females sent in their written accounts in varying lengths of script and it is fair to say that nine of the accounts might be classified as short angry 'rants' at the perceived unfairness of the Annulment Process. I have chosen to discuss three of the accounts in this section and have given the full text of the accounts (with the authors permission) in the Appendix. Care has been taken to preserve the identity of the letter writers and names, dates and places have been left out. These three accounts are more comprehensive in their content than the other nine and they complement the material

obtained from the five participant interviews (Appendix L). Written accounts have the potential to provide a further 'richness' of information relevant to this study as more often than not the author takes time to reflect on the experience they wish to convey. This is certainly the case with Written Account 1 as she states in the text that she has taken her time to convey accurately her experience. I feel that these three written accounts add to this final part of the discussion and they give further insight to answering the question of how female Catholics might perceive the Catholic Annulment Process.

### Written Account 1 - Appendix O

One can see from Mary's account (Appendix O) that she was married to her husband for 24 years before he left her on New Years Eve for someone else - having had a number of extra marital affairs during his time with Mary.

Mary always believed that her marriage, despite having had three children, had never been "a true sacramental union in the eyes of God". Her ex - husband made the split a very traumatic experience for Mary both emotionally and financially. Once Mary received her civil divorce she began to think about applying for an Annulment but there is evidence from her account that she didn't feel comfortable approaching her parish priests:

"I had had so little support from my parish priests over my husband leaving me and the divorce, one priest said he would pray for reconciliation and the other said I could still go to communion - that was it, all the advice I was given."

(Account 1, Appendix O)

Mary didn't feel they were the right people to approach regarding Annulment Application and by chance she applied through a new acquaintance she had met at night school. This acquaintance worked for Mary's local Marriage Tribunal. Mary initially found this lady supportive but sadly her positive experience changed once she



had begun the Process. Her first appointment was cancelled at the Tribunal office and no further appointment was offered her there. Mary was finally granted an interview with a lay Auditor and this interview was to take place in Mary's home. Mary states:

“I was told I was to be interviewed by a lay Auditor in my own house. This turned out to be a male auditor who I discovered later came from a neighbouring parish and it was his first time interviewing a Petitioner. The interview did not go well as I found it almost impossible to talk to a complete stranger, the most personal and intimate details of my marriage. I cried so much after this interview.”  
(Account 1, Appendix O)

Mary went on to contact the lady she had first met but things deteriorated and Mary was eventually informed that the Tribunal didn't want to handle her case and it was rejected. Mary was given no information as to how or why this decision against her had been reached. We can see from Mary's account (Appendix O) that she has a strong self professed faith in God and that this faith was a reason for her making application for an Annulment. Mary eventually makes application to the central Marriage Tribunal in Westminster, London and a Canon Lawyer there agreed to act as her Advocate she says at this point:

“The stress of this was beginning to tell; I kept thinking was it worth it, putting myself through all this stress and strain, but that inner voice just kept saying keep on going.”  
(Account 1, Appendix O)

Mary had a better experience of the Annulment Process from the Westminster Tribunal and she was finally granted an Annulment. The divorce and Annulment Process had taken her “7 long years” and she describes the stress as being “enormous”. Mary's experience of the Annulment Process and the perceived failings of it - unsuitable Auditor, poor communication / information and lack of emotional support - had left Mary a changed person: “these things change your life forever.”



Mary still feels there is a stigma attached to her when she has to label herself a 'divorced Catholic' and she feels that fellow Catholics don't particularly understand what an Annulment is or necessarily acknowledge its status. Mary's opinion on the Catholic Church has been affected by her experience and perception of the Annulment Process and she says:

**"I hate filling in forms where I have to state marital status. The Catholic Church still regards widows very differently to the separated and divorced. Had I been widowed and not my husband leaving me, I would have had all the clergy visiting the house. Did nobody realise that my children and me needed to see that the Church cared about us? The attitude of the Church has distressed me deeply; my faith in the Church may be severely dented but not my faith in God. Funnily enough I could cope with the pain and suffering on a personal level but the attitude of the Church still niggles."**

**(Account 1, Appendix O)**

Mary's account, to say the least, is a sad one and it highlights failings in the Catholic Annulment Process with regard to emotional care, inappropriate use of Auditors and a particularly uncaring (in her experience) face of Church. Mary has also evidenced a hypocritical way of clergy dealing with divorced people:

**"The majority of lay people just do not understand about annulments, many priests do not really understand it and why should they bother, when, as I've seen in my own parish, people remarried outside of the Church can receive Holy Communion with the full blessing of the priest, who deems it to be a matter of conscience."**

**(Account 1, Appendix O)**

### **Written Account 2 - Appendix O**

Ann, like so many other lay - Catholics, didn't even know that the Annulment Process existed until she joined the ASDC (Association of Divorced and Separated Catholics). Ann contacted her Tribunal directly and was given an interview with a priest. The priest asked Ann to provide a list of witnesses to her marriage and she says: "which

you may well understand made me feel like a criminal". Ann found the interview "upsetting at times" and when she was eventually sent a copy of the notes taken at her interview she found herself contacting the Tribunal because it contained errors. This experience of inaccuracy is similar to the experience recounted by interview Participant A (Appendix L) where she states that names and places had not been reported accurately.

After some weeks, post interview, Ann was asked to present herself for psychological assessment to judge the state of her mind she says "how insulting is that!" Ann like the other participants says that after this things went quiet for a long time and she was given no idea as to what was happening. Ann says that after more than a year she received an unexpected letter informing her that her application had been refused. This caused Ann distress because even though she was barred from the Church's Sacramental life (she had married again in a civil service) she had still be attending Mass regularly although not receiving Communion. Ann was hurt, feeling ostracised from the Church's Sacramental life, and she finally found an understanding chaplain at one of her ASDC meetings. This chaplain allowed Ann to receive the Sacraments again but we must acknowledge that this was done by his authority, not the authority or approval of the Catholic Church.

After some time Ann reapplied for an Annulment and went through the interviews again, she writes that this time her experience was more positive and that she was kept better informed. Ann finally got her Annulment and was able to marry her partner in the Catholic marriage ceremony. Ann says of the Annulment Process:

"Overall the process was humiliating and made me feel that it was a case of kicking the dog when it is already down."  
(Account 2, Appendix O)



### **Written Account 3 - Appendix O)**

Christine gives account of her Annulment experience and it conveys a poor image of the functioning of certain Tribunals. When she approached the Tribunal she was divorced from her husband for many years and living with her new partner. Christine had difficulty in deciding who to choose as her witnesses because she says that three possible witnesses had died and these had known her and her previous husband best. Christine eventually nominated two witnesses and it took a wait of 9 months for them to be interviewed. Like the experience of so many Christine found that the Tribunal moved slowly. Christine experienced many delays and her case was passed on to a nun who, after a further six months, asked her to provide more witnesses. Christine states that she did manage to find four more witnesses who were willing to be interviewed, but she says that these were not contacted. Soon after sending in their names she was contacted by letter, notifying her that her marriage had been Annulled. Christine was “overjoyed”.

I feel that what happened next to Christine is both embarrassing and emotionally cruel. Christine informed the new witnesses that they were no longer needed and she treated her friends at the ASDC meeting to a glass of wine to celebrate with her.

Christine says:

“What a relief it was to have it all over. There had been so little communication with the Tribunal, one just doesn’t know what is going on.”  
(Account 3, Appendix O)

Christine’s celebration was to be short lived and she recalls receiving a phone call a very short time after receiving her nullity letter. This call informed her that there was a mistake and that she had been sent papers that were not destined for her - she had not been granted an Annulment. Christine was instructed to destroy the document.

This had a profound effect on her and she recalls:



**“I sobbed down the phone; even writing about it now my eyes are full of tears just remembering the agony of that day. How could they be so stupid? A mistake? It was a tragedy for me. How many others had they done this to? My confidence in the Tribunal sunk to zero.”  
(Account 3, Appendix O)**

Christine was left in confusion, as she desperately wanted to marry her current partner in a Church ceremony and also desired to return to the Sacraments stating: “would we be forever excluded from the sacraments?” We can observe from Christine’s account further evidence of the poor level of communication and transparency in the Marriage Tribunals of England and Wales. Christine says that months and months went by with no movement of her case and no communication. She wrote to the nun who was supposedly handling her case and got no reply, she also phoned and was unable to speak to her. It is sad that once again the initiative to make contact and move the case forward comes from the Petitioner not the Tribunal. A year had passed since Christine had been asked to provide four more witnesses and nothing had happened. She wrote to a high - ranking Monsignor begging him to move the case forward saying:

**“The delay and total lack of communication that I am experiencing is causing me considerable anguish.”  
(Account 3, Appendix O)**

After two months Christine was contacted, the nun had left and had lost all of Christine’s paperwork in the process. Christine had to provide witnesses, names, addresses and details once again. A year after doing this Christine finally got her marriage annulled but this time she states:

**“My joy was tempered by an irrational fear that it wasn’t really true this time either.”  
(Account 3, Appendix O)**

Christine’s perception of the Catholic Annulment Process could be seen as one that caused: embarrassment, frustration, anguish and an experience of appalling

communication issues. Many people with Christine's experience could have abandoned the Process, but her tenacity, like that of others involved in this study, show that certain females genuinely want to do what they consider 'right' by the Church's teaching. They want to feel part of the Church. Why is it that the clumsiness and heavy handed blasé approach of certain Tribunals adds to the hurt many women have already experienced from a broken and abusive marriage? The Annulment Process for Christine took three years and seven months in all, and she states that this is: "in a Diocese where they claim that most Annulments are completed within 18 months."

## **4.2 Conclusion - Recommendations and Limitations**

We have evidenced, from the literature review at the beginning of this study, that certain commentators have called for change in the way that Marriage Tribunals operate here in England and Wales (Buckley 2002, Coriden 2000) and in the United States (Jenks 2002, Haring 1990, Hegy & Martos 2002). Both Jenks and Buckley have recommended changes to the way Marriage Tribunals operate, in favour of a more fair and 'humane' approach to Marriage Annulments. They call for these changes to be rooted in the human and social sciences rather than the purely legalistic approach that is currently in operation. Both of the authors recommend the practice of the Orthodox Church when dealing with marital break - up:

“The Orthodox position is that people make mistakes and, therefore, divorce and remarriage is permitted. Matusiak (2000) stated that what is crucial is whether the marriage has quit functioning. If the two parties no longer do things together, have sexual relations, like or love each other, and so forth, the marriage no longer exists. Once a civil divorce is granted the parties may marry again within the Church. The Church will marry an individual up to three times.”  
(Jenks 2002, p: 204)

By his own admission Jenks really did not hold out hope that this approach would be one that was adopted by the Catholic Church and the same can be said of Buckley (2002). In 2010 it can be evidenced from this study that their doubts were well founded. The Tribunals in England and Wales are still operating in the same way as they did in 2002.

I will make my recommendations within what could be seen as the limitations of the current system. Whilst I might accord with the opinions of those who wish for the demise of the current process for granting Annulments I am under no illusion that their demise is imminent. I feel that the recommendations that I propose, for the current way in which the Tribunals operate, are recommendations that are capable of



changing to a more positive perception the way that females view the Catholic Annulment Process.

From the responses given to the Marriage Tribunal questionnaire (Appendix I) and the accompanying confidential letters, it is clear that the majority of Marriage Tribunals in England and Wales are operating with limited resources, both financial and personnel. If dioceses were to make more of a financial commitment to their tribunals then there would be a marked improvement in the service that is provided to Petitioners. This would be evidenced in the following areas:

- Someone employed to update Petitioners on the progress of their case either by phone, letter or email.
- To make use of professional counsellors to assist Petitioners with any emotional difficulty encountered as a result of the Process.
- To afford improved and more comprehensive training of Auditors by relevant professional bodies.
- To provide explanatory literature concerning the Process to Petitioners and their witnesses.
- To raise the profile of the Annulment process in parishes so as to reduce and eliminate misconceptions and to offer a more transparent approach.

We have seen, from the participant interviews and the written testimonies, that communication between the Petitioners and the Tribunals might be deemed inadequate. Petitioners often felt isolated during their Annulment application and this was largely due to a lack of information as to how their case was progressing. A recommendation for improved and more efficient channels of communication would effect a change for the better.

The Annulment Process, as it currently operates, is often emotionally challenging for the Petitioner and their families and friends. We see (Appendix I) that only one Tribunal out of the sixteen questioned claimed to have trained counsellors available to whom they could refer a distressed client. I would recommend a change of practice in this area. One of the Tribunals (Appendix I) claimed that the Annulment Process was not a “Counselling service but a Juridical Process”. This attitude is unacceptable and I would see this as an ethical issue. When there is potential to cause emotional distress, in varying degrees of severity, then some type of care system should be in place. Should the Tribunals be unable to fund professional support then I would recommend the establishment of other support systems. This might take the form of support groups comprised of individuals who have experienced the Annulment Process and such a group might also include individuals who have been refused an Annulment. Other support might be to assign the Petitioner some type of mentor who has first hand experience of the Annulment Process and who is familiar with the elements of the Annulment Process. These recommendations should be accompanied by the appropriate security checks that are now recommended when working with the public to limit the potential to abuse.

The Auditors are vital to the functioning of the Marriage Tribunals. Auditors take statements from the Petitioner and from their witnesses, as one Tribunal states (Appendix I) they are the “eyes and ears” of the Marriage Tribunals. One of the Auditors questioned for this study, expressed surprise at how little training potential Auditors receive. If we look at the Tribunal responses (Appendix I) we might form the same opinion. When questioned about the training Auditors receive we see comments such as: “a day here and there” or “the odd study day” and “ a study day before they begin” even more worrying is the comment: “very little really”. Choosing



suitably qualified and appropriate Auditors can make a marked difference as to how a female perceives the Annulment Process. Participant C (Appendix L) coped better than the other four interview participants with the Annulment Interview because she felt that she had a well - trained, experienced and professional Auditor.

Auditors are noting down highly sensitive and personal material. If they handle the interview insensitively then the Annulment Interview is likely to be perceived by the female Petitioner as a negative experience and possibly a distressing one. If we look at just two questions out of the two hundred and sixty three questions that the Petitioner is asked when undergoing interview by the Nottingham Diocesan Tribunal we are able to see the need for appropriate professional training. Question 14 b i asks: "Were there any problems in the intimate sexual relationship?" followed by ii: "If so when did they appear, what were they and how serious was this?" (Nottingham Diocesan Tribunal Questionnaire, February 2009, p: 11). To be asked such questions by a complete stranger needs careful management. I would state that Auditors need extensive training in people skills to ask for such information appropriately. Great care needs to be taken in the selection process for recruiting Auditors and a person's suitability professionally assessed.

Auditors also require appropriate training in how to take down such information accurately, objectively and in a non - intrusive fashion. I would also recommend that Petitioners be given a choice as to the sex of the person assigned them to conduct the Annulment Interview. It is my opinion and a recommendation that male celibate clerics should not take on the role of Auditors, as asking questions like the ones above may be perceived as being inappropriate by the female Petitioner. I make note that from one pilot interview, conducted for this study, that the female commented thus:

"Personalities are huge to women. They have a huge impact on women. Many going through the Annulment Process to



effect closure on relationships have been oppressed, abused and bullied by men. Should they not be given the choice therefore to be interviewed by a woman or alternatively a "gentle - man".  
(Pilot interview J, October 2007)

My recommendation for better - trained Auditors is not to be seen as one sided. I feel that Auditors should be trained adequately and appropriately to protect their own emotional state and professional boundaries. This is an area that Denscombe (2004) addresses when commenting on researchers getting help from others to transcribe their interviews. He advises the researcher to be cautious and to transcribe their own work whenever possible. Material that the researcher finds acceptable might not be so acceptable to another party and therefore it is capable of causing distress. Auditors need reasonable training to manage material appropriately and training that helps them to identify and to acknowledge their own limitations.

A recommendation is made that Catholic parishes should make available in a public place, explanatory literature regarding the Annulment Process and how application might be made to begin the Process. This literature should also detail exactly what the Petitioner should expect from the Process. Mention, explanation and invitation regarding the Annulment Process should also be publicly addressed on a Parish level on at least a yearly basis. This would enable the Process to become more transparent and would help to address some of the confusion that surrounds the Annulment Process for both lay Catholics and ordained Catholics. We have evidenced from the Female questionnaire responses concerning Catholic Marriage and Divorce that much confusion still exists regarding the status of a Catholic post divorce and their relationship with the Church and Sacramental life. If we are to believe, as some defenders of the Annulment Process claim, that the Annulment Process can be a cathartic and healing experience then why does information surrounding the Process

seem to be hidden and removed from Parish life? Why is it viewed as some type of subversive process or as Participant A referred to it as: “some dirty little act you just go through” (Participant A, Appendix L). Appropriate advertising and explanatory literature would go some way towards demystifying the Annulment Process as it currently operates. From my own personal experience as a Parish Priest I do not know of one person who would wish to go through the Annulment Process for dishonourable reasons. The majority of female Catholics that I have interviewed have gone through the Process because they wish for any future marriage to be a valid one in the eyes of the Catholic Church. Their faith and the proper reception of the sacraments have been of paramount importance to them.

It is for reasons such as these that I also recommend and advocate the publication of Marriage Annulment statistics in the Diocesan Year Books. Publication of such statistics would enable Petitioners to realise that they are not alone in having to seek a Catholic Marriage Annulment for a marriage that has not worked out as they would have wished it to. If the Annulment Process is to be seen as an effective pastoral tool to help divorced female Catholics reconcile their lives with the Church that they wish to be part of, then it needs to be seen as both inviting and reconciling. A more transparent approach could improve the way the Catholic Annulment Process is perceived by female Catholics.

On a local pastoral level I would also recommend that every parish make use of someone who is knowledgeable with regard to the Annulment Process and who is available to advise and counsel a parishioner that might be considering Annulment Application. The person contemplating Annulment proceeding could then be advised to meet with this person before they formally make approach to their local Marriage Tribunal. It is my opinion that a raising of the profile of Marriage Annulment and



what it subsequently entails, would go some way to enabling lay Catholics to better understand what exactly divorced and remarried Catholics are experiencing by putting themselves forward for the Annulment Process. Pastoral care and understanding of a divorced person's dilemma might also be improved for the good on a local parish level.

If the Annulment Process is to continue in its present form in England and Wales I feel that the above recommendations will go some way to it being viewed as a Process that seeks to build a person up positively post - divorce rather than a Process that isolates a person through poor transparency and misunderstanding.

In certain areas this study might not be fully understood and for a variety of reasons. Coriden (2000) has already declared that in his opinion the Catholic Annulment Process is not fit for purpose because it lacks continuity and that in some parts of the world it does not even operate or exist. This study has been limited to examining how the female Catholic might perceive the Annulment Process as it operates in England and Wales. In the early stages of the study I tried to discern how the Annulment Process operated outside the United Kingdom. I was fortunate to correspond with a lady in Malta who was 81 years of age. Though a widow herself she had set up a group in Malta in 1990 that was called the "Separates Group". The name, she informed me, came about because divorce in Malta is not available, only separation. At the time of her corresponding with me she had 14 people in her group - men and women. Mrs M, as I will call her, knew of only one man who had gained an Annulment and that was due to the fact that he received it abroad before settling in Malta. The group existed, she informed me, to help those who had separated to: "accept the separation from God's hand peacefully and to forgive the wrongs they had suffered" (Letter from Mrs M, July 2007).



I have also had several conversations with a priest friend who is from Croatia. This priest informs me that the Annulment Process there is very limited, and that pressure and opinions from family, neighbours and fellow parishioners often influence the Catholic away from applying for an Annulment because the Process is not particularly understood or indeed encouraged. It was his opinion that the Annulment Process was viewed as some kind of stigma or weakness and that divorced and remarried Catholics were just consigned to accept their 'lot' in that they had removed themselves from full communion with the Catholic Church.

I have discussed this study at some length with a visiting Monsignor from Tanzania. Monsignor T was very interested that I was conducting the study from a female perspective as his own father (a Catholic) had five wives. Monsignor T knew very little of the workings of the Marriage Tribunal in his Diocese and in Tanzania in general, in point of fact he was even uncertain if Tribunals existed there. If they did exist, he doubted that females would make use of them because cultural issues influenced the rights of women, making them feel inferior to address wrong doings or ill treatment in marriage. In his opinion females were more likely to flee a situation than address it due to male dominance in all matters.

I questioned several Catholic females from the Kerala region of India, who now reside in my parish, regarding divorce and remarriage in their culture, and their responses seemed very much out of line with Catholic teaching. Rather than choosing their partner he is chosen for them by the respective families and they accept this decision. They had no knowledge of divorce or separation in their culture as the planned marriage was for life and this was accepted. This is interesting as one of the supposed grounds for granting Annulments is 'lack of freedom in the choice of partner' this does not seem to count in the Catholic culture of Kerala.

The above examples from abroad are obvious limitations to this study but they also prove interesting recommendations for further study of the Catholic Annulment Process abroad, particularly with regard to the rights and understandings of Catholic females in different cultures.

