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Demonization of Divorce: Prevalence Rates and Links to Postdivorce Adjustment

*The meaning-making process can be crucial to individuals as they adjust to their divorce. Demonization is a negative coping response (also known as spiritual struggle) that involves appraising someone or something as related to demonic forces. Individuals may cognitively frame a divorce as the work of Satan in order to understand suffering while maintaining beliefs in a just world or benevolent God. In this study, nearly half (48%) of the community sample (*N = *100) endorsed some form of demonization related to their recent divorce. Differences were observed in psychological postdivorce adjustment (post-traumatic stress, depression, anger, and positive/negative spiritual emotions) among groups with differing levels of demonization of divorce, demonization of ex-spouse, and demonization of self (none, low, and high). Implications for practitioners and researchers are discussed.*

As a topic central to the family, trends in the divorce rate have elicited considerable discussion (Popenoe, 2007). The sociocultural context surrounding divorce in the United States has historically been one of disapproval on moral grounds. Since 2001, however, the acceptance of divorce has risen, with a majority of nearly every major demographic category of Americans currently viewing divorce as morally acceptable (Saad, 2008). Nevertheless, certain segments of society display lower tolerance of divorce, including those 65 and older, political conservatives, and religious individuals (Saad).

At times, divorcees form negative appraisals of their divorce in the meaning-making process. One particularly extreme negative view involves demonization—the belief that demonic forces directly or indirectly influence a phenomenon. Cognitively reframing a negative event as the work of Satan allows a person to make sense of suffering while maintaining beliefs in a benevolent God or a just world (Pargament, 1997). In previous research, demonic reappraisals have been assessed with one item on a widely used measure of religious coping, the brief RCOPE (Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez, 1998). As such, demonization is one component of negative religious coping, which has also been conceptualized in terms of spiritual struggles. Using negative religious coping methods, or struggling spiritually, has frequently been tied to higher levels of physical, spiritual, emotional, and psychological distress (Pargament, 2011). Unfortunately, studies have rarely examined demonization in isolation from other negative coping techniques, and research has focused almost exclusively on individual rather than family stressors.

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This study was designed to provide descriptive information on the extent to which individuals demonize aspects of their divorce. We assessed the prevalence of demonization of one's ex-spouse, demonization of oneself, and demonization of the divorce. A second goal was to investigate whether these forms of demonization were related to psychological adjustment to divorce, including levels of post-traumatic stress, depression, anger, and spiritual emotions.

Transactional Model of Stress

The transactional model of stress and coping is based on the premise that an individual's success in adjusting to a stressor will depend in part on the meaning the person attaches to the event (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). That is, the cognitive appraisals a person forms about a stressor mediate the impact of the stressor on the individual's emotions and shape the coping process. In this model, a divorce appraised as threatening to an individual's values or goals will elicit stronger emotional reactions than a divorce appraised as benign. Therefore, it is valuable to consider how divorcing individuals appraise their divorce.

One longitudinal study provided support for the theory that individuals who reported beliefs in the immorality of divorce experienced heightened stress in the 2 years following their divorce (Booth & Amato, 1991). Lawton and Bures (2001) noted that interpreting divorce as a religious failure can exacerbate spiritual and emotional maladjustment. This study examined demonization as an extreme interpretation of divorce that is new to the research literature.

Demonization

Demonization refers to interpreting someone or something as being controlled by destructive powers of a transcendental nature. More specifically, a demonic appraisal is the belief that the devil or demonic forces directly or indirectly influence a phenomenon. A fair amount of nonempirical literature has described demonization in historical, political, and social events. For example, demonization has been used to explain the persecution, torture, and execution of women in the great witch hunt (Cohn, 1975). In parallel fashion, Robins and Post (1997) stated that demonization of a group of people can be central to political paranoia resulting in disasters such as the Cambodian purges of everything non-Khmer in the 1970s. Demonization has also been used to describe modern-day concerns such as prejudice (Tourish & Wohlforth, 2000), stigmatization (Reay, 2004), discrimination (Modood, 2006), oppression (Sait, 2004), war (Elovitz, 2003), and ethnonational conflicts (Apprey, 2001). Common themes among these examples are that people view individuals, groups, or events in a harsh light, appraise them in absolute terms, and consider them to be aligned with evil. Alon and Omer (2006) noted that demonization also can occur on the intimate levels of marriage, family, and other personal relationships. Views of demonization can be applied to both human and nonhuman activities and entities (e.g., actions, relationships, and events).