This study has been limited to how Catholic females perceive the Catholic Annulment Process in England and Wales. Further research might examine how male Catholics perceive the Process. If such a study was conducted it would be of interest to note the claims of Hegy & Martos (1989). These authors claim to identify within the Church, a difference between what they term the “masculine consciousness and the “feminine consciousness”. They claim that the masculine consciousness is analytic with a desire to classify reality whilst the feminine consciousness is synthetic looking at the whole of reality rather than component parts. Secondly, they state that the masculine consciousness looks at things in terms of order and ranking with everything in its proper place. The feminine consciousness looks at things in terms of wholes and relationships with its models being networks rather than hierarchy. Finally they claim that masculine consciousness is fascinated by power and control whereas feminine consciousness is more concerned with caring and bonding. With regard to the feminine consciousness they state: “right relationship is more important than righteousness; reconciliation is more important than conquest.” (Rohr & Martos, 1989, p. 56 - 57).

I do not agree entirely with their distinctions and this is evidenced from the responses given to the female research questionnaire on a woman’s role in the Catholic Church (Appendix C) and from the research questionnaire on Catholic marriage (Appendix F). A good number of the female responses displayed traits of what Rohr & Martos define as “masculine consciousness” with certain respondents giving very “analytical”



opinions endorsing the Catholic Church's teaching with vigour. Certain responses were very 'black and white' and left little room for manoeuvre and they certainly do not fit the three categories of feminine consciousness assigned them by Rohr & Martos. I do however feel that these supposed distinctions are worthy of further investigation. The attributes assigned to the masculine consciousness may well be found true if further research was undertaken to examine how the male Catholic perceives the Annulment Process in its current form. Do they recount the same experience of it as the females do? Do they encounter the same frustrations? Do they experience similar emotional difficulties? Research in this area might offer a more balanced view as to how the Catholic Marriage Tribunals are perceived in England and Wales.

I have concentrated on female Petitioners in this study. The study has not taken into account how those on the receiving end of an Annulment Application might feel. What does the former spouse experience when informed that their ex - wife is filing for an Annulment of their former marriage? We have evidenced in this study the outrage felt by Sheila Rauch Kennedy (1997) when she discovered that her congressman husband Joseph Kennedy (a Catholic) was filing for Annulment of their marriage. The anger and hurt of this spurred her to write a book called "Shattered Faith" as she was: "so stunned by the hypocrisy of the process and the betrayal of trust it involved, she became determined to defend the legitimacy of her former marriage" (Shattered Faith, Kennedy, 1997).

I have on file a letter (2008) from a distraught Catholic man asking for my help to back his appeal against an Annulment ruling obtained by his ex - wife declaring their former marriage 'null and void' on the grounds that the respondent: "was incapable of assuming and fulfilling the duties and obligations of marriage, this ruling is given on



the XXXX, 2008.” Mr K, as I will refer to him, claims in defence that there are twelve listed items against him in the Tribunal judgement that are simply not true and he claims that his ex - wife’s evidence against him is largely founded on lies, hers and those of her witnesses. Mr K is worried that his sons will see the Annulment document that is in his wife’s possession and says:

“My sons, who I am close to will see their father criticised in his lack of discretion and failure to accept responsibility in marriage on a complete lack of concrete provable evidence.”  
(Mr K letter, 2008)

This study has not addressed the issue of how Respondents react and experience the Annulment Process and, neither has it examined the perception of the Process from the witnesses called to give evidence. There is scope for further research in this area and in particular to ascertain how non - Catholic Respondents and non - Catholic witnesses perceive the process of Marriage Annulment in the Catholic Church.

In conclusion I would say that the Catholic Annulment Process is destined to remain a controversial Process and a confusing one. There are those defending it and those calling for its removal and subsequent replacement with a Process that might be deemed more pastoral to all parties involved, and this includes: Tribunals, Auditors, Petitioners, Respondents, Witnesses, Children, Family members and Friends. It is hoped that my recommendations will serve as valid observations to reviewing the Process for the better, if it is to continue in its current format in England and Wales.

I cannot help but feel that the Annulment Process as it stands at present (2010) is so very capable of doing more harm than good to the reputation of a Church that is called to be the presence of Christ here on earth (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994).

At the beginning of the study I stated that I was looking at the Catholic Annulment Process as a qualified Counsellor not as a theologian or scripture scholar but I am also a Catholic priest with over twenty years service to the Catholic communities in the

Diocese of Nottingham. As a priest I feel that the Annulment Process is in danger of moving away, or has indeed moved away, from the mandate of Christ that we “all be one”. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994). St Paul was tireless in his preaching that early Christian communities should hold together in Christ, and that all parts of the body with different functions have a reason for being. All members of our parishes have different life styles and different stories and the seemingly broken life stories are no less important to the functioning of the body of the Church than the seemingly perfect ones. Let us hope that the Marriage Tribunals keep this to the fore in their ways of thinking and operating. I end with the words of St Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians:

“God put all the separate parts into the body on purpose. If all the parts were the same, how could it be a body? As it is, the parts are many but the body is one. The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I do not need you’ nor can the head say to the feet, ‘I do not need you.’  
What is more, it is precisely the parts of the body that seem to be the weakest which are the indispensable ones; and it is the least honourable parts of the body that we clothe with the greatest care.....  
Now you together are Christ’s body; but each of you is a different part of it.”  
(Jerusalem Bible, 1Corinthians Chapter 12 vs 18 - 26, p: 304, 1966)

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# **APPENDIX A**



**PhD Questionnaire 2007**

**This questionnaire has been designed specifically for female members of the Catholic Church. Once you have completed the questionnaire please return to the designated place in the brown envelope provided.**

**We do not require any personal information but we would be grateful if you could circle your age range. Thank You.**

**My age range is:**

**17 - 23      24 - 30      31 - 45      46 - 60      61 - 75      75+**

**1) It has been suggested that the prayers used in Mass and the Readings (in the English text) often presume an entirely Male congregation to be present. Do you agree with this (Please circle)**

**Yes                  No                  Don't know**

**What is your opinion?**

**2) Do you feel that women are treated the same as men within the structures of the Catholic Church? (Please circle)**

**Yes                  No                  Don't know**

**What is your opinion?**

**3) In your own view does the Catholic Church address the spiritual needs of women? (Please circle)**

**Yes                  No                  Don't know**

**What is your opinion?**

**4) Are there things you would like to see change in the Catholic Church with regard to a woman's role? (Please circle)**

**Yes                  No                  Don't know**

**What are those things?**

**5) In your opinion do you think a woman could perform the role of priesthood? (Please circle)**

**Yes                  No                  Don't know**

**Can you give your opinion?**

# **APPENDIX B**



	<p><b>Sixty Questionnaires made available to Female Parishioners in the Age Range 17 -75+ Years.</b>  <b>Forty Six Questionnaires returned.</b>  <b>Date: October 2007</b></p>			
<b>Questions</b>	<b>SECTION A</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>DON'T KNOW</b>
Question 1	It has been suggested that the prayers used in Mass and the Readings (English Version) often presume and entirely male congregation to be present. Do you agree with this?	36%	58%	6%
Question 2	Do you feel that women are treated the same as men within the structures of the Catholic Church?	30%	68%	7%
Question 3	In your own view does the Catholic Church address the spiritual needs of women?	67%	18%	15%
Question 4	Are there things you would like to see change in the Catholic Church with regard to a woman's role?	63%	28%	9%
Question 5	In your opinion do you think a woman could perform the role of priesthood?	68%	30%	2%

# **APPENDIX C**









40	60 - 75								No comment				
41	60 - 75			No					Always understood that when Church says man it means mankind which refers to men, women and children.				
42	60 - 75			No					Message is for us all. I have never imagined it any other way.				
43	60 - 75		Yes						Male dominated society. Bible = Male domination.				
44	75+			No					No comment.				
45	75+			No					No comment.				
46	75+			No					No comment.				4











39	60 - 75			No				Some changes but not enough.		
40	60 - 75			No				No comment.		
41	60 - 75		Yes					Men and women have different roles in Church but make an equal contribution.		
42	60 - 75			No				Hierarchical structures of the Church unable to fully accept women.		
43	60 - 75			No				Men fearful of loosing control despite many great women saints. There has been no structure in the Catholic Church to allow "the cream to rise to the top".		
44	75+		Yes					No comment.		
45	75+		Yes					No comment.		
46	75+		Yes					No comment.		8



















40		60 - 75			No				No comment.			
41		60 - 75			No				No comment.			
42		60 - 75		Yes					Still areas where women are side - lined.			
43		60 - 75		Yes					Women priests and deacons and greater use of womens skills.			
44		75+			No				No comment.			
45		75+			No				No comment.			
46		75+		Yes					More women readers.			16





8	30 - 45	Yes					Yes and it could offer a more modern attitude to people to have an equal contribution within the Church community.
9	30 - 45	Yes					A woman has more compassion for the world/environment/family.
10	30 - 45	No					If this was the case Jesus would have chosen 6 men and 6 women as his disciples. In my opinion who has the right to change this.
11	30 - 45	DK					It would depend on the individual woman. It would take some getting used to seeing a woman say Mass.
12	30 - 45	Yes					If people in general feel god is directing them to a vocation then gender should not be a barrier. Why place restrictions on individuals who are willing to serve God's people in such a selfless and unique way?
13	45 - 60	Yes					No comment.
14	45 - 60	Yes					No comment.
15	45 - 60	Yes					Women very much in prominence in the early church.
16	45 - 60	Yes					No comment.
17	45 - 60	Yes					Female vicars perform the role very effectively in other Christian religions.
18	45 - 60	No					My personal opinion is that I would not like to see this. Women could have more distractions than a man.
19	45 - 60	No					No comment.
							19









# **APPENDIX D**



## **SECTION B**

**1) Do you agree with the Catholic Teaching with regard to the Sacrament of Marriage - "that it is a lifelong indissoluble commitment?" (Please circle)**

**Yes                      No                      Don't know**

**Can you give your reasons?**

**2) When a marriage is in difficulty do you think of the Catholic Church as a place one could go to for support and counsel? (Please circle)**

**Yes                      No                      Don't know**

**Can you give your opinion?**

**3) When a Catholic Marriage ends in divorce would you think of the Catholic Church as an organisation that would be helpful and supportive of the couple? (Please circle)**

**Yes                      No                      Don't know**

**Can you give your opinion?**

**Before answering question 4 please read the example below:**

***“If (for example) a murderer is evidenced to truly repent of his/her crime and fulfills the necessary penance and receives sacramental absolution he/she is permitted to receive the sacraments.***

***If a divorced Catholic ‘marries’ again without obtaining an Annulment from the Church that person has put themselves out of communion with the Church and they are excluded from the sacraments.”***

**4) Do you think that this is a just and fair situation? (Please circle)**

**Yes                      No                      Don’t know**

**Can you please comment?**

**5) Marriage Annulments are the responsibility of a Tribunal - do you think this is appropriate? (Please circle)**

**Yes                      No                      Don’t know**

**Please comment**

**6) On the Catholic Marriage Tribunal for one particular diocese (chosen at random) there are nine male ordained priests examining the cases. There are no lay - people. Do you feel this is acceptable? (Please circle)**

**Yes                      No                      Don’t know**

**Please comment**

**Thank you for the time taken to fill in this questionnaire! It is much appreciated.**



# **APPENDIX E**

	<b>Sixty Questionnaires made available to Female Parishioners in the Age Range 17 - 75+ Years. Forty Six Questionnaires returned. Date: October 2007</b>			
<b>Questions</b>	<b>SECTION B</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>DON'T KNOW</b>
Question 1	Do you agree with the Catholic teaching with regard to the Sacrament of Marriage - "that it is a lifelong indissoluble commitment.?"	68%	28%	4%
Question 2	When a marriage is in difficulty do you think of the Catholic Church as a place one could go to for support and counsel?	48%	30%	22%
Question 3	When a Catholic Marriage ends in divorce would you think of the Catholic church as an organisation that would be helpful and supportive of the couple?	35%	41%	24%
Question 4	<p>Before answering question 4 please read the following:  <i>"If (for example) a murderer is evidenced to truly repent of his/her crime and fulfills the necessary penance and absolution he/she is permitted to receive the sacraments.</i>  <i>If a divorced Catholic 'marries' again without obtaining an annulment from the Catholic Church that person has put themselves out of communion with the Church and they are excluded from the sacraments."</i>            Do you think this is a just and fair situation?</p>	21%	58%	21%
Question 5	Marriage Annulments are the responsibility of a Tribunal - do you think this is appropriate?	50%	26%	24%
Question 6	On the Catholic Marriage Tribunal for one particular diocese (chosen at random) there are nine male ordained priests examining the cases. There are no lay - people. Do you feel this is acceptable?	9%	91%	

# **APPENDIX F**



























	60 - 75			No			If there were married priests there might be more flexible Church laws - especially if there were women priests.
43							
44	75+	Yes					No comment
45	75+	Yes					No comment
46	75+		DK				
							10





























**Missing pages are unavailable**



















11	30 - 45	No	Should be a mixed group. Have any of the priests ever been married!			
12	30 - 45	No	This seems excessive - more lay involvement needed.			
13	45 - 60	No	No comment			
14	45 - 60	Yes	No comment			
15	45 - 60	No	Should be a mix including women			
16	45 - 60	No	No comment			
17	45 - 60	No	The process is farcical. It is a very flawed process overall.			
18	45 - 60	No	No comment			
19	45 - 60	No	No comment			
20	45 - 60	No	how can men who have never married have any understanding of this situation?			
21	45 - 60	No	What experience do priests have of marriage. Lay people need to be involved in the decision making.			
22	45 - 60	No	A wider variety from the population may be more effective.			
23	45 - 60	No	Why no women on the tribunal? This is the way forward or abolish the whole thing.			
24	45 - 60	No	No comment			
						25



25	45 - 60	No	What experience do they have of being a woman or being married. Do they have experience of being in a violent relationship, living in fear?
26	60 - 75	No	No comment
27	60 - 75	No	What do they know about marriage? Why do they have to be male? Lay people of both sexes should be included and those who have experience of divorce.
28	60 - 75	No	Not at all. I feel lay people should be included on this with experience of marriage.
29	60 - 75	No	No comment
30	60 - 75	No	Lay people should be included
31	60 - 75	No	I think there should be some lay people
32	60 - 75	Yes	Some lay people could be biased
33	60 - 75	No	No comment
34	60 - 75	No	This situation is awful. How can a group of unmarried priests pass judgement on something they have never had experience of? Of course lay people should be involved!
35	60 - 75	No	There should be people there with experience of marriage as well as those trained in Canon Law. The female input would seem to be essential.
36	60 - 75	Yes	Providing they are open minded and not totally dominated.
			26



37		60 - 75			No					Should be half priests and half lay people.		
38		60 - 75			No					It is very unlikely they have any experience of marriage.		
39		60 - 75			No					Should be married people on the tribunal and preferably an equal number of women.		
40		60 - 75			No					No comment		
41		60 - 75			No					Their judgements should be based on recommendations from the local parish priest and people who know the couple.		
42		60 - 75			No					This is not acceptable and it is very biased.		
43		60 - 75			No					It needs a balanced membership.		
44		75+			No					Needs some married couples		
45		75+			No					No comment		
46		75+			No					No comment		27.

# **APPENDIX G**



# St Joseph's Church

St Joseph's Rectory, Burton Road, Derby DE1 1TJ

Tel No: (01332) 343777 Fax No: (01332) 202074

14 June 2004

Dear Father

## **PhD Studies**

By way of a brief introduction I am a parish priest in the Nottingham diocese and I have my Bishop's permission to write to the various marriage tribunals in England and Wales concerning my Doctoral Studies.

In 2002 I completed a Masters Degree in the Psychology Unit of Derby University. The final dissertation was entitled: **"The nature of the psychological impact of the Marriage Annulment Process within the Catholic Church on female participants."**

I am now in the very first stages of assembling my approach to further study in this area.

Would you please have a look at the enclosed questionnaire and if you think fit please respond to the questions? I enclose a stamped addressed envelope for your replies and really do thank you in advance for any trouble you take to fill it in.

Should any of you wish for a copy of the Masters Paper I would do my best to send you one.

Thanking you in anticipation,

Yours sincerely,

Fr Bill Naylor



# **APPENDIX H**

## **QUESTIONNAIRE 2005**

### **(PhD RESEARCH)**

Do you have any kind of process in place in your Diocese whereby the client may 'feedback' to the Tribunal how he or she felt during the interview process?

Do you provide the client with any information as to how the Tribunal process works before their interview e.g : what facts are required, how the process works, length of time?

Who conducts the Tribunal Interviews in your Diocese?

What training, if any, would you expect those conducting Tribunal Interviews to have?

**If a client finds the interview process difficult or indeed distressing - How is this handled? Do you have a system in place that helps the client deal with emotions that may come to the fore during the interview?**

**Is the client able to make regular contact with the Tribunal to ascertain how their case might be progressing?**

**Do you publish figures in the Diocese to make known publicly how many marriages have been 'successfully' Annulled during the Year?**



**Is there a percentage (even a rough guide) available as to who is more likely to approach the Tribunal: More Males than Females/More Females than Males?**

**Name of Contact Person:**

**Name of Diocese:**

**Many thanks for your help with this Questionnaire - it is much appreciated!**

**If you have any further information which you feel relevant and helpful you may wish to add it below and on the back of this sheet of paper.**

# **APPENDIX I**

<p><b>Question 1</b> Do you have any kind of process in place whereby the client may feedback' to the Tribunal how she/he felt during the interview process?</p>	<p><b>Diocese A</b>  NO</p>	<p><b>Diocese B</b>  Nothing Formal</p>	<p><b>Diocese C</b>  NO! Some thank you letters</p>
<p><b>Question 2</b> Do you provide the client with any information as to how the Tribunal process works before their interview e.g: what facts are required, how the process works, length of time?</p>	<p>Leaflet</p>	<p>Information Sheet</p>	<p>People invited to question when making an appointment</p>
<p><b>Question 3</b> Who conducts the Tribunal Interviews in your Diocese?</p>	<p>Lay Auditors</p>	<p>Interview of Petitioner by Judicial Vicar. Auditors interview witnesses.</p>	<p>Petitioners &amp; Respondants interviewed by Canon Lawyers. Witnesses by Lay Auditors.</p>
<p><b>Question 4</b> What training, if any, would you expect those conducting Tribunal Interviews to have?</p>	<p>Odd Study Day</p>	<p>Yearly Training Day and 'one-off' study days.</p>	<p>Lay auditors trained to know their task is: ask, hear, record. No specialist knowledge.</p>
<p><b>Question 5</b> If a client finds the interview process difficult or indeed distressing - How is this managed? Do you have a system in place that helps the client deal with emotions that may come to the fore during the interview?</p>	<p>Interviewer deals with it as best they can! No resources available for more or personnel to deal with this issue.</p>	<p>Interviewer as best they can. Provide tea break, tissues. Other than this no system.</p>	<p>Tea break, bathroom visit. On rare occasions details of a Counsellor have been provided.</p>



**Question 6**  
Is the client able to make regular contact with the Tribunal to ascertain how their case might be progressing?

**Diocese A**  
Yes! No problem here!

**Diocese B**  
Yes! Encouraged to do so.

**Diocese C**  
Clients told they can make contact any time for progress report.

**Question 7**  
Do you publish figures in the Diocese to make known publicly how many marriages have been 'successfully' annulled during the year?

NO

Figures sent to Bishop Diocesan Pastoral Council and to Council of Priests

NO

**Question 8**  
Is there a percentage (even a rough guide) available as to who is more likely to approach the Tribunal: More males than females/ more females than males?

30 years experience says 60% are female.

At present 2005,  
60% Female  
40% Male

Early 80's/90's three quarters female. To date it is about 50/50.

**Any other Comments**

None

Lack of structured support

None

**Question 1**

Do you have any kind of process in place whereby the client may 'feedback' to the Tribunal how she/he felt during the interview process?

**Diocese D**

No. Some thank you letters.

**Diocese E**

No Feedback invited.

**Diocese F**

No

**Question 2**

Do you provide the client with any information as to how the Tribunal works before their interview e.g: what facts are required, how the process works, length of time?

Information Sheet.

\*Researchers note: an example was enclosed and is sensitively prepared.

Yes - we send out a lot of information.

\*Researchers note: no examples enclosed.

Not provided as such but invitation to discuss.

**Question 3**

Who conducts the Tribunal Interviews in your Diocese?

Judicial Vicar & Lay Auditors.

Petitioner/Respondant interviewed by Judicial Vicar. Other witnesses by Lay Auditors.

Auditors in the main on occasion the Judicial Vicar or Parish Priest.

**Question 4**

What training, if any, would you expect those conducting Tribunal Interviews to have?

Very little! They observe one or two interviews.

Auditors - a few hours of preparation. Judicial Vicar 2 years training.

4 half days per year.

**Question 5**

If a client finds the interview process difficult or indeed distressing - How is this managed? Do you have a system in place that helps the client deal with emotions that may come to the fore during the interview?

Most cope well.  
Box of tissues, break...  
No follow up is provided.

No. Left to Auditors or Interviewers pastoral sensitivity.

No system in place for distressed clients.

<b>Question 6</b> Is the client able to make regular contact with the Tribunal to ascertain how their case might be progressing?	<b>Diocese D</b> Yes but informed that over contact may delay matters.	<b>Diocese E</b> YES	<b>Diocese F</b> Can phone or write if they choose.
<b>Question 7</b> Do you publish figures in the Diocese to make known publicly how many marriages have been 'successfully' annulled during the year?	No	No	No
<b>Question 8</b> Is there a percentage (even a rough guide) available as to who is more likely to approach the Tribunal: More males than females/ more females than males?	In our opinion more females than males.	60% Female 40% Male	50% Female 50% Male
<b>Any other Comments</b>	<b>Males tend to present for Annulment because of female in the background. Majority of cases are 'female driven'</b>	None	None



**Question 1**  
Do you have any kind of process in place whereby the client may 'feedback' to the Tribunal how she/he felt during the interview process?

**Diocese G**  
No

**Diocese H**  
No

**Diocese I**  
No

**Question 2**  
Do you provide the client with any information as to how the Tribunal process works before their interview e.g: what facts are required, how the process works, length of time?

**Yes.**  
Two page letter.

**Yes.**  
\*Researchers note:  
Example given of good quality information they give out.

**Yes.** Process explained verbally at the outset.

**Question 3**  
Who conducts the Tribunal Interview in your Diocese?

Lay Auditors.

Judicial Vicar interviews Petitioner and Respondant. Lay Auditors interview witnesses.

Lay Auditors, some with several years experience.

**Question 4**  
What training, if any, would you expect those conducting Tribunal Interviews to have?

No extensive training.

1 day training to start, then refresher every 18 months to 2 years.

2 day training course and observation of experienced Auditors.

**Question 5**  
If a client finds the interview process difficult or indeed distressing - How is this managed? Do you have a system in place that helps the client deal with emotions that may come to the fore during the interview?

Have to rely on the sensitivity of Auditor.

Try to create welcoming atmosphere.

Tea break, walk time. Sometimes reschedule interview.

<b>Question 6</b>	<b>Diocese G</b>	<b>Diocese H</b>	<b>Diocese I</b>
Is the client able to make regular contact with the Tribunal to ascertain how their case might be progressing?	They make contact but we do not encourage it.	Yes, welcome to contact us.	Yes, can phone or write in.
<b>Question 7</b>	No	No. Only send to Canon Law Society magazine. No figures published in the Diocese.	No
<b>Question 8</b>	50% Male 50% Female	As at 2005: 44% Female 56% Male	50% Male 50% Female
<b>Any other comments</b>	"People who give us a great deal of trouble are female Catholic respondents who often feel that the male orientated Catholic Church is against them."	None	None

**Question 1**

Do you have any kind of process in place whereby the client may 'feedback' to the Tribunal how she/he felt during the interview process?

**Diocese J**

No formal process.

**Diocese K**

Yes. Invited at the end of interview.

**Diocese L**

No.

**Question 2**

Do you provide the client with any information as to how the Tribunal process works before their interview e.g: what facts are required, how the process works, length of time?

Yes information provided.

\*Researchers note:  
No sample given.

Yes. Verbal explanation at the outset.

Yes - Starter pack.

\*Researchers note:  
No sample given.

**Question 3**

Who conducts the Tribunal Interviews in your Diocese?

Judicial Vicar interviews  
Petitioner & Respondent.  
Lay Auditors interview witnesses.

Judicial vicar interviews  
Petitioner and Lay Auditors  
interview witnesses.

Three Canon Lawyers  
helped by Lay Auditors.

**Question 4**

What training, if any, would you expect those conducting Tribunal Interviews to have?

Lay Auditors - 1 training annually.

1 Training day to begin and occasional 'follow up' days.

Training Day and annual refresher.

**Question 5**

If a client finds the interview process difficult or indeed distressing - How is this managed? Do you have a system in place that helps the client deal with emotions that may come to the fore during the interview?

Nothing formal in place.  
Auditor to manage situation as best they can.

"Yes, considered in training."

\*Researchers note:  
No examples given as to how.

No system in place.  
Sympathy offered.



Question 6 Is the client able to make regular contact with the Tribunal to ascertain how their case might be progressing?	Diocese J Yes by phone or email. Full time administrator employed.	Diocese K Yes. Encouraged to make contact over any worries.	Diocese L Yes.
Question 7 Do you publish figures in the Diocese to make known publicly how many marriages have been 'successfully' annulled during the year?	No. Only send to Canon Law Society.	Published in Canon Law Society magazine.	To Diocese and Canon Law Society. Do not go to Laity.
Question 8 Is there a percentage (even a rough guide) available as to who is more likely to approach the Tribunal: More males than females/ more females than males?	2002 - 11 male, 19 female 2003 - 9 male, 11 female 2004 - 10 male, 13 female	About equal.	About equal.
Any other comments	None	None	None

**Question 1**

Do you have any kind of process in place whereby the client may 'feedback' to the Tribunal how she/he felt during the interview process?

**Diocese M**  
No

**Diocese N**  
No

**Diocese O**  
No

**Question 2**

Do you provide the client with any information as to how the Tribunal process works before their interview e.g: what facts are required, how the process works, length of time?

Yes.

\*Researchers note:  
No sample given.

Lots of Info.

\*Researchers note:  
No sample given.

Yes.

\*Researchers note:  
Sample enclosed of a very comprehensive booklet.

**Question 3**

Who conducts the Tribunal Interviews in your Diocese?

Judicial Vicar.

Married & Single lay people. Priest not involved.

Judicial Vicar but sometimes Lay Auditor or Parish Priest.

**Question 4**

What training if any would you expect those conducting Tribunal Interviews to have?

Lay Auditors trained by Judicial Vicar.

In service training.

Usually Professional Classes Doctors, Social Workers, etc who attend 1/2 day sessions.

**Question 5**

If a client finds the Interview process difficult or indeed distressing - How is this managed? Do you have a system in place that helps the client deal with emotions that may come to the fore during the interview?

Halt the Interview

It is not therapy but help to file a petition.

Take a break or in some cases refer to a Counsellor.

<b>Question 6</b> Is the client able to make regular contact with the Tribunal to ascertain how their case might be progressing?	<b>Diocese M</b> "Yes provided they do not become a pest."	<b>Diocese N</b> Progress report sent every 14/21 days.	<b>Diocese O</b> Yes by phone or email.
<b>Question 7</b> Do you publish figures in the Diocese to make known publicly how many marriages have been 'successfully' annulled during the year?	No.	Diocesan Directory & other.	No.
<b>Question 8</b> Is there a percentage (even a rough guide) available as to who is more likely to approach the Tribunal: more males than females/ more females than males?	By far the majority are female. At estimate about 75%.	60% Female 40% Male	2003 - 50% Male, 50% Female 2004 - 58% Male, 42% Female
<b>Any other comments</b>	None	None	None



**Question 1**

Do you have any kind of process in place whereby the client may 'feedback' to the Tribunal how she/he felt during the interview process?

**Diocese P**

No

**Question 2**

Do you provide the client with any information as to how the Tribunal process works before their interview e.g: what facts are required, how the process works, length of time?

Only to the Petitioner.

**Question 3**

Who conducts the Tribunal Interviews in your Diocese?

Judicial Vicar for Petitioners & Respondent. Lay Auditors for witnesses.

**Question 4**

What training, if any, would you expect those conducting Tribunal Interviews to have?

Yearly training days.

**Question 5**

If a client finds the interview process difficult or indeed distressing - How is this managed? Do you have a system in place that helps the client deal with emotions that may come to the fore during the interview?

Break offered, tissues at hand. Some referred to Marriage Care or other Counselling.

**Question 6**

Is the client able to make regular contact with the Tribunal to ascertain how their case might be progressing?

**Diocese P**

We try to keep client informed.

**Question 7**

Do you publish figures in the Diocese to make known publicly how many marriages have been 'successfully' annulled during the year?

No. Only available at National Level.

**Question 8**

Is there a percentage (even a rough guide) available as to who is more likely to approach the Tribunal: more males than females/ more females than males?

47% - Male  
53% - Female

# **APPENDIX J**



**Comments from the Lay Tribunal Auditors on the responses given to the  
Marriage Tribunal Questionnaire by Dioceses  
A - P**

**Thank you for agreeing to comment on the responses given to the questionnaire  
by the various Dioceses.**

**To retain Confidentiality you are not required to give your name or contact  
address. Your responses, however, will be used to 'critique' the answers given to  
the questionnaire.**

**Please answer the following:**

**Are you Female / Male (please circle)**

**Your Age.....**

**1) What are your initial thoughts on reading the various responses given to the  
questionnaire?**

**2) Do you feel there is adequate support available to those applying for an  
Annulment?**

**3) On reading the responses do you feel the 'Annulment Process' to be a fair one?**

**4) Do you think there is anything missing or something you would like to see taken account of?**

**5) Do you think the 'Annulment Process' is transparent?**

**6) Are you clear as a practicing Catholic as to what the 'Annulment Process' entails?**

**7) Do you feel it would be of any benefit to the 'worshipping' community to have statistics made available in each diocese as to how many 'Annulments' are granted say on a yearly basis or are you content not to know this information?**



# **APPENDIX K**

**Thoughts on the Responses Given to the Questions by  
Dioceses A - P**

**Thank you for agreeing to comment on the responses given to the questionnaire by the various Dioceses.**

**To retain confidentiality you are not required to give your name or contact address. Your responses, however, will be used to 'critique' the answers given to the questionnaire.**

**Please answer the following:**

**Are you Female / Male (please circle)**

**Your Age: 67 yrs**

**MALE A**

**1) What are your initial thoughts on reading the various responses given to the questionnaire?**

There appears to be a degree of consistency across the responses. However, this does not mean that procedures are necessarily all good. Comments from certain Dioceses give a little cause for concern - for example: "People who give us a great deal of trouble", "provided they don't become a pest", "we do not encourage contact for feedback". Such comments beg the question: 'Are annulments to be encouraged in appropriate circumstances or not, and if so what is each Tribunal doing to help, not only the process but also the persons involved?'

**2) Do you feel there is adequate support available to those applying for an Annulment?**

I think that the mechanics of carrying out interviews and obtaining statements are in place. I am not sure of whether other support is available to those applying for an Annulment. Presumably the local priest will have had some involvement and would also provide additional support. The Judicial vicar and Auditors can also provide some support but certainly an Auditor would only advise on the overall process, and should not get involved in counselling.

**3) On reading the responses do you feel the 'Annulment Process' to be a fair one?**

The Annulment Process should be seen to be a fair one across all dioceses. The responses indicate that perhaps it is not yet totally fair. Most Dioceses do not appear to think that training of people conducting interviews is important. I think that it is far from the case, particularly when the next question required a response on handling a sensitive or emotional interview. How does the Tribunal know the capabilities of its interviewers? Similarly, comments in Q1 above indicate to me that some Tribunals

may have lost sight of what they are there to do, and there seems to be little concept of customer service.

**4) Do you think there is anything missing or something you would like to see taken account of?**

a) There does need to be some indication of how Tribunals arrange finances. Do they need to be profitable, self - funding, or subsidised?

b) Bearing in mind the world we live in, how are interviewers able to identify themselves to petitioners and witnesses - should there be formal identity badges?

**5) Do you think the 'Annulment Process' is transparent?**

Probably yes, but more may need to be done in the way of communication and contacts with petitioners and witnesses to ensure that they also believe it is a transparent process.

**6) Are you clear as a practicing Catholic as to what the 'Annulment Process' entails?**

Only by working within the Tribunal as an Auditor. I did not have much idea before that.

**7) Do you feel it would be of any benefit to the 'worshipping' community to have statistics made available in each diocese as to how many 'Annulments' are granted, say on a yearly basis, or are you content not to know this information?**

Generally the information might be helpful to those working for the Tribunal - giving an indication of workload etc. but probably not to the community as a whole. On the other hand, published statistics may actively encourage the few people who may be thinking of applying for an annulment, to actually do so.



**Thoughts on the Responses Given to the Questions by  
Dioceses A - P**

**Thank you for agreeing to comment on the responses given to the questionnaire by the various Dioceses.**

**To retain confidentiality you are not required to give your name or contact address. Your responses, however, will be used to 'critique' the answers given to the questionnaire.**

**Please answer the following:**

**Are you Female / Male (please circle)**

**Your Age: 70**

**MALE B**

**1) What are your initial thoughts on reading the various responses given to the questionnaire?**

The process is still as bad as it was 25 years ago.

**2) Do you feel there is adequate support available to those applying for an Annulment?**

No - it appears that those applying for Annulment are seen to be 'guilty' - experience has shown that the opposite is true! Efforts have been made to actively discourage people from going through with the process. "Support" / "Annulment" - poles apart!

**3) On reading the responses do you feel the 'Annulment Process' to be a fair one?**

No! Women should not have to be interviewed by men.

**4) Do you think there is anything missing or something you would like to see taken account of?**

Feedback - How many petitioners don't go through with the process and why?

**5) Do you think the 'Annulment Process' is transparent?**

No. Keep all the helpful information hidden from those who may need it, probably because full disclosure would encourage a stampede for annulments - in the eyes of mother Church!

**6) Are you clear as a practicing Catholic as to what the 'Annulment Process' entails?**

Yes - but only to find out the hard way - experience. Emotional rape describes it accurately.

**7) Do you feel it would be of any benefit to the 'worshipping' community to have statistics made available in each diocese as to how many 'Annulments' are granted, say on a yearly basis, or are you content not to know this information?**

The more information the better:

- How long is the process?
- How do Dioceses compare?
- Reasons for Annulment.
- Are some more likely to win annulments than others?

**Thoughts on the Responses Given to the Questions by  
Dioceses A - P**

**Thank you for agreeing to comment on the responses given to the questionnaire by the various Dioceses.**

**To retain confidentiality you are not required to give your name or contact address. Your responses, however, will be used to 'critique' the answers given to the questionnaire.**

**Please answer the following:**

**Are you Female / Male (please circle)**

**Your Age: 71**

**FEMALE C**

**1) What are your initial thoughts on reading the various responses given to the questionnaire?**

Huge gaps in some areas - e.g: Feedback process, help for distressed, publishing of annulment figures.

**2) Do you feel there is adequate support available to those applying for an Annulment?**

I have supported people (mainly women) through the 'ordeal' and it has always seemed to me to be very painful and lacking in sensitivity - too intrusive.

**3) On reading the responses do you feel the 'Annulment Process' to be a fair one?**

There seems to be a fairly good process in place but I wonder (again, from personal contact) if it is all too rigid and incisive.

**4) Do you think there is anything missing or something you would like to be taken account of?**

Certainly more access to feedback and a general openness to what it is all about - my impression is that it is kept very quiet!! And VERY LONG

**5) Do you think the 'Annulment Process' is transparent?**

Not really - I'm sure if you did a survey among Church going Catholics you would find it is all a bit of a mystery (the 6<sup>th</sup> Sorrowful mystery!!)



**6) Are you clear as a practicing Catholic as to what the 'Annulment Process' entails?**

No very unclear so I suppose I shouldn't be so judgemental but perhaps someone who does know could occasionally come round parishes and talk at Mass like they do for the mission Appeals or the Adoption Society?

**7) Do you feel it would be of any benefit to the 'worshipping' community to have statistics made available in each diocese as to how many 'Annulments' are granted, say on a yearly basis, or are you content not to know this information?**

I definitely think more clarity and transparency would be very helpful on a regular basis. What's all the secrecy about? Afraid of being inundated?

**Thoughts on the Responses Given to the Questions by  
Dioceses A - P**

**Thank you for agreeing to comment on the responses given to the questionnaire by the various Dioceses.**

**To retain confidentiality you are not required to give your name or contact address. Your responses, however, will be used to 'critique' the answers given to the questionnaire.**

**Please answer the following:**

**Are you Female / Male (please circle)**

**Your Age: 55**

**FEMALE D**

**1) What are your initial thoughts on reading the various responses given to the questionnaire?**

That the 'annulment process' is as bad as I thought it might be. There seems to be very little preparatory material, little support and people are made to feel a nuisance if they raise any queries during the process.

**2) Do you feel there is adequate support available to those applying for an Annulment?**

Definitely not. Those applying for an annulment must feel that they are having to defend themselves in a court of law (being charged guilty) rather than being supported through a very emotional and difficult situation. There is a general lack of trained counsellors for people already traumatised.

**3) On reading the responses do you feel the 'Annulment Process' to be a fair one?**

No. If the majority of petitioners are women, why are they usually interviewed by a male Judicial Vicar?

If most annulments are requested so the person can remarry and receive Holy Communion, why does the petitioner have to annul their first marriage (a sacrament) in order to receive another sacrament (the Eucharist)?

**4) Do you think there is anything missing or something you would like to see taken account of?**

I would like to see some feedback from petitioners.

**5) Do you think the 'Annulment Process' is transparent?**

No. I think information about the availability and the process of annulment is kept hidden in fear that more people would apply. I think it is deliberately kept hidden and foreboding. If it was transparent, more practicing Catholics would understand the grounds for annulment, and the number of annulments and the length of time for the process would be publicized.

**6) Are you clear as a practicing Catholic as to what the 'Annulment Process' entails?**

As a practicing Catholic I have never seen any information about the annulment process available in any parish. I have a friend who began the process when her husband left her for another woman, but she could not cope with witnesses being interviewed so gave up the process.

**7) Do you feel it would be of any benefit to the 'worshipping' community to have statistics made available in each diocese as to how many 'Annulments' are granted, say on a yearly basis, or are you content not to know this information?**

I believe in transparency and therefore I think statistics should be available:

- How many annulments are requested?
- How long the process takes?
- How many were granted?

Names remaining confidential, of course.



**Thoughts on the Responses Given to the Questions by  
Dioceses A - P**

**Thank you for agreeing to comment on the responses given to the questionnaire by the various Dioceses.**

**To retain confidentiality you are not required to give your name or contact address. Your responses, however, will be used to 'critique' the answers given to the questionnaire.**

**Please answer the following:**

**Are you Female / Male (please circle)**

**Your Age: 47**

**FEMALE**

**1) What are your initial thoughts on reading the various responses given to the questionnaire?**

There seems to be no uniform format for each diocese to follow.

**2) Do you feel there is adequate support available to those applying for an Annulment?**

Yes, on a judicial / matter of fact basis.

It is unclear as to how much emotional support is offered, given or requested - this could be seen as inadequate.

**3) On reading the responses do you feel the 'Annulment Process' to be a fair one?**

I feel it is fair with regards to making a judgement and following Canon Law. It does not seem fair that there is not absolute uniformity / code of practice throughout the country.

**4) Do you think there is anything missing or something you would like to see taken account of?**

To take account of the fact that this is a process only within the Catholic Faith. Some instruction, leading to a better understanding, of why, on religious grounds, this process exists could be beneficial to petitioners and practicing Catholics.

**5) Do you think the 'Annulment Process' is transparent?**

I think it is transparent to those on the 'inside' but very foggy to those outside the process.

The 'Annulment Process' could be likened to any judicial process; it is wreathed in mystery and 'make believe'. Only those experiencing the process see it more clearly and have a real understanding of it.

**6) Are you clear as a practicing Catholic as to what the 'Annulment Process' entails?**

No. I have a small understanding of it as an auditor but further than that I wouldn't expect to understand the Canon Law involved etc.

**7) Do you feel it would be of any benefit to the 'worshipping' community to have statistics made available in each diocese as to how many 'Annulments' are granted, say on a yearly basis, or are you content not to know this information?**

I am content not to know this information - I don't know who would benefit from the publishing of statistics except, perhaps, those thinking of applying. It would encourage them to see that the 'Annulment Process' does work; people do often say it is not worth applying because annulments are never granted!

**Thoughts on the Responses Given to the Questions by  
Dioceses A - P**

**Thank you for agreeing to comment on the responses given to the questionnaire by the various Dioceses.**

**To retain confidentiality you are not required to give your name or contact address. Your responses, however, will be used to 'critique' the answers given to the questionnaire.**

**Please answer the following:**

**Are you Female / Male (please circle)**

**Your Age: 50 & 49**

**FEMALE & MALE - F**

**1) What are your initial thoughts on reading the various responses given to the questionnaire?**

We were surprised at the lack of consistency in how different dioceses deal with the annulment process.

Also surprised at the number of dioceses using judicial vicar or priests to conduct petitioner interviews.

Amazed that only one diocese has a formal process for obtaining feedback on clients about the annulment process itself.

The lack of ongoing training provided to those conducting the interviews was rather alarming and the fact there is a lack of consistency amongst the different dioceses.

Our personal experience is that we did have initial training, as well as support from experienced lay auditors in our parish. We would welcome annual training/study days - an inter-diocesan training day would be useful, to share good practice and ideas.

We think that, even amongst Catholics, the annulment process is surrounded in mystique and there is a great deal of misinformation and misunderstanding about the process and how it operates.

**2) Do you feel there is adequate support available to those applying for an Annulment?**

This obviously varies between dioceses, in terms of the amount of type of information. If information is given verbally, is it consistent?

Is there consistency between the written information produced by different dioceses? Is this not something that could be done centrally, to avoid each diocese having to re-invent the wheel?

There is an argument for producing clear information on why the process is needed and how the process actually works, with the various stages. A Frequently Asked Questions format could also be used as a simple way of addressing the issues that



petitioners want to know about. A common question is whether annulling a marriage will mean any children born during that marriage will be termed illegitimate.

For some petitioners or respondents the interview process can be a very difficult one that needs to be handled carefully. We were pleased to see that some counselling was available, but only three dioceses mentioned this, and only one specifically referred to Marriage Care. It is important that those conducting the interview are aware that counselling support is available and can be mentioned to clients if needed.

We liked the idea, undertaken by one diocese, of providing regular progress reports to the client. This means they are aware of what is happening and the clients themselves aren't having to initiate this. We also think that if the process and ideas of timescale were laid out clearly at the outset, there would probably be fewer requests from the client for updates anyway.

**3) On reading the responses do you feel the 'Annulment Process' to be a fair one?**

We feel that the use of judicial vicars or parish priests to conduct interviews (who are obviously male clergy) may seem intimidating to female petitioners, who might feel more comfortable talking about what are often very intimate issues, to a female member of the laity. It is also helpful if those conducting interviews have personal experience of marriage.