Despite the historical, political, and social consideration that has been given to the concept of demonization, the topic has rarely been studied empirically. There is much to be learned about how people come to perceive others, themselves, and aspects of life as demonic and what the implications of these perceptions are for human well-being. This study focused on the prevalence of demonization of divorce and the associations of demonization to various forms of postdivorce adjustment.

The Relevance of Demonization to Divorce

Not much is known about how often individuals form appraisals of demonization. Many Americans possess a religious framework for understanding the world (Kosmin, Mayer, & Keysar, 2001). Surveys indicate that approximately two thirds or more of Americans believe that the devil exists (Blanto, 2004; Davis, Smith, & Marsden, 2005; World Values Survey Association, 2006). This includes the majority of Americans in almost every demographic group (Robison, 2003). Not all individuals who believe in the devil will necessarily form appraisals of demonization. Some individuals who face troublesome circumstances may, however, rely on demonization as an attempt to come to grips with a threat. Reframing negative events as the work of Satan allows a person to make sense of suffering by attributing it to an evil force while holding on to beliefs in a just world or a benevolent God (Pargament, 1997). This spiritual appraisal can also function to mobilize painful emotions into

anger (Alon & Omer, 2006). By providing a target for anger, demonization can push difficult affect such as fear, loss, and shame out of awareness. For example, anger associated with demonization of divorce can overpower fear about being alone again, pain of losing a spouse, and shame about a failed marriage.

In a study of the types of attributions individuals make for various life events, Lupfer, Tolliver, and Jackson (1996) found that attributions to Satan were relatively rare, but occurred most frequently for events that had negative or life-altering consequences. Divorce fits this description, as it can unexpectedly violate a person's expectations about the future and can cause painful changes in social, financial, parental, residential, and vocational aspects of life (e.g., Amato, 2000; Brown, Felton, Whiteman, & Manela, 1980; Walters-Chapman, Price, & Serovich, 1995). Furthermore, many individuals consider their marriage to have spiritual meaning (Laaser, 2006; Mahoney et al., 1999; Otnes & Lowrey, 1993), regardless of whether they identify with a traditional religion (Vise, 2006). Thus, divorce can be experienced as the violation of a sacred institution (Krumrei, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2009; Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005). This can result in a spiritual trauma in which divorce is appraised in an intensely negative spiritual light (Mahoney, Krumrei, & Pargament, 2007). These appraisals can take place on an individual basis and may also reflect messages from larger contextual influences. For example, divorcing individuals may be told by members of their family, community, or church that divorce is evil or that the decision to divorce aligns the individual with the devil.

Appraisals of demonization can be applied to the divorce event and to the people involved. Individuals may escalate from a suspicion of negative intentions on the part of the ex-spouse to assuming the darkest of motives and believing that the other's behavior is controlled by demonic forces (Alon & Omer, 2006). Past research has indicated that a fair proportion of individuals maintain highly negative images of and feelings about their ex-spouses following divorce, which is associated with more emotional distress and poorer postdivorce adjustment (e.g., Brown et al., 1980; Tschann, Johnston, & Wallerstein, 1989). It is unknown to what extent appraisals of demonization might contribute to these harsh, negative views of the ex-spouse. Furthermore, demonization can be targeted not only toward others but also toward oneself (Alon & Omer). Thus, it is possible that individuals believe they have personally been influenced by the devil's will. In this way, they may demonize their own divorce-related actions.