We feel that it is important for the client to have the opportunity to feedback their views on the process, both what worked well and what could be done more effectively. This information could then feed into the induction and ongoing training of those undertaking annulment interviews.

**4) Do you think there is anything missing or something you would like to see taken account of?**

An area that has not been researched in this questionnaire is the issue of what, if any, understanding the witnesses have about the annulment process. We have on occasions found witnesses to be rather antagonistic, this is clearly due to their lack of understanding about the process. This is particularly true of those who are not Catholics. Perhaps a simplified or shortened version of the annulment process information could be made available to them.

Another question is whether (or how) a petitioner can appeal against an annulment decision. This is an area where some petitioners are unclear and, as lay auditors, it is not an area where we feel knowledgeable.

**5) Do you think the 'Annulment Process' is transparent?**

No, neither to the petitioner nor to the wider Catholic community.

**6) Are you clear as a practicing Catholic as to what the 'Annulment Process' entails?**

Yes.

**7) Do you feel it would be of any benefit to the 'worshipping' community to have statistics made available in each diocese as to how many 'Annulments' are granted, say on a yearly basis, or are you content not to know this information?**

We were surprised how few dioceses publish statistics on the number of successful annulments.

If figures were produced, they would need to be clearly set in context to aid understanding. There would also need to be more information readily available about the annulment process, why it is there and how it works. Producing statistical information would be one way of making the process more transparent as would clearly setting out how the process works.

#### **8) Other comments**

We were rather disappointed with the tone of responses given to the questionnaire by the Diocesan Tribunals. They give the impression that they saw the clients as a nuisance and we didn't feel that they were acting in the best interest of the client.

# **APPENDIX L**



Participant A Interview  
October 2006

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3 **Note:** This participant has come along to share her Marriage Tribunal experience with her twin sister who has also been interviewed as a witness by the tribunal. We refer to participant A's sister as participant L. It is participant L who speaks first at the interview as participant A is quite tearful even before the interview begins. It is participant A that is seeking the Annulment from the Church.

4 **Researcher:** Thank you for both agreeing to be interviewed on your experience with the Catholic Marriage Tribunal. I gathered from speaking to you on the phone that your experience wasn't a very pleasant one.

5 **Participant L:** No it wasn't. I did not make a protest at the time because I was afraid that it might affect my sister's case in a negative way.

Negative Emotion/Perception  
Apprehension



6 **Researcher:** Right.

7 **Participant L:** I was a bit taken aback with the way it was conducted.

Unexpected

8 **Participant A:** I would suggest that a lot of witnesses might act like that they don't speak out because it might upset the apple cart.

Apprehension

9 **Participant L:** When the tribunal interviewer telephoned to make an appointment to see me she introduced herself on the telephone but when she came to my front door she didn't introduce herself, she introduced the nun who came with her.

Unexpected





10 **Researcher:** Right.

11 **Participant A:** Which you weren't expecting.

Unexpected

12 **Participant L:** Well she did warn me over the phone.

13 **Researcher:** Was she dressed like a nun? With a veil and so on?

14 **Participant L:** No. I wouldn't have been quite so easy about that. I had cleaned up and arranged the conservatory with chairs that you could move around so you know I thought I'd sit there and if someone was observing they could sit there (note: client L illustrates chair layout at this point). She took one look at that and said "Oh no! This won't do! I need a table!" She was walking around with this massive great typewriter thing and she says "Oh look we'll sit here!" and she says "You sit there and you sit there!" I was sat at the dining table while she was sat opposite with this huge great typewriter typing away, which was really off putting.

15 **Researcher:** Mmm.....What age were they, roughly, the interviewer and....

16 **Participant L:** I would say the interviewer would be mid - 70's

Perception of Process and Interview(er)

Perception of Process and Interview(er)

Negative Emotion/Perception

Perception of Process and Interview(er)



17 **Researcher:** Right.

18 **Participant L:** I would say quite an old person. And she was supposed to be showing the nun how to do it.

Perception of Process and Interview(er)

19 **Researcher:** Right.

20 **Participant L:** I mean they started asking me the questions and I almost forgot, I had to sign a declaration with my hand on the Bible to say that I wouldn't disclose any of the questions asked.

Unexpected

21 **Researcher:** Mmm.

22 **Participant L:** And I got really upset at one stage. I mean some of the questions are really quite personal. You know they were talking about Dad at one stage and you know it really brings it all back and I felt quite upset about the whole situation , for A... anyway.

Effect of process/life situation on Participants life situation Negative Emotion/Perception

23 **Researcher:** It's a good thing that you and your sister seem to be close because some brothers and sisters - how can I put it - you don't want to know their private life.

24 **Participant L:** Yes, definitely I found it very intrusive.

Unexpected Intrusive? Negative Emotion/Perception

25 **Participant A:** But I had been through the same experience of Dad's

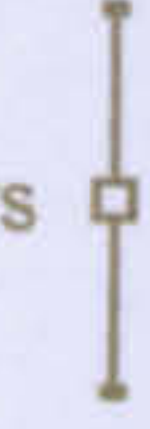
Intrusive?



Intrusive?  
Negative Emotion/Perception



Effect of process/life situation on others



Negative Emotion/Perception  
Perception of Process and Interview



Unexpected



Perception of Process and Interview(er)



Effect of process/life situation on  
Negative Emotion/Perception



death as L... had at the same age and we'd experienced it together and she had to go through material that was as personal and hurtful (client A very tearful at this point) as that because it was a very hurtful time in our lives.

26 **Participant L:** Yes, its just how its affected both of us really. I worked out quite a lot about it anyway.

27 **Researcher:** Okay.

28 **Participant L:** Anyway, so I was crying a bit and then the nun started putting her arm out towards me and I thought that's not the right thing to be doing to me - there you go - she stopped me crying really. But they asked lots of questions, lots of unexpected questions.

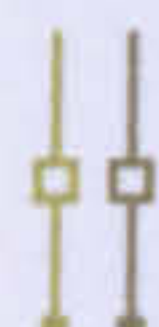
29 **Participant A:** After the interview they walked out into the garden didn't they?

30 **Participant L:** Oh, right, this is the second time they came back. Everytime I started talking about things she'd say: "Oh, I didn't get that, could you repeat that?" (Client L sighs) or "Oh what did you say?" Just so she could type at her speed and I simply lost track of what I was saying and thinking.

31 **Participant A:** And T...our brother said the same thing about his



Effect of process/life situation on  
Negative Emotion/Perception



interview that it was annoying. He said that at the most sensitive moments, things like Dad's death, they made him stop. I mean its all sensitive stuff! Asking him to stop while she typed it up. I don't know why you have to type everything up verbatim.

Perception of Process and Interview(er)



32 **Participant L:** Why couldn't it have been recorded like this for example and typed up later?

Perception of Process and Interview(er)



33 **Researcher:** It does seem a rather strange way of interviewing.

Suprise  
Negative Emotion/Perception



34 **Participant L:** Oh I was quite taken aback by it all but I was feeling upset by it anyway so I didn't feel in any position to challenge that.

Effect of process/life situation on others



35 **Researcher:** And the questions - with all respect to you A... - were the questions in your opinion intrusive? You don't have to answer this.

36 **Participant L:** I gathered they were questions that A... had answered and they were asking me questions based on some of A... answers and same sort of questions that A had had.

37 **Researcher:** And were they disclosing what A.. had said?

38 **Participant L:** No.



39 **Researcher:** No. Right.

40 **Participant L:** But, but in a way I could work it out. I felt at times that she was leading me a bit. "Did you mean this?" "Did you mean that?"

41 **Researcher:** On speaking to A.. alone before this interview of us together, A mentioned an incident that took place in the garden. Can you remember what that was?

42 **Participant L:** That was the second time.

43 **Researcher:** A... were you present the second time?

44 **Participant A:** No.

45 **Participant L:** So, having been upset and having answered all these questions which took sort of an hour or so.....

46 **Researcher:** Was T...(brother) present for this?

47 **Participant L:** No he was interviewed separately.

48 **Researcher:** Right. Sorry for stopping you.

Perception of Process and Interview(er)

Negative Emotion/Perception



Perception of Process and Interview(er) □  
 Negative Emotion/Perception □  
 Negative Emotion/Perception □  
 Feelings of isolation □  
 Negative Emotion/Perception □

49 **Participant L:** As she was going out she said "I hope I haven't upset you too much" and when she'd gone out I turned round and just burst into tears and B.. (husband) sort of comforted me and I thought phew that was awful! And the most awful thing about it was that I couldn't talk to anyone about it. So it really upset me, it upset me for two weeks really, it was going around in my head.

Effect of process/life situation on others □

50 **Participant A:** That happened during the holiday didn't it while I was away and you didn't even tell me - did you?

51 **Participant L:** I didn't tell you because I didn't want to upset you on holiday. I didn't want you to know it had even occurred.

Actions taken by Participant □  
 Effect of process/life situation on □

52 **Participant A:** Right.

Effect of process/life situation on □  
 Negative Emotion/Perception □

53 **Participant L:** I can't tell you what they said because.....(pauses & tearful)

54 **Participant A:** Yes, I know.

Feelings of isolation □

Negative Emotion/Perception □

55 **Participant L:** I couldn't talk to anybody and for them not to get back to me knowing that I was really upset even just a phone call to say are you alright today L...? Something like that would have been something!



56 **Researcher:** So they didn't give you any place to go or anyone to talk to?

57 **Participant L:** No, no. I couldn't talk to anybody I kept thinking should I go and talk to G...(note: her parish priest), shall I go and talk to... who can I talk to? I didn't feel I could talk to anyone not even my husband who had seen me upset. I just thought I can't tell you anything about it. It was just so difficult.

Feelings of isolation

58 **Researcher:** So how did the next (interview) one go then?

59 **Participant L:** Well, two weeks down the line they came back for me to read through what she'd typed. This was supposed to be verbatim of what I had said but there were so many mistakes. I sat in the dining room and they went and sat out through the conservatory into the garden and they were talking about the report they would have to make on me. Whether they thought I had said the truth or not. I did say the truth so this was a bit bad really.

Unexpected

Perception of Process and Interview(er)

Suprise

60 **Researcher:** Yes it seems so.

61 **Participant L:** Then she commented on the fact that I was taking my time. She said that: "You don't have to correct every single grammar mistake!" I thought well if I hadn't it would not have read properly, the sense would be wrong. She got things completely the wrong way round

Perception of Process and Interview(er)

Suprise



Suprise

like A.. was in Nottingham and I was in Leeds. (Researchers note: A.. lived in Leeds, L in Nottingham)

62 **Participant A:** They are important things!

63 **Participant L:** Then I signed what I had corrected and I have since thought what if she types that incorrectly again and I have signed it. So there is that little doubt whether she's....whether what I have signed is exactly what I want to put down, because I added a few things and altered a few things.

Negative Emotion/Perception

64 **Participant A:** This whole thing is quite traumatic. You know (pause) .....I sat at Mass thinking what am I doing, you know, why am I here (pause).....because you know (pause).....this is the church I have belonged to for so long (pause).....how can they be like this? How can they be so unprofessional? It really upsets me as to the amateur way they go about it under the guise of this professional (pause).....no its not even professional (pause).....its this legal umbrella but underneath it all there's just these amateur people. There's a seventy five year old lady there, I mean my first experience of it all was with this woman in her seventies! They have no background and here is this woman training somebody else to do it but in the wrong way. They have no counselling skills, there is no easing off at the end of the interview you know where you can have some time to get yourself sorted out, its just right off we go and we are not going to speak

Religious Influence - positive/negative

Perception of Process and Interview



Perception of Process and Interview  
Feelings of isolation

to you! Everything goes quiet now. I mean I have heard nothing! L... was interviewed during the summer holidays and my brother was as well and not a dickie bird! I've sent emails that haven't been answered, I've rung, I mean I have been told now that the case is on a monsignor's desk and he is on holiday! I don't know whether he has returned or not! I asked for information about what happens next, its like the doors closed! I mean I have opened my heart, I've upset my sister, I've upset my brother but nothing absolutely nothing, (client A very tearful at this point) there's no time limit to it, there's no hope!

Negative Emotion/Perception  
Effect of process/life situation on

65 **Researcher:** From what you are saying you seem to have found the process very upsetting so far. The lack of communication must be very frustrating for you. I can't really say that I know much about how the process is administered once you have been interviewed and witness statements gathered. I have no idea for example about the statistics as to how many marriages are annulled yearly in this diocese or indeed in any other. I don't think they publish statistics for the general public.

Perception of Process and Interview  
Guilt

66 **Participant A:** No! Because it's felt to be like some dirty little act you go through. You get things through the back door (client still very tearful) and I don't want it to be like that. I want it to be open. That's why I have (very tearful) gone through this and it hasn't made me feel any better. My brother was brought up catholic but he lapsed and after being interviewed as a witness for my annulment application he said "its just confirmed all

Negative Emotion/Perception

Effect of process/life situation on



my thoughts, it has made me feel that I made the right decision to give up on it.” Now I think that’s such a shame, really it is so sad.

67 **Participant L:** A poor reflection on the Church isn’t it?

68 **Researcher:** I’m afraid it is. I find it hard to disagree with the experience you have had.

69 **Participantt A:** But why are we continuing to allow people to interview..... (pause) ....to interview people who are vulnerable, and you know.....(pause).. feeling sensitive about everything you are saying, why are we allowing people who haven’t got sufficient training to interview? Is it money? Is it lack of people volunteering to do it?

70 **Participant L:** Why not employ people like Marriage Care to do it who don’t have a basic counselling qualification but they do have counselling skills and they operate within marriage settings and things?

71 **Participant A:** I mean people in my situation, I would willingly pay for someone to do it properly. I mean people who I care for to be treated in a proper way.

72 **Researcher:** In my opinion some support should be made available for emotions that arise when interviewing about such sensitive material.

Effect of process/life situation on  
Negative Emotion/Perception

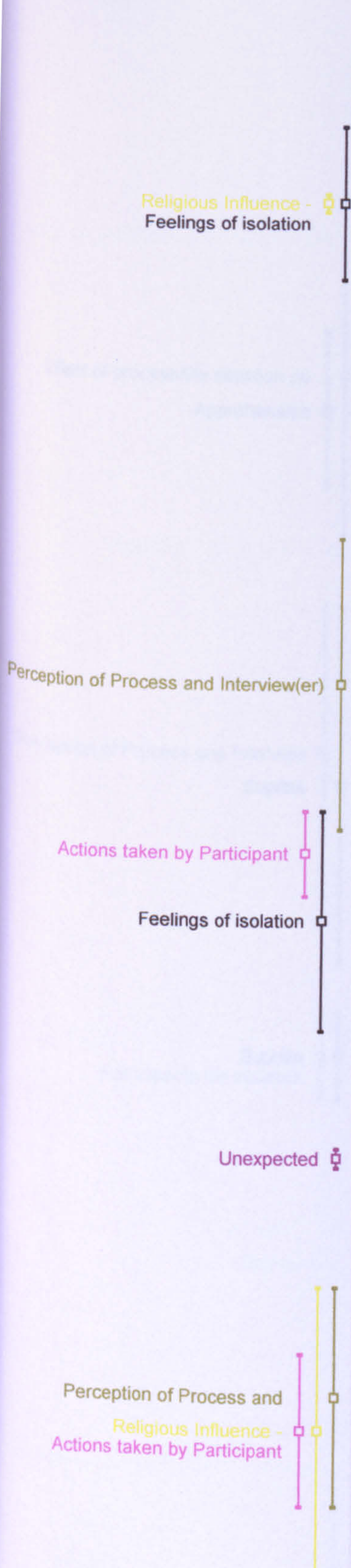
Perception of Process and Interview  
Religious Influence -

Perception of Process and Interview  
Suprise

Suprise

Perception of Process and Interview(er)





73 **Participant A:** I feel that for the people interviewed be it myself or my witnesses there was no support at all in this diocese. If there is I certainly wasn't directed anywhere.

74 **Researcher:** Right.

75 **Participant A:** I get the impression with our Tribunal that the people in control have been in control a long time and they do not want to relinquish control because they have always had it! They just have the power. I get the impression its very old fashioned in its methods and ways of communicating - I have rung and had no reply. I have emailed and nothing and when I did ask if they had received my emails to see how my case was progressing she said: "Oh well we seem to have something wrong with our emails, the system may be up and running next week."

76 **Participant L:** It all seems so very, very secretive.

77 **Participant A:** Well they give us an email address in the Diocesan Year Book and nothing! I have sent two emails, written down what I wanted to ask and I've had no reply, not even an acknowledgement that they will be dealt with!

78 **Researcher:** Right. Well as I see it you are within your rights to write to



the Bishop and respectfully express your experience.

79 **Participant L:** Well when my sister hopefully gets her annulment then I am going to write to the Bishop and complain about the treatment. I had made this decision some time ago. At the moment rightly or wrongly I have this fear of jeopardizing my sister's chances of obtaining an annulment.

80 **Participant A:** I don't understand how people in a profession get away without being assessed and reassessed over the years? Why aren't they going on courses and updating their people skills? They should update their knowledge on how to treat people properly - how can this be allowed to carry on? It happens to teachers, nurses, doctors.....

81 **Participant L:** As a nurse I have to go on courses every year and be assessed!

82 **Researcher:** I am afraid I can't answer this as it is something I too would expect to happen when they are dealing with people and with such emotive material.

83 **Participant A:** People in positions of authority that make decisions about other people's lives - it's not fair is it?

Effect of process/life situation on  
Apprehension

Perception of Process and Interview  
Suprise

Suprise  
Participants life situation

Negative Emotion/Perception





84 **Participant L:** It's the same for people they choose to conduct the interviews some of them are nuns, spinsters, how are they chosen and assessed? Doing the interviews for them could be titilation, hearing about the nitty-gritty of someone's marriage about which they have no experience.

85 **Participant A:** Also its very insensitive when the person who first conducted my interview was someone I saw every single week at Sunday Mass, who then knew some of the most intimate details about my life and you know (pause) playing the organ and looked across at me - that's the most insensitive thing I can imagine. Do they not consider if the interviewer is suitable for the client or look at geographical issues? I would wish for anonimity.

86 **Participant L:** Well that should be at the heart of the process really.

87 **Participant A:** Well it shocked me really when this interviewer came to the door because I immediately thought - I know you, I see you every Sunday at Mass!

88 **Participant L:** Well you should have said: "I'm sorry I don't want you, I'll have someone else!"

89 **Participant A:** But you can't in the position you are in, you can't!



90 **Researcher:** Maybe you just don't think quickly or clearly enough at the time.

91 **Participant A:** Well there's a fear that any action might jeopardize the case. In your experience Bill what is the time scale for my case now having got all this evidence sitting on their desks since early September and its now late August?

92 **Researcher:** Well all I know is that when they have made a decision it is then sent to Westminster to ratify their decision. But I am sure a decision will be made on your case in due course.

93 **Participant A:** Do they sit on a regular basis as a Tribunal? (Sigh) There are so many questions unanswered that I feel I need to ask and get answers for.

94 **Researcher:** Well I am afraid that you are asking me questions that I don't have the answers for.

95 **Participant A:** Really! You don't even know details of how it all works!

96 **Researcher:** Well you have actually told me more this evening about how it works than I know, things like them coming with the typewriter, how

Apprehension

Perception of Process and Interview

Feelings of isolation

Perception of Process and Interview

Suprise



they conduct interviews with witnesses and so on.

97 **Participant L:** I find it appalling that it all seems hidden.

98 **Researcher:** Well I thought they usually wrote to you within about six weeks to say that you either have a case or not. Have you received such a letter?

99 **Participant A:** I have received absolutely nothing!

100 **Participant L:** Well Tom my brother asked how long will this take and the interviewer raised her eyes and said: "Well at least two years!" So she actually gave a time scale.

101 **Participant A:** Well that was pretty bad that she did that because she really had no idea in my opinion. I think she just made that up!

102 **Researcher:** I think she was really out of order to say that, after all time scale depends on the actions of the Tribunal.

103 **Participant A:** Well believe me we fully intend to write to the Bishop about all of this because it is absolutely dire! I saw a lot of discussions that went on prior to the Diocesan Assembly and this whole Marriage thing was a big issue and it wasn't covered sufficiently in the Assembly

Perception of Process and Interview(er)

Suprise Perception of Process and Interview

Effect of process/life situation on Perception of Process and Interview

Suprise Perception of Process and Interview

Actions taken by Participant Perception of Process and Interview(er)

Religious Influence -



Religious Influence -  
Suprise

and I certainly haven't seen any mention of it in the Diocesan Plan. I intend to feed back on that believe you me!

104 **Researcher:** Well I think we are coming to an end with our sharing and there is not a lot more we can say at present. You A... are in the waiting stage and I think it would be useful for you to document your experiences of the process and hopefully use them constructively by eventually writing in to the people concerned.

105 **Participant A:** Well what concerns me is that I've been told that Monsignor X will deal with all this when he returns from his holiday but is he then going to wait six weeks before he writes back to me and anything gets done! I feel at the moment with my case we are talking about months and months, maybe even years!

Perception of Process and Interview(er)  
Feelings of isolation

106 **Researcher:** Well maybe you have to be one of those people who challenge a system and keep on asking for an update on your case.