Spirituality and Postdivorce Adjustment

The social sciences contain a large number of studies on factors that contribute to the nature and quality of individuals' postdivorce adjustment. Little empirical research, however, exists specifically on the role of spirituality in facilitating or undermining postdivorce adjustment (Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005; Mahoney et al., 2007). We located only a few studies on the role of spirituality in divorce, each indicating that religion and spirituality can function as positive resources for individuals and families following divorce (Blomquist, 1985; Greeff & Merwe, 2004; King, 2003; Nathanson, 1995). Less is known empirically about whether certain forms of spirituality can also heighten distress in a family crisis. Given that religious systems of meaning provide people with fundamental assumptions about appropriate, *God-given* family values and processes (Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank, & Murray-Swank, 2003), events such as divorce that violate these assumptions may result in increased struggle (Mahoney & Tarakeshwar). Within this model, Krumrei et al. (2009) observed that interpreting divorce as a sacred loss or desecration was associated with higher levels of depression following divorce. We are unaware of any published empirical studies that address the current topic of demonization and divorce.

Demonization and Psychological Adjustment

A substantial body of literature has examined the role of positive and negative religious methods of coping with stress (Pargament, 2011). As noted, demonic reappraisal has been examined embedded within the construct of negative religious coping. We were able to locate only two empirical studies that focused specifically on demonization. In a longitudinal study of medically ill elderly patients, those who viewed the devil as the cause of their illnesses

experienced greater decline in quality of life and were at greater risk of mortality in comparison with those who did not endorse appraisals of demonization, even after controlling for baseline health, mental health status, and demographic factors (Pargament, Koenig, Tarakeshwar, & Hahn, 2001). In another study, viewing the 9/11 terrorists as working under the influence of the devil was associated with a greater sense of threat and higher levels of illness, post-traumatic stress symptoms, and desire for retaliation (Mahoney et al., 2002).

In the case of divorce, individuals may similarly experience more intense negative emotional reactions if they engage in appraisals of demonization. Attributing one's divorce to the work of the devil could conceivably increase distress. Similarly, viewing one's ex-spouse as aligned with evil might increase anger, and demonizing oneself could be associated with increased depression. Thus, in addition to the well-known postdivorce readjustment challenges, those who demonize aspects of their divorce may experience an added layer of psychological difficulties.

Study Goals and Hypotheses

The first goal of this study was to provide descriptive information regarding the extent to which individuals demonize aspects of their divorce. We expected that those going through divorce might perceive the devil as being present in the divorce or the actions of the individuals involved. We assessed the prevalence of three forms of demonic appraisals: views of one's ex-spouse as having knowingly or unknowingly operated under the influence of demonic forces in the process of getting divorced (demonization of ex-spouse), perceptions of oneself as having acted in line with the devil in the process of getting divorced (demonization of self), and appraisals of the devil being manifest directly in the divorce process (demonization of divorce).

Little is known about how views of demonization relate to people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Therefore, the second goal of this study was to investigate whether differences in demonization were related to varying levels of psychological adjustment. We selected psychological measures on the basis of theory and previous research. Anger was selected on the theoretical basis that individuals may engage in demonization to overcome fear during a time of transition by mobilizing it into anger (Alon & Omer, 2006; Pargament, 1997). Post-traumatic stress was selected due to this variable being related to views of demonization in previous research (Mahoney et al., 2002). Spiritual emotions were selected due to views of demonization being longitudinally predictive of spiritual outcomes in previous research (Pargament et al., 1998). Finally, depression was selected because it has been a common measure of postdivorce adjustment. Fitting within the transactional stress model, we hypothesized that those who demonized aspects of their divorce to a greater extent (i.e., interpreted the divorce as a greater spiritual threat) would experience poorer psychological adjustment than those who formed less or no demonic appraisals of divorce. We expected appraisals of demonization to be associated with higher post-traumatic stress, depression, anger, and negative spiritual emotions, and lower positive spiritual emotions.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 100 adults (55% women) who had filed for divorce within the previous 6 months ($M = 3.32$ months). For 77% of the participants, the divorce was final at the time of participation. An additional 21% of participants were within 5 months of finalizing the divorce. In 47% of the cases, the divorce was initiated by the participant, in 33% by the ex-spouse, and in 20% by partners together. The majority of participants (62%) had children with their ex-spouse. Participants resided in 13 states, predominantly in the Midwest. Their ages ranged from 19 to 75 years ($M = 40.0$, $SD = 10.76$). Participants were 87% Caucasian, 5% African American, 5% Hispanic, 2% Asian, and 1% ''Other.'' Preseparation annual household income in 2005 dollars was 14% less than $25,000; 27% between $25,001 and $50,000; 24% between $50,001 and $75,000; 20% between $75,001 and $100,000; and 15% more than $100,000. Forty-two percent of the sample had a college or postgraduate degree.