107 **Participant A:** It's so terribly hard. The lack of information is appalling! I am so annoyed that Parish Priests know so very little about the process when its underway. I feel the questions they are asking should be in the hands of a very skilled communicator who could perhaps ask intrusive style questions but in a more sensitive way and style. Someone who could perhaps manage to get information by recording a conversation and then

Negative Emotion/Perception  
Intrusive?



Intrusive? □

transcribing it so that it is less intrusive than a check list type of interview where you have to wait and watch every word being written down before your very eyes. Questions and answers are written down verbatim and in long hand. My goodness, it took four and a half hours to take my statement because it was all taken in long hand.

108 **Researcher:** Goodness me!

109 **Participant L:** With my position in the Health Service we gather information by just communicating with people following a set of guidelines.

110 **Participant A:** Well someone I know used to be an interviewer and he has stopped doing it for the Tribunal because he said in his opinion it was such an unhelpful exercise. He hated being the interviewer having to ask these questions in that particular format.

111 **Researcher:** Right. So you are saying there are better ways of gathering the information?

112 **Participant L:** You can get information in far more sensitive ways in my experience.

Intrusive? □

113 **Participant A:** Well I am going to keep trying, ringing and writing to

Actions taken by Participant □



Actions taken by Participant  
Negative Emotion/Perception

Intrusive?

get updates because I am just not happy. I need to know, I am one of those people who needs to know what's going to happen so I can try and be in control of at least some of it. I feel at present that someone else has taken control of my life. I want to know what they are doing with this information I have given.

114 **Researcher:** Well I think this is a good point to end. Thank you both for giving of your time and if I can help you in any way then please get back in touch and I wish you well with your interview.

115 **Participant A:**

116 **Participant L:** Yes it has. Thank you Bill for seeing us.



**Participant B Interview  
November 2007**

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3 **Notes:** Participant B is female and in her late forties. She is a Catholic but describes herself as lapsed. Her story is of interest in that she divorced her husband when she was in her early twenties (she married very young - her words) because he was a hardened criminal and was sent to prison for a very serious crime. She has been with her present partner for over twenty years and he has brought up her three children as though they were his own. They have had no children together. Participant B applied for an Annulment because her partner wants to become a Catholic. They have been married in a registry office but her partner wants them to be married in Church now that he is to become Catholic. Participant B is supportive of this and really desires this too.

4 Of her own admission Participant B is a very 'nervy' and quiet person although very pleasant. The researcher knows the client, although not very well, as he referred her for interview to the marriage tribunal. This is not a 'rigid' question and answer interview it takes the form of a conversation owing to the nervousness of the participant. The participant approached the researcher to ask if she could share her experience of the interview she had to start her Annulment process. Owing to her reserved personality and her nerves it is not a particularly lengthy encounter.

5 **Researcher:** Hi B.... thank you for agreeing to meet at this time. I know evenings are difficult for you. As you requested we won't go on for ages as I know you have to get up for work early tomorrow. (participant laughs nervously and coughs) So you have now completed the initial interviews - did you have two interviews or did it spread out over three?

6 **Participant:** (participant is looking at the floor) Well I didn't really know what to expect when I turned up for interview (coughs) but almost as soon as I sat down the interviewer told me that she would need to see me for approximately nine hours to gather information and these sessions would take place in three

Unexpected |

Unexpected |



Unexpected □

interviews.

7 **Researcher:** How did you feel about that, did it come as a surprise?

Suprise □

8 **Participant:** Well yes it did really. I didn't know what to think or expect and I was really nervous when I turned up in fact I had been worrying about it for days and I had a really upset tummy which I think was nerves. The first interview took two and a half hours and it was a lady who interviewed me. She asked me to give details about my early childhood. I was very confused and I quickly became scared. This lady really did not set me at ease in fact she had a really severe way about her from the very start. I went home after the interview it was quite late about 9:30pm and I said nothing to P...(her current partner). I would say I was tired, confused and scared my head was really fuzzy with it all.

Apprehension □  
Physical sensations □

Negative Emotion/Perception □

Perception of Process and Interview(er) □

Effect of process/life situation on others □  
Physical sensations □

Physical sensations □

9 **Researcher:** So it wasn't a particularly good experience to start with?

10 **Participant:** (Still looking down and floor and moving about nervously in the chair) No it wasn't but the second interview was worse! It was absolutely horrendous! (tearful) The lady asked me to remember so many details from past years and very painful ones things I wouldn't choose to share with my current partner or even with a priest. They were things that most people would put to

Perception of Process and Interview(er) □

Negative Emotion/Perception □

Intrusive? □

Negative Emotion/Perception □



Negative Emotion/Perception

Perception of Process and Interview(er)

the back of their minds. I remember thinking why is this necessary?

11 **Researcher:** I'm sorry you found it so unpleasant.

12 **Participant:** Well it's not your fault. I asked you to arrange an interview for me to start the Annulment thing off. I mean she asked me about witnesses to my first marriage at the very beginning - I mean for goodness sake we are talking almost 31 years ago. I was 17 at the time of that marriage and pregnant. I was married within 7 months of telling my mother I was having a baby. That was what you did in those days wasn't it?

Perception of Process and Interview(er)

Suprise

Participants life situation

13 **Researcher:** Yes it was in a lot of cases especially in the Catholic faith.

14 **Participant:** Well anyway she asked me things like I've said that I would never tell you or P....(her partner). After the second interview I was totally drained and I went home sobbing. I tried hard to be brave in front of P... because he wants to become a Catholic and I thought well if he sees this interview thing as being part of the Catholic Church it might put him off. You see P... is a very gentle person and I didn't want him to hurt for me. I didn't share any of it with P... and when he asked me why I had been crying I just told him that it was tears of tiredness that I had had a long day or something like that. I just wanted to forget the whole

Intrusive?

Physical sensations

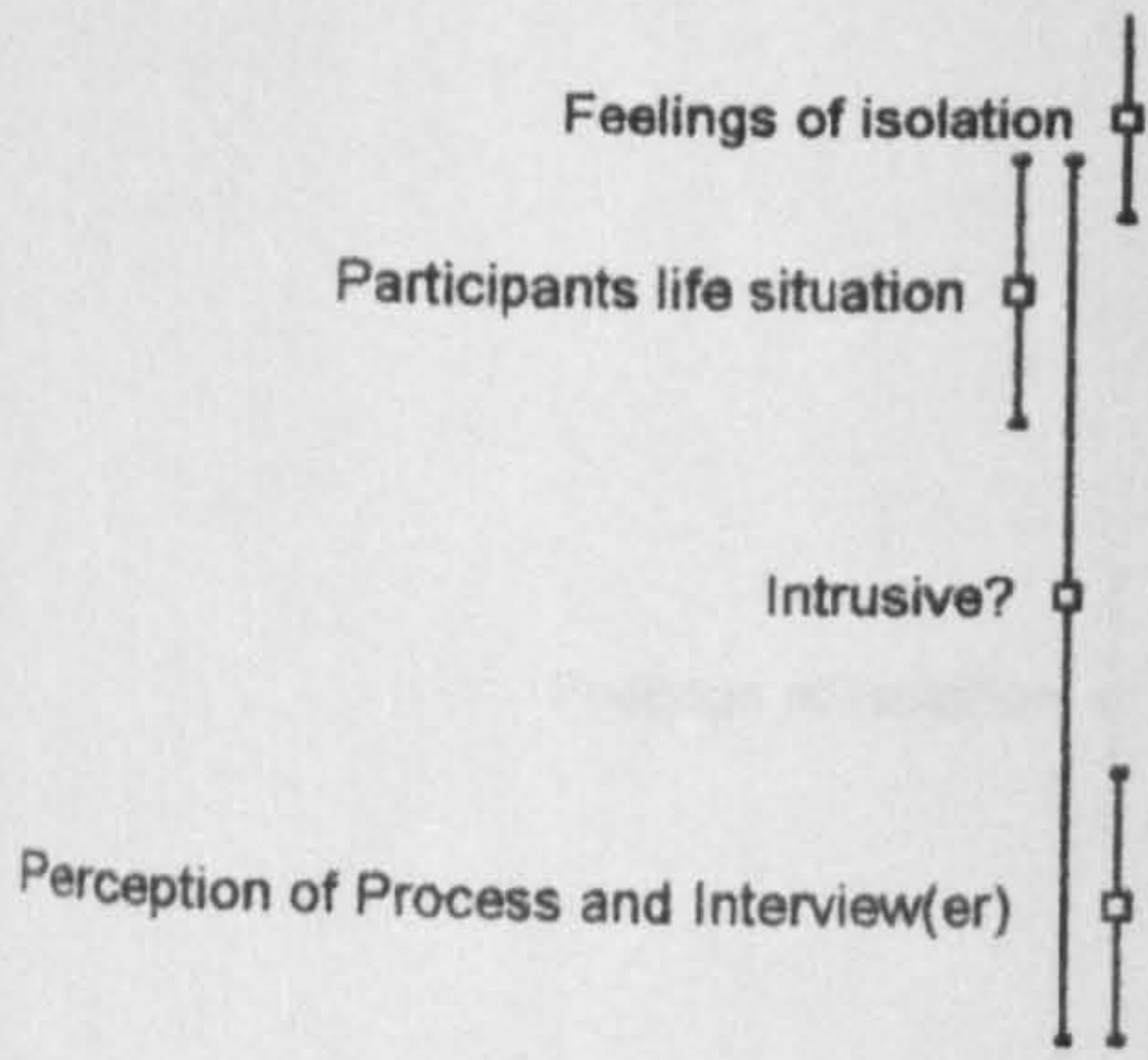
Negative Emotion/Perception

Effect of process/life situation on others

Religious Influence - positive/negative

Feelings of isolation





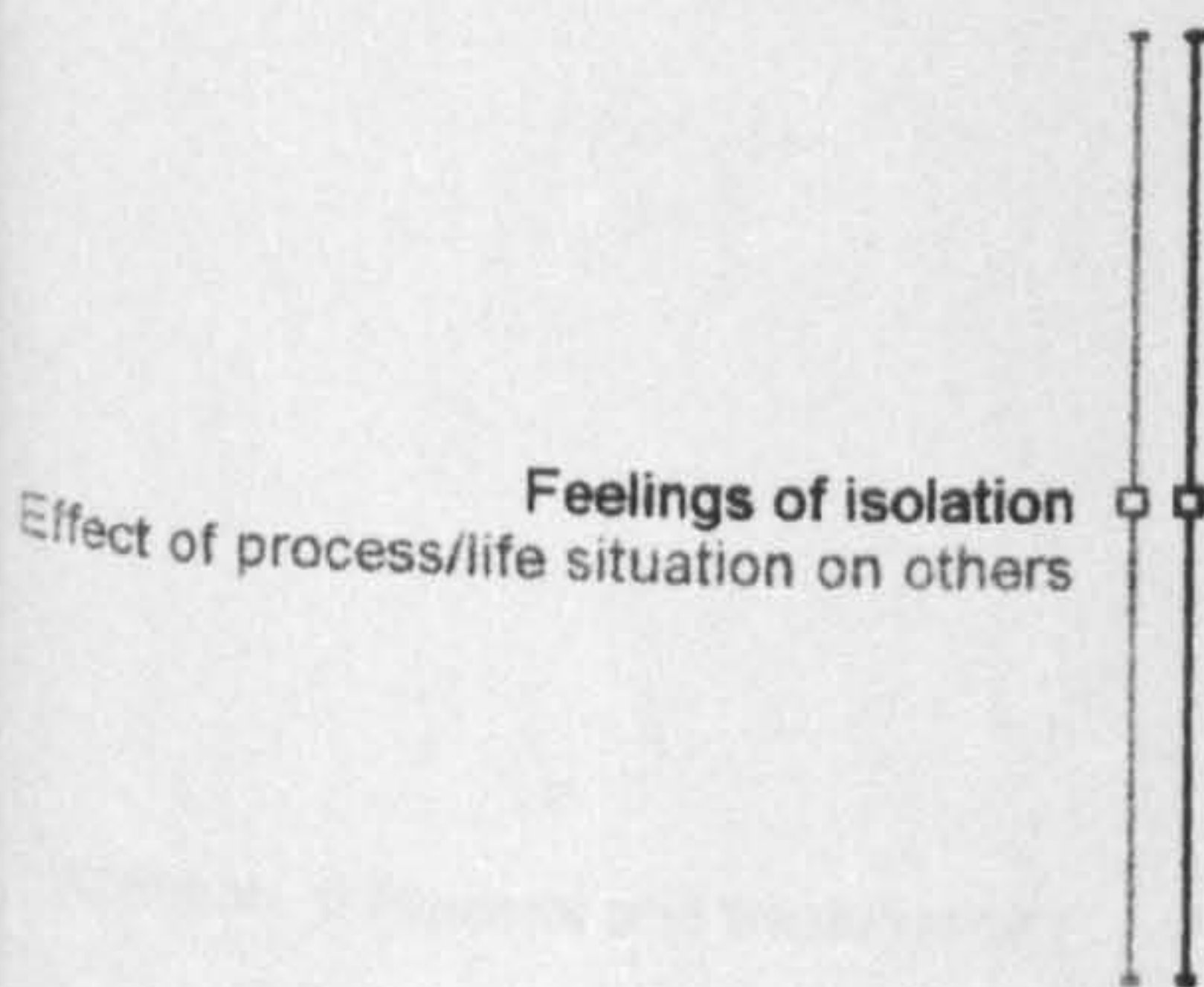
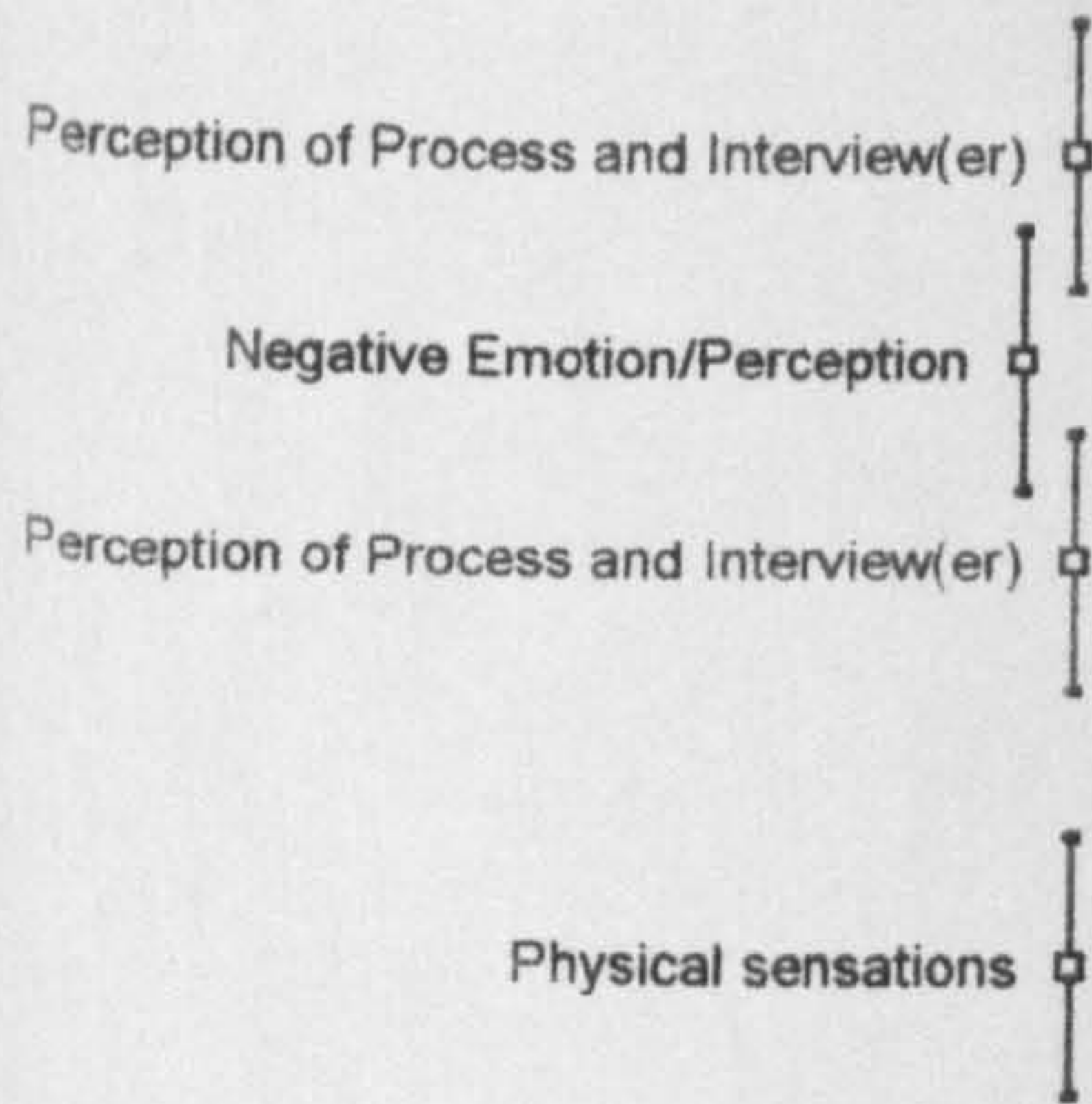
experience. I mean she even asked me questions about my brothers and sisters and what their marriages were like. I couldn't believe it but the worst thing was when she asked me about my mum and dad's marriage (still looking at floor but very angry) I mean what was the point of that they are both dead!

15 **Researcher:** You really found this second interview a tough one didn't you/

16 **Participant:** You bet I did! Do you know what - after this second interview I was ready to give the whole thing up I was so angry and confused and hurt that some stranger could pry so deeply into my life. I had never met this woman before! (takes a deep breath) Anyway I didn't really sleep that well after the second interview and during the night I had calmed down a bit and I thought 'well I am over half way through so I may as well continue'.

17 **Researcher:** I think that was very brave of you because you had found it really upsetting.

18 **Participant:** I don't know about brave perhaps stupid! You see you can't really share any of this with your partner or your friends. My friends are not Catholic so they really wouldn't understand what its all about. I tried to tell one of them and she just laughed. She said 'why are you going? You and P... are married anyway I went to your wedding at the registry office' I tried to explain that I





Feelings of isolation

Effect of process/life situation on others

Participants life situation

was hoping to marry in the Catholic Church and it was necessary to go through these interviews. She just laughed and said if it was her she would just tell them to 'p... off!' So you see you can't begin to tell anyone. I tried with my eldest son and he got really confused he started going off that if I got an Annulment it would make him and his sisters illegitimate. I couldn't even answer this because I don't understand it all.

19 I am not sorry I am going through the Annulment thing because I want to make P.. happy and he wants to marry in Church and so do I - me more than him I think.

20 **Researcher:** So how was the final interview?

21 **Participant:** (Laughs nervously but seems more relaxed) Well things changed at the third interview believe it or not. The lady was a bit more sociable and she even told me that she had been through the Annulment thing a few years ago but I don't know if the damage was done.

22 **Researcher:** What do you mean?

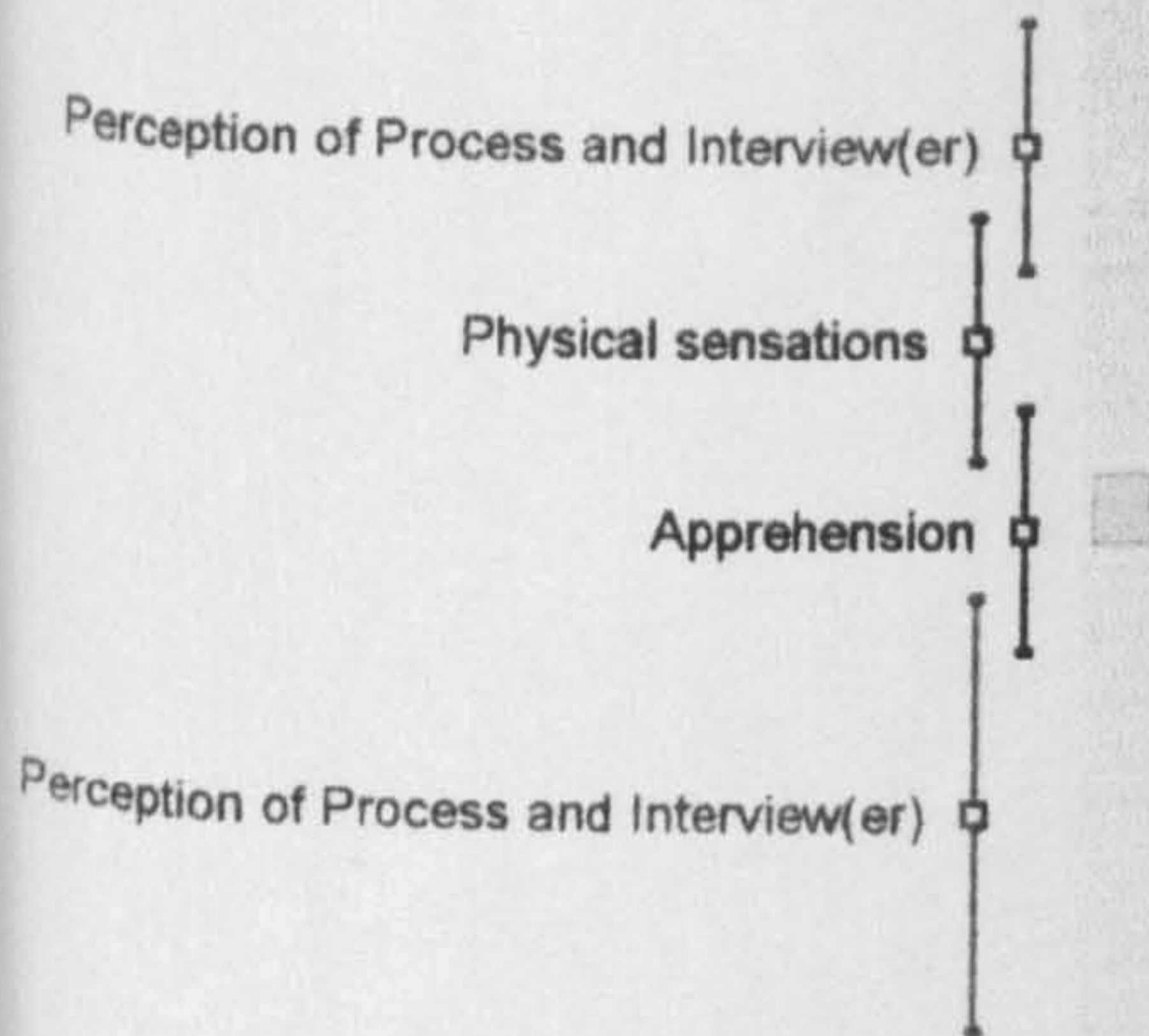
23 **Participant:** Well in my opinion she still wasn't a very approachable person. She also revealed that she was a prosecutor whatever that is, if it is to do with court then I certainly would not have liked to have been on the opposing side as she scared the life out of me.

Perception of Process and Interview(er)

Perception of Process and Interview(er)

Negative Emotion/Perception





24 **Research:** (Laughs)

25 **Participant:** (Laughs) Its true I really would not have liked to face that woman in court. Anyway I was so drained when the last interview was over and I am still confused as to what happens now - nobody seems to tell you. I have shared my whole life story and intimate details with a complete stranger and in my view not a pleasant person.

26 **Researcher:** Well as far as I know what happens now is that your case - what you said in interview - goes before the Marriage Tribunal and they decide if you have a case for Marriage Annulment. They usually write to you about six weeks after the interview and let you know if your case is going forward. If your case does go forward I believe it can take up to 18 months to reach a decision because they have to contact the witnesses you gave.

27 **Participant:** Right. So it is just a case of waiting now to see what happens.

28 **Researcher:** Yes I'm afraid so. I am conscious of your time so is there anything else you want to speak about or any questions you have?

29 **Participant:** No I think that's it really. I just wanted to come



Negative Emotion/Perception ☒

Participants life situation ☒

along and tell you how it went seeing as I asked you to make an application for me. I just hope after all this upset and interviewing they will grant me an Annulment. It would mean so much to P..and me if we could marry in Church.

30 **Researcher:** Well let's just hope and pray you get it. Thanks for calling by B and for sharing your experience.

31 **Participant:** That's okay. I hope I haven't bored you with my moaning but I really did find it so difficult.

Perception of Process and Interview(er) ☒

32 **Researcher:** No you haven't bored me and I do hope you get a positive result.

33 **Participant:** Thank you.



1 **Participant C Interview**  
2 **February 2008**

- 3 **Notes:** Participant C has been married twice. She is Catholic and in her early forties. She describes herself as a traditional Irish Catholic and has been raised in a traditional Irish Catholic setting (her words). Participant C married fairly young in the Catholic Church and the marriage lasted only 18 months. After just one year participant C married again - this time in a registry office. This marriage failed after two years. Participant C has been dating a single Catholic man for about three years now he has never been married before and is of similar age to participant C. Participant C's partner is desperate for them to marry in Church and for this reason she has applied for a Marriage Annulment. Participant C has gone through all the preliminary interviews and is waiting for a result. Participant C appears to be of nervous disposition and speaks very quickly.
- 4 **This is not an interview as such but a conversation on how she found the Annulment Interview.**
- 5 **Researcher:** Thank you C for agreeing to share experience with me on the initial stages of your Annulment process. As we agreed on the phone this is not a formal interview as such but you sharing your thoughts with me. As you requested I'll respect your wishes to keep it brief but you are in charge of that one anyone.
- 6 **Participant:** (Laughs) Yes I suppose I am really (participant moving about quite a bit in her chair and nervously playing with her hair). When I said I want to keep it brief it's really because I feel I don't have that much to say. I'm a person who gets on with things and who doesn't like to whinge.
- 7 **Researcher:** If you want to whinge you can but I really just want you to share your experience of the initial interview and your thoughts on the process positive or negative.



8 **Participant:** Well you remember that it was you I approached about getting married when I came along with my partner and you told me that I would be unable to marry in Church without an Annulment. I kind of knew we couldn't marry in Church because of my track record but I had just come along to see if you could give us a blessing or something. When you told me about the Annulment and explained it to us I was hooked. I know you told us both to go away and think about whether we wanted to apply or not I knew there and then I did. So as soon as I walked in the door at home I rang you and asked you to set it up for me.

Participants life situation

Actions taken by Participant

9 **Researcher:** Why do you think getting an Annulment or hoping to get an annulment is important to you?

10 **Participant:** Well it would be a way of starting again from scratch for me I know that might sound daft to some but to me it means so much if I got an Annulment. You see you never knew me in the parish in my first marriage and I stayed away from Church during my second one in fact you may have noticed I have not long started coming back to Church. Even applying for an Annulment has made me feel clean again. I have felt so unclean since my first marriage failed. I blame both of us for the break up as well. In fact it may have all been my fault I was young and really head - strong and I suppose promiscuous. I felt if I came to Church everyone would look at me and judge me just as I was judging myself.

Religious Influence - positive/negative

Religious Influence - positive/negative

Negative Emotion/Perception

Guilt

Religious Influence - positive/negative



11 **Researcher:** So you have been quite hard on yourself over the years?

12 **Participant:** Yes I really have and I have needed to forgive myself.

You know the first Sunday I came back to Church you gave a sermon about a prisoner returning to Church after he had been released and how he hadn't been to Church for years and how uncomfortable he felt. I really identified with that I have felt like a criminal and a prisoner. I come along now and I love it but I still sit right at the back like you said that prisoner did and I still don't take Holy Communion and I don't want to until I get the Annulment and marry in Church. So I haven't fully forgiven myself yet. I felt I let my parents down my friends down - everything really. Everybody at Church has been okay with me and I am glad I am but I know I would be really hurt if someone said anything about my past I am still really tearful (wiping eyes).

13 **Researcher:** It's sad that you feel like that but it seems that the hope of gaining an Annulment has been good for you. It has made you strong enough to return to Church a move forward for you from what you have said.

14 **Participant:** Yes it is and I love being back at Church even though I am still a little shaky but that is good old Catholic guilt for you, you never feel really good about yourself. I have lived over 20 years

Religious Influence - positive/negative

Guilt

Religious Influence - positive/negative

Guilt

Effect of process/life situation on others

Guilt

Physical sensations

Guilt

Guilt



Guilt

feeling really guilty and really dirty so it is going to be hard to break that.

15 **Researcher:** There is really only you who can break that C. Did you find the interview hard, did that make you feel guilty? I don't know the man who interviewed you very well but he seems a really nice person.

16 **Participant:** He was a lovely person. At first I would have liked a lady interviewer but as we got started he was really lovely. He took his time and he was very helpful with all the questions.

Perception of Process and Interview(er)

17 **Researcher:** I believe they ask quite a few questions?

18 **Participant:** Yes they do and some of them are quite difficult to get through but E....(interviewers name) was really good. When I became upset he just said 'right take your time and we can have a break if you want'. He seemed to be really experienced.

Perception of Process and Interview(er)  
Negative Emotion/Perception

19 **Researcher:** When you became upset did it make you feel negative about the interview process?

20 **Participant:** No it didn't in fact I think it is a necessary process to get all the facts. I must also say that E....(interviewer) pre - warned me that it might be difficult but it wasn't as difficult as I imagined having said that it was difficult to go through.

Perception of Process and Interview(er)



Perception of Process and Interview(er) □

Effect of process/life situation on others □

Religious Influence - positive/negative □

21 **Researcher:** So your interview experience was a positive one?

22 **Participant:** Well it was not as bad as I thought it would be. I just hope that it goes through okay I haven't got any witnesses apart from my two brothers.

23 **Researcher:** I do know of cases where there have been no witnesses so I wouldn't worry too much about that one. Well I promised you we would keep it short we have gone on longer than I thought actually. Is there anything else you wish to say?

24 **Participant:** Not really. I would like to thank you for putting me in touch with the Marriage Tribunal as I have a lot of hope that I will be able to marry in Church so if that happens I really will be so happy.

25 **Researcher:** Well I wish you the very best with it C and thank you for agreeing to share your experience with me and for allowing me to use your interview. Your name won't be mentioned in it at all I will just assign you a letter of the alphabet if that is okay?

26 **Participant:** Yea that's fine. I'm not bothered what you do with it really. Right if we have finished I'm off to get some tea I came here straight from work so I'll get off.



27 **Researcher:** Okay and thank you again.

28 **Participant:** No problem.



**Participant D Interview**  
**March 2008**

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3 **Notes:** This lady is in her fifties and is a regular Church attender and she is active in other areas in her parish community. The lady contacted the researcher from a posting in the "Divorced and Separated Catholics Newsletter". The lady contacted the researcher by phone and said she would like to meet to share her experience of the Catholic Annulment Process.

4 **Interview**

5 **Researcher:** Thank you D for being willing to talk to me about your experience of the annulment process. I don't have any set questions I like to just see where things go. Do you have any problems with that?

6 **Participant:** No I don't mind that. I didn't plan on there being any question and answer stuff anyway. I just contacted you because I would like to help your study if I can and hopefully others can be helped from me sharing what went on when I applied.

7 **Researcher:** Would you mind if I taped our conversation and made some notes. Once I have transcribed the tapes I delete the contents.

8 **Participant:** No, I don't have a problem with that and as I said to you on the phone I am happy for you to use whatever we talk about in your study. (Laughs) I wouldn't be here otherwise.

9 **Researcher:** Thank you. Now, would you like to tell me about how you came to be involved with applying for an annulment?



Participants life situation

Physical sensations

Participants life situation

Feelings of isolation

Participants life situation

- 10 **Participant:** (Sighs) Well, it goes back quite a bit really. Me and my husband parted in October 1976 I'm Catholic and he wasn't. My husband was an only child and he was aware, at least in his mind, that he wasn't wanted as a child. He struggled with lots of issues emotionally but the main thing that scared me was his temper. He had a really bad temper although he was never physically violent. We had two children together and it was really because of the children that I left him. I got so ill because of the continual arguments that raged every day especially every morning at breakfast time. I felt these arguments were destroying my boy's lives and so I thought enough is enough. I don't want to bore you with detail but my husband was a very cruel man in many ways. He kept us on such a tight rein he would only give me money for house keeping every month and the amount would change every time so that I had to go and beg of him if I needed more. He was very jealous and would want to know where I had been, who I had spoken to. In the first year of marriage he absolutely crushed me I have never felt so alone as I did at that point in my life.
- 11 **Researcher:** Right. Did you have a place to go when you left?
- 12 **Participant:** Well my mother was still alive then and she was aware of how things were so we went to my mothers. My husband didn't try to persuade us to return and neither did he offer any maintenance for the children. My mother lived in XXXX and this was quite a way



from XXXX were I lived with my husband. I missed my home town and I always intended to return when funds allowed it. I got a job teaching so as to help mum and also to save some money.

Participants life situation

13 In 1980 I filed for divorce so as to get a share of the house and this went through okay it was almost as if we ceased to exist at this stage as far as my husband was concerned.

14 **Researcher:** So your husband didn't contest the divorce?

Participants life situation

15 **Participant:** No he didn't. I thought he would because when I say that he was an only child I feel he behaved as an only child throughout our marriage - he wanted his own way all the time even above our children's welfare. So I thought he would react to the fact that I was the one who had begun the divorce proceedings he always liked to be the one in charge.

Perception of Process and Interview(er)

16 After the divorce I joined the local ASDC (note: Divorced and Separated Catholics) group. I hadn't heard much about annulments then, in fact I didn't really know they existed, but I met a divorced man in the group and someone told me I should apply for an annulment in case we ever wanted to get married. After a while the time felt right for me to apply because things were getting serious with this man. He wanted to leave England and live abroad in XXXX. I was a bit unsure about this but the boys were grown up now and they could either go with us or continue to live in England it was their choice and they got on quite well with this man. Anyway it just felt right to apply so I did.

Participants life situation



17 **Researcher:** How did you go about this? Did you go to your Parish Priest?

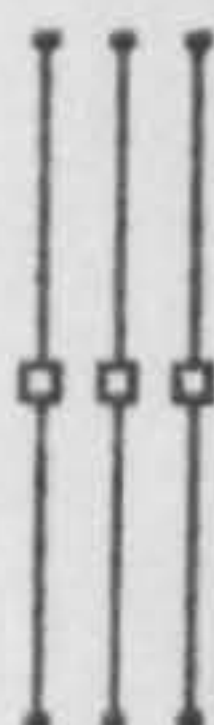
18 **Participant:** I did and it was disastrous. When I mentioned annulment, I can see him now, he just froze. He said that he knew nothing about them and it would be better if I did the same. So I didn't get anywhere with him. I told someone in the parish what had happened and they laughed. They said they knew a girl in the parish who had been granted an annulment and he had still refused to marry her. Shortly after this I moved back home (note: to her home town where she had lived with her previous husband).

19 **Researcher:** How were you treated when you returned home?

20 **Participant:** Well I forgot to mention this, I had been travelling back home from my mum's house in XXXX to XXXX for Sunday Mass every so often so people were aware of my divorce and I didn't really have any bad comments. When I moved back home I also finished with the man I had met at the ASDC group because he was desperate to move abroad and I just couldn't go as quickly as he wanted me to so I decided, and he did, that it was better to go our separate ways.

21 **Researcher:** Did you still want to go forward with the annulment after your split with this man?

Perception of Process and Interview  
Religious Influence - positive/negative  
Effect of process/life situation on



Effect of process/life situation on others  
Religious Influence - positive/negative

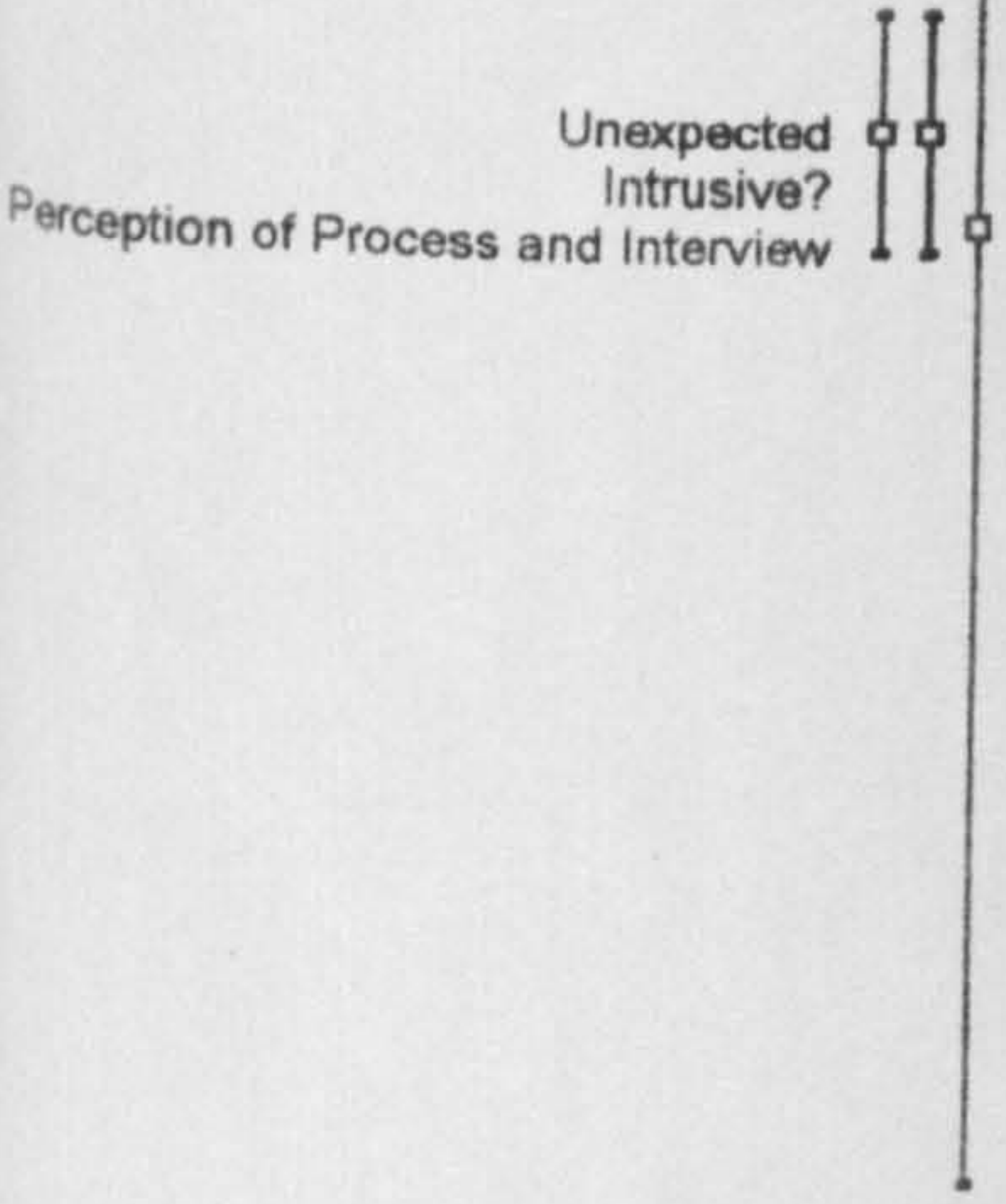


Participants life situation



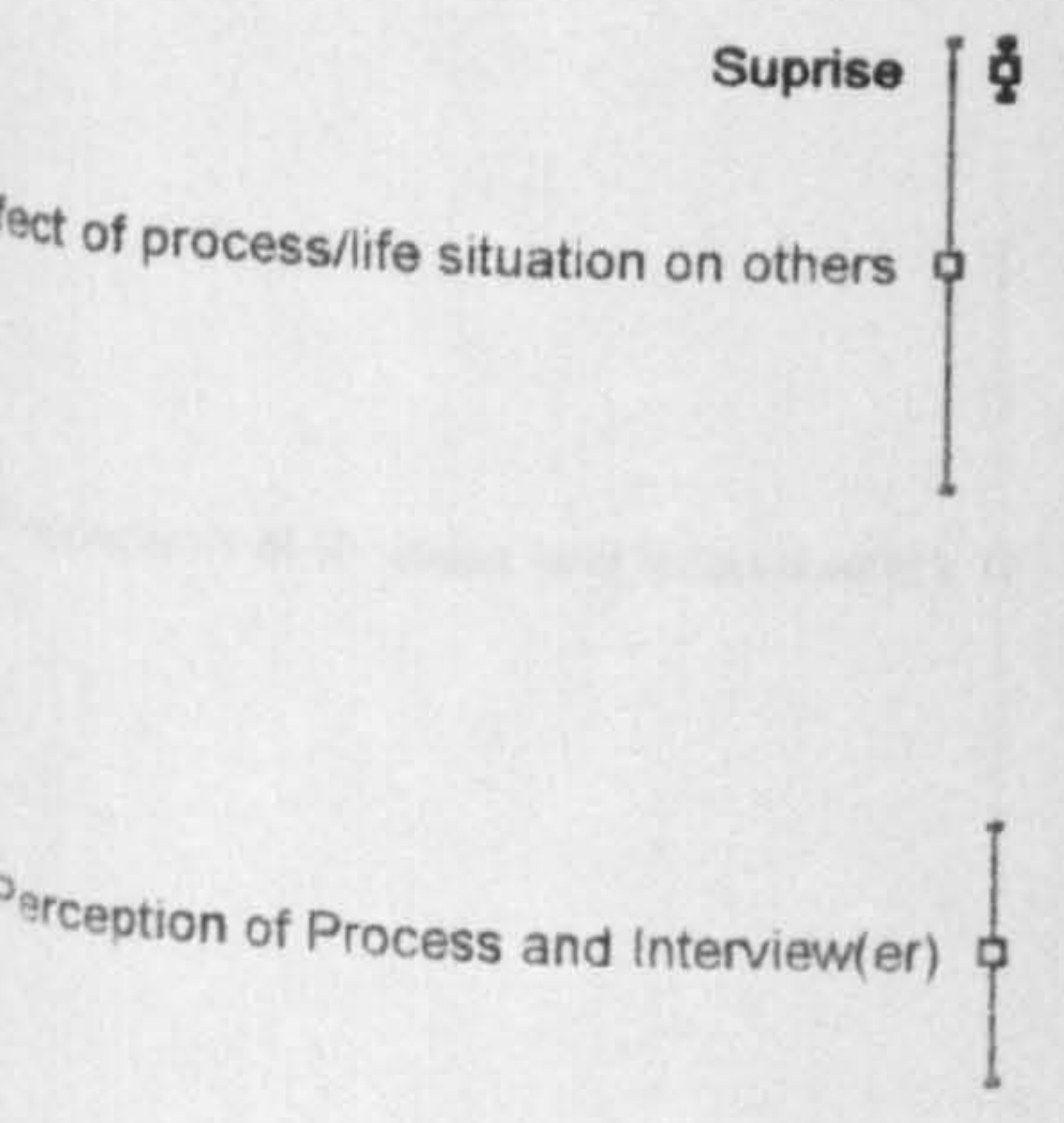


22 **Participant:** Yes I did because I still thought that I might meet someone else in the future. Once I was settled I approached the marriage tribunal in the nearest city to where I live it was XXXX Tribunal. They gave me an appointment for my first interview. I remember it so clearly it was on a Friday at 5:00pm. I had to finish teaching at school early and drive 20 minutes to the city centre. I made it for 5:00pm and I was out for 5:50pm. It wasn't a good experience I had driven through rush hour traffic then told to sit down and answer some of the most personal questions ever. That was what really sticks in my mind they were just so personal and upsetting. I would really have liked to have been given a copy of the questions earlier, it is all so secretive. I also expected to be asked to go back for another interview as 50 minutes seemed such a short time to tell someone about the state of your marriage but that was it.