Participants appeared similar or slightly lower than representative U.S. adult samples with regard to religiousness. For example, 19% indicated that they had no religious or denominational affiliation compared to 14%

of all adults in the 2004 General Social Survey (Davis et al., 2005). The religious affiliation of the rest of the sample was predominantly Christian: 54% Protestant, 22% Catholic, and 5% other (including Buddhist and Native American Lore). Almost half (49%) of the participants indicated that they attended religious services nearly every week or more, whereas a quarter (25%) attended religious services twice a year or less. When asked to rate their religiousness, 19% of participants indicated that they were not at all religious, 40% slightly religious, 15% moderately religious, and 4% very religious (the additional 22% indicated they did not know how to rate their religiousness). In comparison, 10% of participants indicated that they were not spiritual at all, 33% slightly spiritual, 37% moderately spiritual, and 4% very spiritual (the remaining 16% did not know).

Procedure

With approval from the affiliated Human Subjects Review Board, participants were recruited through two means: (a) postcards were sent to 599 addresses in the public records of those filing for divorce at the courthouse in a metropolitan county in the Midwest and (b) brochures about the study were made available to approximately 80 individuals at parenting seminars mandated for those with children who divorce in a rural county in the Midwest. Through the postcards and brochures, individuals were invited to complete a survey about divorce. The informed consent information indicated that participation would involve answering questions about thoughts, feelings, and behaviors related to their divorce. Participants chose whether to complete the materials online (68%) or to complete a paper survey and return it by postage-paid envelope (32%). Participants were compensated with $20 gift cards.

Measures

Demonization. A demonization scale (Mahoney et al., 2002) was adapted to assess the extent to which participants demonized aspects of their divorce. The scale assessed views of (a) the devil being directly manifest in the divorce (three items, e.g., ''The devil played a role in my divorce''), (b) the ex-spouse's behavior being influenced by the devil (eight items, e.g., ''The devil used my ex-spouse for his purposes'' and ''My ex-spouse has been on the devil's side''), and (c) participants' behavior being influenced by the devil (eight items, e.g., ''The devil has been at work in my actions'' and ''I have been confusing God's work with the devil's work''). The 19 items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). The items displayed high internal consistency in the current sample (Table 1). Items were summed to create scores for demonization of divorce, ex-spouse, and self. Scale scores were used to divide the sample into groups of no, low, and high demonization of divorce, ex-spouse, and self.

Depression. Participants' depressive symptoms were assessed with the 20-item Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1977). This measure was developed for use in the general population. Extensive research established the validity and reliability of the CES-D in community samples ($\alpha = .84 - .87$). Items were summed to create a total depression score.

Post-traumatic stress. The 15-item Impact of Events Scale (IES; Horowitz, Wilner, & Alvarez, 1979) was used to assess stress reactions to divorce. The IES includes two subscales of symptoms associated with anxiety disorders and stress response syndromes: intrusive thoughts, such as ''pictures about it popped into my mind'' (seven items) and avoidant behaviors, such as ''I tried not to talk about it'' (eight items). Prior research has established adequate internal reliability and construct validity of both subscales (intrusion subscale $\alpha = .78$, avoidance subscale $\alpha = .82$; Horowitz et al.). Items were summed to create a total post-traumatic stress score.

Anger about divorce. An adapted version of the state subscale of the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory (Spielberger, 1991) was used to assess participants' experience of anger about their divorce, including feeling angry, irritated, annoyed, mad, and furious about the event. Previous research has established high internal consistency for the state items (e.g., $\alpha = .94$; Kroner & Reddon, 1992). Items were summed to create a total score of divorce-related anger.