23 **Researcher:** So they didn't ask you to go back again?

24 **Participant:** No they didn't which really surprised me. I remember that someone came to interview my mother, auntie and a couple of friends and that was it. After a while - I can't remember how long - a letter arrived in the post saying that I had been refused an annulment. They said that there were no grounds for annulling the marriage because of the circumstances before the marriage.



25 **Researcher:** How did you react to this news?



26 **Participant:** Well I am not an over emotional person but I was very angry and confused. They had only interviewed me for 50 minutes.

Negative Emotion/Perception  
Perception of Process and Interview(er)

27 **Researcher:** Did you give up after this news?

28 **Participant:** No I didn't the letter said that I could appeal to the Metropolitan Tribunal of XXXX if I wanted to have the case re-examined so I wrote back and said that I did. I had to pay of course. After a few weeks I got an interview with a nun and we spoke for a couple of hours with her recording the interview and making notes.

Perception of Process and Interview(er)

29 **Researcher:** how did you feel about this interview?

30 **Participant:** Well I thought it went very well and the nun was a very kind lady so I thought that I was getting somewhere.

Perception of Process and Interview(er)

31 **Researcher:** And did you?

32 **Participant:** No I didn't. After a couple of months a letter came back saying that whilst my ex - husband and I were incompatible there appeared to be no grounds on which the marriage could be annulled.

Perception of Process and Interview(er)

33 **Researcher:** What did you do after you received this letter?



34 **Participant:** Well I was obviously very disappointed and I was angry and hurt but I now thought just leave it. I thought I have done what I can and if I ever want to marry again I will and just go to another Church were I am not known to receive Holy Communion. I don't know what you think about this but I now believe after all this that what goes on in this area is between me and God. I was helped by talking to my head teacher and he said that he knew of a divorced woman with two children - she was Catholic - and she had met a divorced man with one child. They married outside Church and they now have a child of their own and they are very happy. The head said that where love is God is and I now really believe this. I wouldn't go to the Church (Catholic) for any help or advice on a marriage issue I would now just get on with it and trust in God.

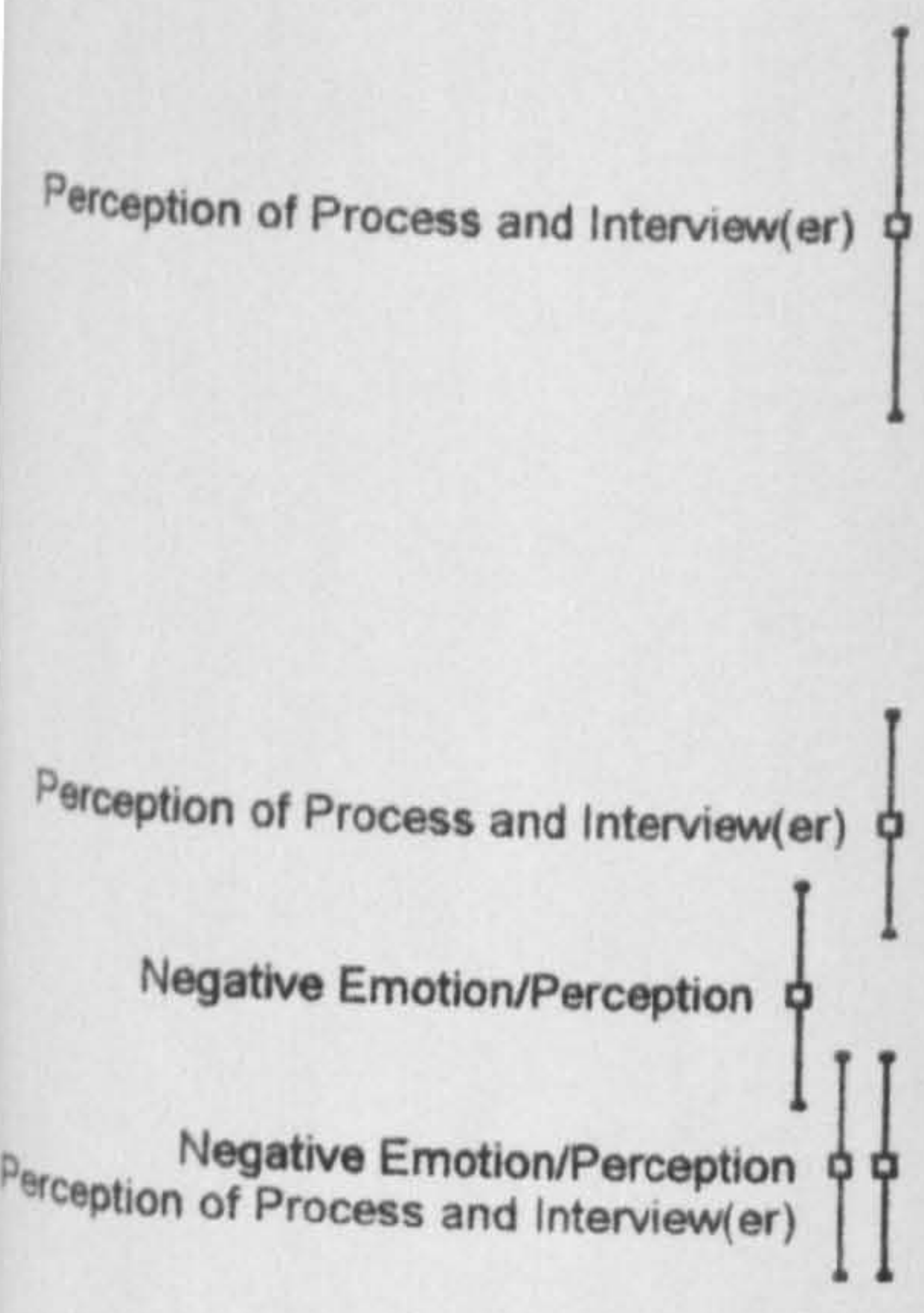
35 **Researcher:** I'm sorry that you were not able to get your annulment after all your efforts.

36 **Participant:** Its in the past now but when I saw your note in the newsletter I thought I would come and share my story if it only helps your study or other people.

37 **Researcher:** I'm grateful you did and I am glad you have given me permission to use your example. Before we finish is there anything else you would like to add?

38 **Participant:** Well, I don't know if it has changed since my





interview but I would like to see people who work for the tribunal better trained to interview and that if it is a woman being interviewed for an annulment that she be interviewed by a woman. I believe it is important for them to use people who have people skills and people you feel able to open up to. With my experience I wouldn't encourage anyone to go for an annulment. It still makes me very angry and do you know I think that the Church has a lot to answer for if it has treated other people like it treated me.

39 **Researcher:** Well I will consider these thoughts in my study and I am grateful to you for sharing them with me. I would really like to thank you for travelling the distance you have to speak to me.

40 **Participant:** Oh don't worry about that. I am retired now so I don't mind it gets me out and I quite enjoy driving, I know this part of XXXX very well anyway.

41 **Researcher:** Well thank you for your time and safe journey home.

42 **Participant:** Thank you and good luck with your study.



Participant E Interview  
January 2008

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3 **Notes:** This lady is in her forties and she describes herself as a traditional Catholic. The lady contacted the researcher from a posting on the website of "The Association for Divorced and Separated Catholics" on which the researcher has detailed his study. The lady lives in the north of England and the researcher has never been in contact with her before. At first, contact was via email, and the researcher assured the participant of confidentiality and the purpose of this study. The participant was keen to be interviewed or as she put it "tell my story". The researcher gave the participant his telephone number via email once the participant had disclosed her telephone number. There was transparency throughout. The participant gave a time at which the researcher could call.

4 Interview proper

5 **Researcher:** Thank you E for agreeing to speak to me about your experiences I really appreciate it. I haven't prepared any of my usual questions as you said you would like to tell your story rather than answer a series of planned questions.

6 **Participant:** Yes that's right (note: participant is what the researcher would describe as a gregarious person who speaks rapidly with quite a lot of nervous laughter) - pause - now where do I begin (nervous laugh). Well my husband S..... left me when I was pregnant with my second child. When he left he didn't know I was pregnant. He left me with a four year - old daughter.

7 **Researcher:** Right.

8 **Participant:** I was very, very depressed. The parish priest encouraged me to get back together with my husband and he was very persistent

Negative Emotion/Perception | □  
Intrusive? | □



Intrusive? □

(the parish priest) - in fact every time I saw him this was the only subject he talked about. As the months went on and our divorce came through my parish priest still kept on encouraging me to get back together with him even though I had told him that my ex - husband was about to marry someone else!

9 **Researcher:** (Laughs) He really was persistent wasn't he?

Negative Emotion/Perception □

Intrusive? □

10 **Participant:** (Laughs) Yes it was awful. It was like it had become an obsession with him. Anyway, I eventually moved parish and after a while I went to see the parish priest at this Church and I asked him if he would help me to apply for an Annulment. He was really negative and I remember him saying that it would take at least 9 years to apply for an Annulment. I told him I was in no rush and would still like to try. We filled in some forms and then he asked me for some other documents which I got for him. It was strange though because he was so dismissive all the time. When I asked him how things were going he never gave me a straight answer. After a long time - I can't remember exactly how long - I asked him, as I was leaving Church, was any progress being made. Well, you won't believe the reaction I still quake now when I think about it. There were other parishioners milling around and he turned on me and in a loud voice in front of these others he said 'what's your hurry are you that desperate to marry again!' I was so embarrassed that I just walked off.

Effect of process/life situation on others □

Perception of Process and Interview(er) □

Effect of process/life situation on others □

Physical sensations □

Intrusive? □

11 **Researcher:** Yes I can see that you would be quite taken aback by that



response especially in front of others.

12 **Participant:** It was really upsetting. Anyway I started a course at L...University shortly after this and one lunch time I wandered over to the Marriage Tribunal offices and asked to see someone. They took my details and said they would be in touch. After a short time I was interviewed by a nun. The nun was okay but when she asked me for witnesses to my marriage I was really stuck. My mother and father were both dead, my auntie was a really strict catholic and didn't believe in divorce full - stop and she said no way was she getting involved she said the whole thing was against God. No one wanted to get involved not even so - called friends they all refused. Any way the nun carried on with my case and I eventually got the Annulment - don't ask me how! Do you know though the nun asked me to go and see the priest to get my documents back and I was amazed he must have had 7 copies of everything I had given to him. He had never sent anything off he had been stalling all the time.

13 **Researcher:** It must have all been quite upsetting but at least you were granted an Annulment.

14 **Participant:** Yes it was upsetting. I really feel that there should be more guidance and counselling. There should be more help and support available to get out of a really horrible situation. Its like in Church you never hear prayer intentions for divorced people. I felt totally abandoned by my Church I didn't want support from secular

Negative Emotion/Perception

Perception of Process and Interview(er)

Effect of process/life situation on others

Effect of process/life situation on

Unexpected

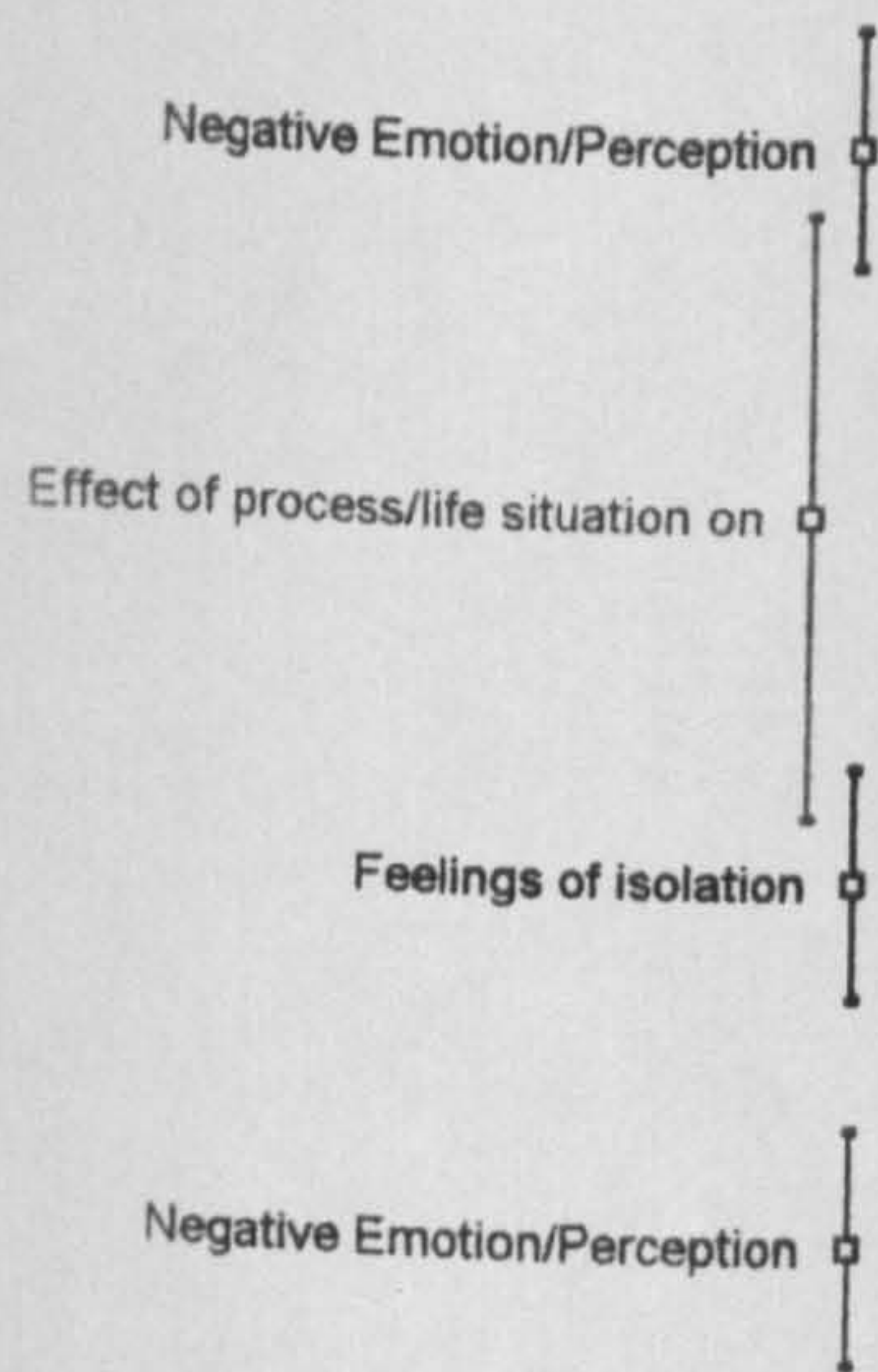
Effect of process/life situation on

Negative Emotion/Perception

Perception of Process and Interview(er)

Feelings of isolation

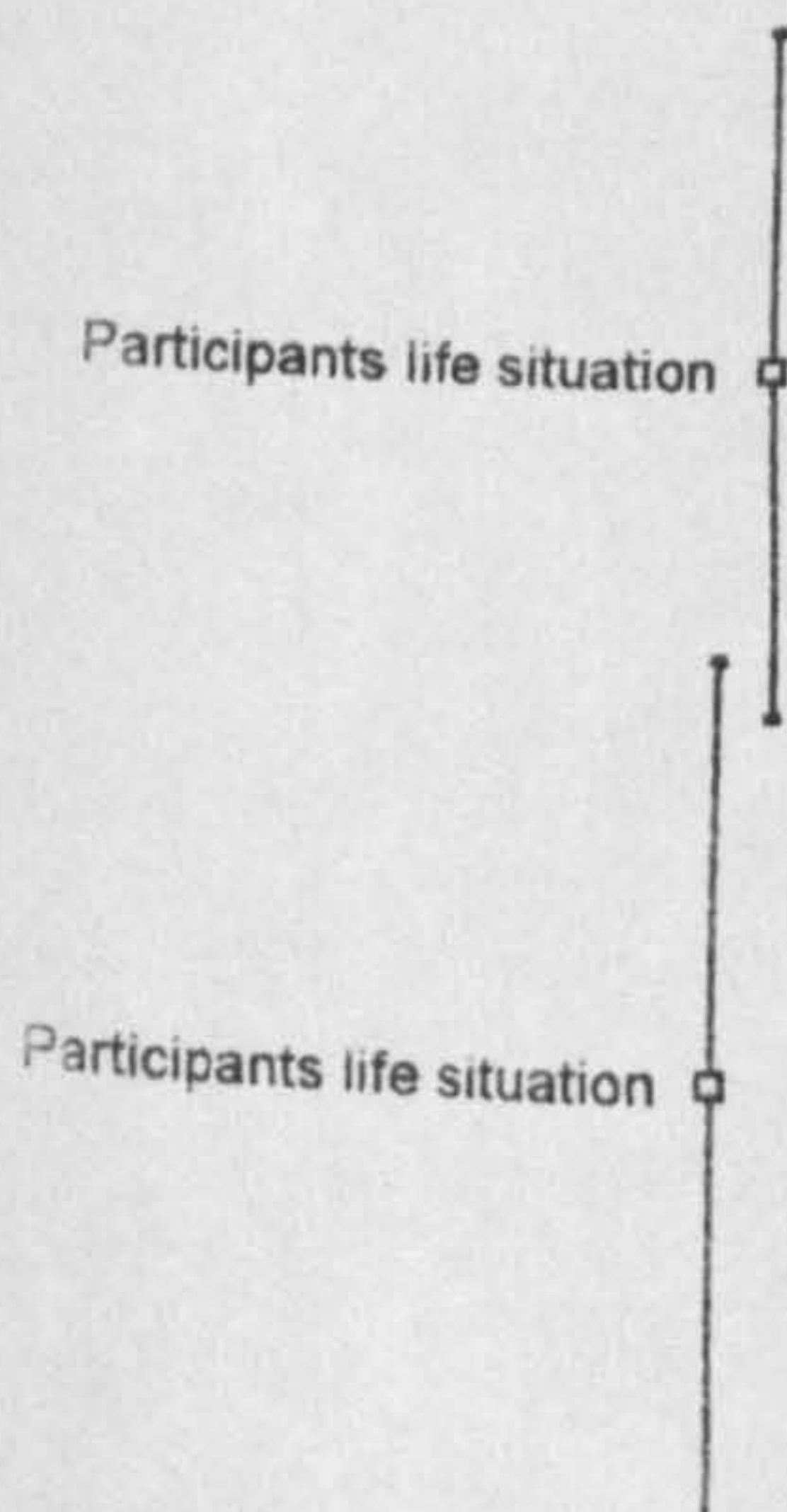




institutions like 'gingerbread' I wanted support from my own Church. When I was divorced and applying for the Annulment I felt totally worthless. I got this impression that if people spoke to me they might 'catch divorce' like it was some disease or something and these were Church going people. Can you believe it - I was even told by someone that I would burn in hell! Even though my husband divorced me and I had not met any one else I didn't go to Holy Communion for years. I go now because I think God is my judge and he would not have wanted me to stay in a marriage that was killing me in body and soul. When I told my ex - husband (note: client says here "just a minute I am going to see where my son is" she puts the phone down and returns after a few seconds client says "its alright I didn't want my son to hear this") that he was leaving me and I was pregnant he wanted me to have an abortion and he said that whatever I decided to do he was leaving me anyway.

15 **Researcher:** You were in a very difficult and sad situation at this time.

16 **Participant:** Yes I was my husband inflicted (client speaking very rapidly at this point) immense mental cruelty on me. He was an incredibly selfish man. Do you know I would walk to work and he would drive past me - you would do that to a stranger wouldn't you? He had many hobbies that cost us thousands of pounds. If he wasn't doing his hobby he would be on the computer all night. He gave me absolutely no emotional support or care. He was a totally selfish man.





Unexpected

Effect of process/life situation on others

Feelings of isolation

You know what, you do the right thing and marry in Church, and yet if you marry in a registry office there's no problem you can always have your married put right or walk away from it. I know people living together who go to Church and they go up to receive Holy Communion and there is no trouble and no bad thoughts against them. Its all wrong. Even when you get an Annulment some people still don't believe in them. In Church no divorced people ever get prayed for that's my experience. We pray for the Church, Bishop's, Priest's, Politicians and so on but never for divorced people. My God we are the one's that need help! (raised voice here and very emotional.)

17 **Researcher:** I must agree with you there E. I have to admit that I haven't heard many prayers - if any - for divorced people.

18 **Participant:** I know I'm right on this one. The only prayer I can remember is this one, I think I've got it right, 'Let us pray for people considering Annulments that they may seek reconciliation with their partner' - you just can't believe the lengths the Church will go to. They would rather people suffer than be happy. One priest whose parish I no longer attend once took a line of Scripture for his homily it was that one that goes something like: 'Once the hand is laid to the plough don't look back.....' or something along those lines. Do you know what followed?