Table 1. *Prevalence Rates of Demonization; Ranges, Means, Standard Deviations, and Internal Reliability of All Variables; and Spearman's Rho Correlations Between Demonization Scales and Adjustment Measures (*N = *100)*

	Demonization of Divorce	Demonization of Ex-Spouse	Demonization of Self
Psychological adjustment			
Post-traumatic stress	.31**	.21*	.30**
Depression	.23*	.12	.32**
State anger	.24*	.20*	.26**
Positive spiritual emotions	.28**	.35***	.15
Negative spiritual emotions	.47**	.39***	.51**

Measure	Number of Items	Range	*M*	*SD*	α	Percentage of Sample With Average Item Response Corresponding Most Closely to the Anchor Points: *Not at All* (1 of 5)	*Somewhat* (3 of 5)	*Very Much* (5 of 5)
Demonization (full scale)	19	19–78	29.74	15.74	.95	52%	46%	2%
Demonization of divorce	3	3–15	5.7	4.21	.97	64%	18%	18%
Demonization of self	8	8–31	10.20	4.87	.92	69%	31%	0%
Demonization of ex-spouse	8	8–38	13.84	9.02	.96	57%	34%	9%
Depression	20	20–80	41.63	13.57	.93			
Post-traumatic stress	15	15–57	32.10	10.87	.92			
Anger about divorce	5	5–20	12.95	4.77	.93			
Positive spiritual emotions	7	7–35	18.46	8.13	.91			
Negative spiritual emotions	7	7–33	13.00	6.07	.84			
Global religiousness	4	4–23	15.01	4.62	.84			

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Spiritual emotions. A measure of essentially religious feelings that result from difficult life events (Butter, 2004) was adapted to assess the degree to which participants experienced various emotions about their divorce, including positive spiritual emotions (e.g., peace, awe, gratitude, inspiration, and acceptance/love from God) and negative spiritual emotions (e.g., guilt, spiritually lost or empty, anger at God, and fear of divine punishment). Content validity for the items was reasonable, and internal consistency for the Positive Religious Feelings subscale ($\alpha = .91$) and the Negative Religious Feelings subscale ($\alpha = .93$) was high (Butter). Convergent validity was established on the basis of correlations with religious coping scales. Items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*most of the time*) and summed to create scores for positive and negative spiritual emotions.

Demographic information. General demographic data were gathered, including participant's age, gender, race, educational background, and annual household income. In addition, couple demographic data were gathered, including time since filing and finalizing divorce and whether there were children shared by both partners. Finally, consistent with prior research (Mahoney et al., 1999) a global religiousness score was computed on the basis of self-rated religiousness and spirituality, frequency of religious service attendance, and frequency of prayer ($\alpha = .84$ in the current sample).

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Visual examination revealed that the frequency distributions for the three demonization scales appeared positively skewed. This was supported with both Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests of normality, which were significant at the $p < .01$ level for demonization of divorce, demonization of ex-spouse, and demonization of self. A positive skew is fitting with the notion that views of demonization may be relatively

rare and minimally endorsed. As a result, we made use of nonparametric analyses that do not assume data are normally distributed.

Spearman's rho was selected as a nonparametric analysis to correlate the three forms of demonization with one another and with each of the demographic variables of gender, race, income, level of education, age, having children with the ex-spouse, and an index of general religiousness. This revealed that those with higher incomes tended to engage in less demonization of self and ex-spouse ($r = -.26$, $p < .01$ for income and demonization of self; $r = -.22$, $p < .05$ for income and demonization of ex-spouse). Follow-up Kruskal-Wallis tests of differences among the six income brackets, however, revealed no significant differences for demonization of self, $\chi^2(5, n = 100) = 7.35$, $p = .20$, or demonization of ex-spouse, $\chi^2(5, n = 100) = 5.76$, $p = .33$.

The demonization scales were correlated with a four-item index of global religiousness at levels indicating that demonization was related to greater religiousness, but not redundant with religiousness ($r = .44$, $p < .001$ for demonization of divorce; $r = .32$, $p < .01$ for demonization of ex-spouse; and $r = .38$, $p < .001$ for demonization of self). Finally, the degree to which participants endorsed one form of demonization was moderately associated with the degree to which they endorsed the other forms of demonization ($r = .62$, $p < .001$ for demonization of self and ex-spouse; $r = .74$, $p < .001$ for demonization of divorce and self; and $r = .76$, $p < .001$ for demonization of divorce and ex-spouse).