Effect of process/life situation on others

Participants life situation

19 **Researcher:** No I don't.

20 **Participant:** Well, the wicked man, I am sorry but that's how I feel

Negative Emotion/Perception  
Participants life situation



Participants life situation

about him went on to preach about quitters and losers - the quitters and losers in the context of marriage. He said keep going whatever you have to put up with this implies to me that quitting your marriage even for abuse is quitting! I was stunned what about all the poor people fleeing from abusive relationships are they quitters? You see some people who get married in Church never go again and never take their children I never did this. Even when I was not receiving Holy Communion I still took my children. I still wonder how I did it because there was certainly no shortage of malicious tongues wagging! Do you know I still have 'flash backs' as to how awful it all was.

Physical sensations

21 **Researcher:** It's very sad to hear this. Did you not get any support from sources outside of a Church setting?

22 **Participant:** When I was really depressed my doctor arranged counselling for me but other than this I had no support. I didn't go to any Church functions, fetes, prayer groups, coffee mornings and so on because I felt a failure. I feel there is no respect for a person who has been divorced - bereaved yes divorced - no, in the Church it is a real stigma. No one talks about divorce and nothing is provided for divorced Catholics. My sister was violently abused by her husband he broke her arm, kept her a prisoner, fed the dog not her. When she broke away and went for an Annulment guess what they told her?

Feelings of isolation

Participants life situation

23 **Researcher:** I don't know.



24 **Participant:** They told her they would have to get in touch with her ex-husband to get his side of the events. This nearly killed her she just could not bear the thought of this because he was so evil and violent she had fled from him. I feel (client is speaking very fast again) publicity about Annulments is seen as spreading a disease! My sister has never been to Communion for 20 years. When she escaped him she was bruised and battered. All she says now is that she knows God loves her.

25 **Researcher:** Would your sister consider talking to me would it help in any way?

26 **Participant:** I don't think she would. She has been hurt so badly worse than me in fact. I'll ask her but I am sure the answer will be no. Canon Lawyers were very aggressive towards her. They said they had to contact her husband but she knew that he would tell lies and put a spanner in the works. My sister never went forward to apply for an Annulment because of the threat of contacting her previous husband. She has married again in a registry office and it breaks her heart not to be able to receive Holy Communion.

27 **Researcher:** Hopefully she might find someone in the future who she feels able to help her and more importantly to trust.

28 **Participant:** Who knows I just find it so sad. I feel every parish should have a trained counsellor. We are a welcoming Church if you haven't had a divorce! (Note: Researcher was steering the interview to closure)

Participants life situation

Effect of process/life situation on

Participants life situation

Perception of Process and Interview(er)

Participants life situation

Negative Emotion/Perception



at this point as the client was beginning to 'take off' on different themes). Yes we have 'Marriage Care' groups and support but if you have had a divorce there is very little help. There is nothing about help if the divorce has happened. I mean if you didn't care you wouldn't apply for an Annulment anyway so why are you treated badly with resistance and criticism? People who don't care seem to get treated better!

Perception of Process and Interview(er)



29 **Researcher:** Well E I am afraid I am going to have to finish our conversation as I am conscious of time restraints. I would really like to thank you for sharing your story with me even though it is a painful one.

30 **Participant:** That's okay. I hope it is of some help please feel free to use it. I will still keep plodding on please pray for me and my sister. She has had so much hurt in her life and I will let her know about your offer to speak to her.

Participants life situation



31 **Researcher:** Thank you S and once I have written up our interview I will email you a copy so that you can agree the content. Is that okay.

32 **Participant:** That's fine, I'm sure it will be alright. I'm not bothered if it helps others that is enough for me.

33 **Researcher:** Well, once again, thank you E and take care of yourself.

34 **Participant:** Yes, I will, thank you.



# **APPENDIX M**

























					Researcher's Code		Critical Friend M Code	Critical Friend L Code
<b>Statement 47</b>								
"I was helped by talking to my head teacher and he said that he knew of a divorced woman with two children - she was Catholic - and she had met a divorced man with one child. They married outside Church and they now have a child of their own and they are very happy. The head said that where love is God is and I now really believe this. I wouldn't go to the Church (Catholic) for any help or advice on a marriage issue I would now just get on with it and trust in God."					Code 1	Code 11	Code 11	
<b>Statement 48</b>								
"I was obviously very disappointed and I was angry and hurt."					Code 7	Code 9 / 7	Code 7	
<b>Statement 49</b>								
"Yes it was awful"					Code 7	Code 7 / 9	Code 7	



# **APPENDIX N**

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## Interview Validation Form

I.....am willing to state that after reading the transcribed copy of my interview with Bill Naylor that it represents a true and accurate copy of what

I.....gave in answer to the questions discussed in the taped interview.

I agree to the transcribed interview forming part of the above named researchers dissertation. I am aware that copies of the final dissertation will be lodged with the University of Derby and will be available for public scrutiny and that the researcher will retain a copy.

Signed (Participant).....

Date.....

Signed (Researcher).....

Date.....

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# **APPENDIX O**

E-N

m

14<sup>th</sup> February 2008

Dear Father Bill

I read with interest your letter in the latest edition of New Vision regarding the Annulment Process and female petitioners. Although my case was some years ago, the feelings and emotions do not change.

I am a Catholic and have always practised my faith. I was married to a non-Catholic for nearly 24 years and had three children from the marriage. As you are referring to the annulment process, I will not go into the details of my marriage unless you deem it necessary, not because I do not want to but it would take some time to write about it! Briefly, my husband left me on New Years Eve, 1991 to live with a woman with whom he had been having an affair [not the first time]. It was a difficult marriage in many ways, mainly because of my religious beliefs and had always thought that our marriage was not a true sacramental union in the eyes of God.

After such a long marriage, I was understandably devastated and very distressed, emotionally and physically distraught. It is very difficult to separate divorce and following annulment because to obtain the annulment, the marriage is picked to the bone. The emotions of the divorce have to be taken into account. Later that year I applied for a Judicial Separation but eventually I had to apply for a divorce to settle financial matters. My parents, brother and sisters all lived away, so I was on my own with the children. Even telephone conversations were difficult, no mobiles and walkabout phones then! My ex-husband was very difficult when it came to financial matters and trying to get a settlement with lawyers and courts was extremely stressful. Fortunately, I had some very close friends who helped me through this crisis.

When the divorce was eventually settled in 1993, I started to seriously think about the Annulment Process. Because I had had so little support from my Parish priests over my husband leaving me and the divorce, one priest said he would pray for reconciliation and the other said I could still go to communion- that was it, all the advice I was given. [How I wished I'd been a widow instead of divorced], I felt I would get little help and sympathy from them regarding an annulment. So it was going it alone time. I had joined the Association and Separated Catholics by this time and was welcomed with open arms, I did not have to explain myself, I had come home, and here was the loving church I was seeking. What a comfort!



Then, through doing a Diploma in Theology I met a wonderful lady who worked for the Northampton Diocesan Tribunal. I unburdened myself to her and told somebody for the first time the history of my marriage. She advised me to apply for the annulment as I felt so strongly about it. I was not in a position where I was in another relationship and wanted to remarry in church, a matter that I believe was held against my petition. I duly wrote to Northampton and was sent a fact sheet to fill in, followed by an appointment with the Tribunal, which was cancelled. No further appointment was given. Instead, I was told I was to be interviewed by a lay auditor in my own house. This turned out to be a male auditor who I discovered later came from a neighbouring parish, and it was his first time interviewing a Petitioner. The interview did not go well as I found it almost impossible to talk to a complete stranger, the most personal and intimate details of my marriage. I cried so much after this interview and contacted the lady who had previously helped me. She advised me to contact Northampton, which I did, to no avail. I had little contact with the Tribunal, I really did not know how the system worked and in September I had a letter saying the tribunal had rejected my case. I was absolutely devastated; the sense of disappointment was immense. No one from the Tribunal had actually spoken to me; information about the proceedings was sketchy. I felt immensely let down and felt there was nobody on my side and representing me properly. Therefore I decided to appeal.

After two years of difficult divorce proceedings I was a bit of a mess, both physically and mentally. I had to keep my stressful job as a Practice Nurse going to pay the mortgage and bills, and I had three children to think about. I could not discuss my feelings with them; they were distressed and hurting too. It broke my heart to see them suffering so I kept my own counsel. The strain was continuous and I wonder on reflection how I coped. I could not have done it without my personal faith in God, though I wondered many times why I was being put through all this suffering. I can say now 'why not me', but not then. There were times when I thought God had deserted me and there were times when I ranted and raved at Him, but at least in doing so I was keeping the channels of communication open. But I can be fairly strong-minded, I had to be, not to give in under all the pressure and I was convinced in my heart and soul that my marriage was not a true sacramental union and was determined to prove it.

My faith at this time was being sorely tested and this caused me great distress. I spent time in prayer and reflection asking for spiritual guidance. I was then asked to Northampton to review the Acta in my case. I had been asked previously but was unable to attend. Nobody from the Tribunal stressed how important it was for my case to see the documents. I thought I was in the good hands of the Church. I then decided to do some research on the matter on annulments and discovered that my rights were at worst denied and at best severely infringed. I was told I could consult a Canon Lawyer for advice. I then had to contact the Canon Law Society [which I found by myself] and was contacted by a wonderful man, Monsignor ~~Michael Duggan~~ who agreed to help me. In March 95 I was informed that my case would be heard again as a First Instance Case. My Canon Lawyer advised me that it would be better if I applied to the Westminster Metropolitan Tribunal as Northampton had been too involved. He would act as my Advocate as my case had been declared by Northampton as 'res adhuc integra'.

The stress of this was beginning to tell; I kept thinking was it worth it, putting myself through all this stress and strain, but that inner voice just kept saying keep on. I cannot explain the difference between the two Tribunals. Here in Westminster was a group of



dedicated people who really cared about me. The difference in the tone of their letters to me was vastly different. At last I felt, no matter what the outcome, a large weight had been lifted from me. I was no longer battling alone. But the wheels of the legal system of the Church grind slowly and it was not until September 96 that Westminster was ready to proceed. I had a long interview in Bristol with my Advocate, and then an interview in London at Westminster in the Tribunal office, which lasted several hours. This is when I poured out my heart to the woman interviewing me, no horrible tape recorder here, she had to write everything down in longhand. I think I got through two boxes of tissues, the floodgates just opened. In retrospect I think that this was the moment when the healing process started, it was cathartic.

I was kept informed regularly by Westminster, including a wonderful condolence letter from them on the death of my mother. At long last in May 1998 I was granted a Decree Of Nullity in respect of my former marriage. The relief I felt was palpable. Going back through all the documents for this letter has revived many emotions. The divorce and annulment process had taken 7 long years. The stress was enormous. How it must be for anybody wanting to remarry does not bear thinking about. The difference between the two Tribunals handling my case was very marked. Although I have my annulment, I have never remarried.

I had had a very long marriage, my protracted and messy divorce was very painful, I was nearly destroyed physically and mentally, and then the annulment case was so distressing because in the beginning I felt nobody believed me and it went on for so long. I felt frustrated by the delays and lack of communication and having to travel to different places. I look back now and wonder how I managed to come through the whole process a normal human being. Of course I'm not normal, these things change your life forever. I still find it difficult to say I'm a divorced Catholic. If I tell someone I have an annulment, the immediate response is 'but you have three children'. I hate filling in forms where I have to state marital status. The Catholic Church still regards widows very differently to the separated and divorced. Had I been widowed and not my husband leaving me, I would have had all the clergy visiting the house. Did nobody realise that my children and me needed to see that the church cared about us? The attitude of the Church has distressed me deeply; my faith in the Church may be severely dented but not my faith in God. Funnily enough I could cope with the pain and suffering on a personal level [just about with the help of God's grace] but the attitude of the Church still niggles.

I am a founder member of our parish's Union of Catholic Mothers, but was told I could not be an officer because I was divorced [the rules have changed now], I couldn't be put forward as a Eucharist Minister because I was divorced until we had a more enlightened Parish priest, being a catechist was a bit iffy, but being a lector posed no problems!!

The majority of lay people just do not understand about annulments, many priests do not really understand it and why should they bother, when, as I've seen in my own parish, people remarried outside of the church can receive Holy Communion with the full blessing of the Priest, who deems it to be a matter of conscience.

So, why did I bother to put myself through all the hurt, pain, rejection and suffering? It was because I knew deep in my heart and soul that my marriage, although it was in a Catholic Church and I had three wonderful children from the marriage, that it was not a sacred bond. It was not a sacramental marriage. That was what kept me going despite the time



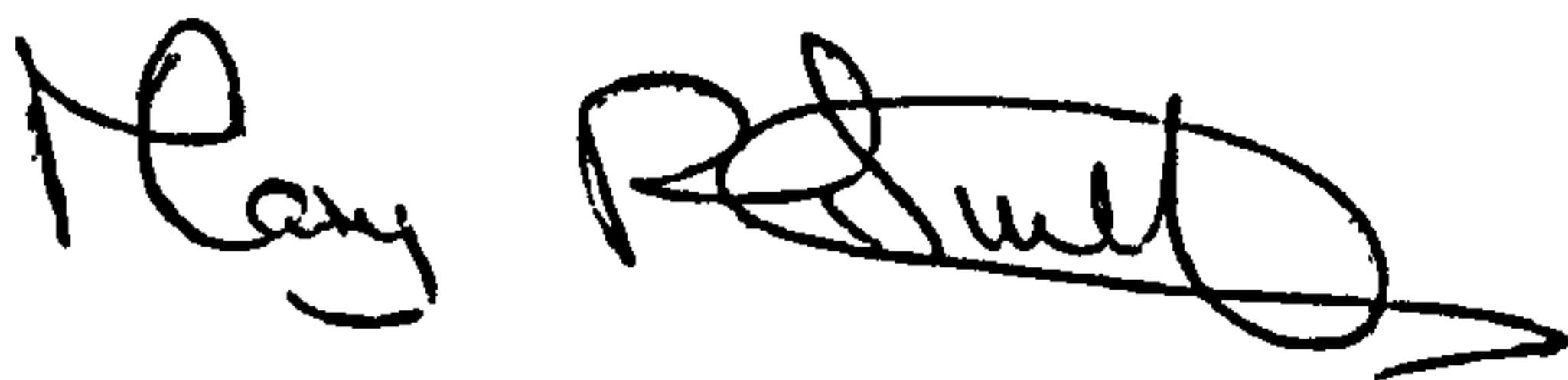
involved, the pain, the hurt, the distress, and at times the utter loneliness not to mention the cost.

I do apologise for having written at such length. Seven years is a long span to cover. If you require any more information, I do have a complete file on my annulment cases. It's only when I have been reading through all the correspondence I had, I have not opened the file for years, all the emotions have come flooding back. One does not, or should not enter the matter lightly; it is a difficult road to travel. With the Church now tightening up on annulments, how my heart sank when Cardinal Ratzinger became Pope, anyone even thinking of an annulment should be allowed proper counselling beforehand and not go into blindly as I did. Apologies for the statement about the Pope. I just had a heartfelt belief and fortunately for me my belief was upheld.

I would like to thank you for your time in reading this long missive. If I can be of any further help to you, please do not hesitate to contact me.

I wish you well in your studies and I hope that in future there will be 'better practice' in the area of applying for annulments and hope that people will not have to struggle on their own as I did for much of the time' I also hope that the Church will become a little more understanding of the miseries endured by marriage break ups, and especially that of the extended families and the children.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mary R Smith'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Mrs Mary R Smith

**Subject:** Annulment Process

**From:** "John and Ann Tivey"

**Date:** Sat, 8 Mar 2008 17:21:20 -0600

**To:** <info@stjosephderby.fsnet.co.uk>

Dear Fr Bill,

I saw your letter to Jimmie and Tracy in the latest copy of New Vision, the magazine of the ASDC, and after some consideration, decided to let you have some reminiscences of my own annulment.

When I first made contact with ASDC, I did not even know that there was such a thing as annulment until my Mother sent me a copy of an article in The Universe. I then contacted the local Marriage Tribunal and arranged to see the priest for an interview, and to provide him with a list of witnesses, which you may well understand made me feel like a criminal! The interview was upsetting at times, and if my memory serves me correctly, I was eventually sent a copy of the notes taken at the interview. I then had to contact the priest again to put right the errors it contained before he submitted it to the appropriate Tribunal ( not my local one, as I had married in my Parents' parish).

After many weeks, I heard that I needed to have another interview, with a psychologist, to assess my state of mind - how insulting is that! After that, everything went quiet for a long time, and I had no idea of what was happening, although some people did advise me that they had been contacted for interviews.

After many months (over a year), out of the blue I received a letter telling me that the application had been refused. As you can imagine, I was very distressed, especially as by this time I had been attending Mass regularly and fulfilling all my obligations apart from Easter Duties, which were denied to me in my current situation, as I was remarried (before I started the proceedings).

Luckily, I had a very understanding Chaplain at ASDC, and he absolved me in line with the Internal Forum as it was then, and I was able to start to receive the Sacraments again, which was a great joy to me. I know that I had been excluded by my own actions, but this doesn't make it any easier to accept that you cannot participate fully with your fellow Christians.

After some years, I was informed that some annulment processes had been declared unacceptable and could possibly be overturned, so I applied again and went through another process of interviews etc, and this time was kept informed of what was being done, and how long things should take. You can perhaps imagine my delight, relief, happiness ( and sadness that this had taken so long) when I was advised that an annulment had been granted, and I was able to arrange with the current ASDC chaplain to have a service to have my "marriage" blessed, which was a day of immense happiness for me, my husband and all our friends in our branch of the ASDC.

I would say that, overall, the process was humiliating, and made me feel it was a case of kicking a dog when it's already down, but thankfully, for me, in the end, all is well.

Yours sincerely,  
Ann.



In June 1978 I wrote to the Westminster Metropolitan Tribunal. In three closely typed pages I described the history of my unhappy marriage and asked if there would be a possibility of it being annulled on the grounds of my husband being unable to assume the obligations of marriage.

I was given an appointment to see a priest at the Tribunal in September. After a long interview, during which he did his best to make me feel at ease, he said there appeared to be a case, but as I was not yet divorced it could not go ahead. I had assumed that annulment should precede divorce as I knew the Church frowned on divorce.

I was cohabiting, and found that my relationship seemed much more like a marriage than my first marriage ever had. I felt comforted by the fact that the Church might see that first marriage as I had: I had often thought I didn't really feel as if I was married at all.

It was several years before I divorced my husband and contacted the Tribunal again on 14 January 1987. It was by then 25 years since my marriage, and three possible witnesses had died.

These were the people who knew both me and my husband best, both at and before the time of my marriage. I wrote to the tribunal with the names of two other witnesses, and subsequently suggested my partner, who had known both my husband and myself during the marriage.

After a wait of 9 months, the three witnesses were interviewed at the Tribunal. Things seemed to be moving very slowly. However, this was only the beginning of the delays. My case was passed to a Sister who 6 months later (February 1988) asked me to find further witnesses "at the earliest possible time". This was difficult but I did track down four friends or former friends who were willing to be interviewed.

However, these were not contacted, and when on a Friday in May 1988 I received a document notifying me that I had been granted an annulment I was overjoyed. I told the witnesses they would not be needed after all, and over the weekend on a country walk with my ASDC Group treated everyone to a glass of wine so they could celebrate with me. What a relief it was to have it all over. There had been so little communication with the Tribunal, one just doesn't know what is going on.

But on the following Monday a 'phone call came. There had been a mistake. Papers had been muddled; I should not have been sent the document as I had not been granted an annulment. I was instructed to destroy it. I sobbed down the 'phone; even writing about it now (7 years later) my eyes are full of tears just remembering the agony of that day. How could they be so stupid? A mistake? It was a tragedy for me. How many others had they done this to? My confidence in the Tribunal sunk to zero.

I was back to the restless worry of whether I would be granted an annulment. Would I be able to marry in church the partner I was living with, or would we be forever excluded from the sacraments?

Shortly after this Mgr ~~John Brown~~ sent a personal letter to me apologising for the "administrative error". Cold comfort.

There then followed months and months when nothing whatsoever happened. I wrote to the Sister who was supposed to be dealing with my case but received no replies. I 'phoned but was unable to speak to her.

Eventually in late December I wrote to Mgr ~~Finlay~~ pointing out that almost a year had passed since I was asked for the four further witnesses and nothing at all was happening. "The delay and total lack of communication that I am experiencing is causing me considerable anguish", I lamented, beseeching him to get the case moving again.

A reply from the Administrator reached me two months later. The sister had left and the details of my witnesses had been lost. Would I please send the names and addresses again. This was a whole year since I had first been asked for them. I was beginning to despair of the case ever being decided.

By June 1989 the witnesses had at last been interviewed. Now I was now in correspondence with the Administrator things seemed to be going better. At last information was coming. The material had been referred to a Psychiatrist.

In February 1990 I heard that the Westminster Tribunal considered the nullity proved and it would go to Birmingham for their decision. Finally on 24 April 1990 I was informed that my annulment had been granted.

But the memory of the mistake made in 1988 still haunted me, and for a while my joy was tempered by an irrational fear that it wasn't really true this time either.

I was pleased to have the annulment not only because I wanted to get married, but also because it confirmed my feeling that my first marriage was not a real marriage at all. The relief was enormous, after such a protracted period - 3 years 7 months in all, in a diocese where they claim that most annulments are completed within 18 months.

*Christine Hacklett*