Descriptive Information

Table 1 displays information on the psychometric properties of the demonization scales and adjustment measures in the current sample. A clearer picture of the prevalence of demonization among divorcing individuals is gained by considering the extent to which participants engaged in such appraisals (Table 1). Forty-eight percent of participants endorsed some form of demonization related to their divorce. Thirty-six percent of participants indicated that they had, to some extent, experienced the divorce itself as a demonized event. Forty-three percent of participants indicated that they believed their ex-spouse had, to some extent, been operating under the influence of demonic forces. A slightly lower subsample (31%) indicated that they themselves had, to some extent, been doing the devil's work in the process of getting divorced. Those who endorsed demonic appraisals tended to do so to a small degree. Very high levels of demonic appraisals were relatively rare.

Relationship Between Demonization and Postdivorce Adjustment

Correlation analyses. Spearman's rho correlations were conducted between the three demonization scales and each measure of adjustment (Table 1). As expected, demonization of the divorce, demonization of ex-spouse, and demonization of oneself were generally associated with higher levels of post-traumatic stress, depression, anger, and negative spiritual emotions. Contrary to expectations, however, demonization of the divorce and demonization of the ex-spouse were each associated with higher levels of positive spiritual emotions. Finally, demonization of the ex-spouse was not significantly correlated with depression and demonization of self was not significantly correlated with positive spiritual emotions.

Group differences in adjustment based on the degree of demonization. To examine differences on the basis of endorsement of demonization, cutoff scores of the demonization scales were used to divide the sample into groups. For each form of demonization, the No Demonization group endorsed ''none'' an all scale items, the Low Demonization group on average endorsed ''slightly'' or ''somewhat'' on scale items, and the High Demonization group on average endorsed ''high'' or ''very high'' on scale items.

Kruskal-Wallis tests revealed significant differences in the amounts of post-traumatic stress, anger, negative spiritual emotions, and positive spiritual emotions among those who endorsed no, low, and high demonization of divorce (Table 2). Post hoc Mann-Whitney *U* tests were performed between each pair of groups, with the use of a Bonferroni correction to control for Type 1 errors. Results for each group were as follows.

Those who demonized their divorce to a high degree experienced greater levels of post-traumatic stress than those who endorsed no or low levels of demonization of divorce. Those who endorsed any degree of demonization of

Table 2. *Kruskal-Wallis Tests of Differences in Adjustment Measures for Levels of Demonization (*N = *100)*

	None		Low		High		
Adjustment Measure	*N*	*M*	*N*	*M*	*N*	*M*	χ^2
Panel A: Demonization of divorce							
Post-traumatic stress	64	44.27_a	15	56.20_a	21	65.40_b	9.08*
Depression	64	45.41	15	60.30	21	59.02	5.50
State anger	64	45.09_a	15	63.17_b	21	57.93_a	6.58*
Negative spiritual emotions	64	40.48_a	15	63.67_b	21	71.62_b	22.14***
Positive spiritual emotions	64	45.36_a	15	47.17_a	21	68.55_b	10.39**
Panel B: Demonization of ex-spouse							
Post-traumatic stress	57	47.23_a	25	46.26_a	18	66.75_b	6.92*
Depression	57	49.82	25	42.50	18	63.78	5.71
State anger	57	46.49	25	50.96	18	62.56	4.28
Negative spiritual emotions	57	41.80_a	25	56.54_b	18	69.67_b	14.26**
Positive spiritual emotions	57	41.95_a	25	60.68_b	18	63.44_b	11.68**
Panel C: Demonization of self							
Post-traumatic stress	69	44.60_a	23	61.67_b	8	67.19_b	9.03*
Depression	69	43.60_a	23	65.96_b	8	62.75_{ab}	12.10**
State anger	69	44.17_a	23	64.63_b	8	61.94_{ab}	10.37**
Negative spiritual emotions	69	41.38_a	23	64.85_b	8	84.94_c	24.19***
Positive spiritual emotions	69	48.23	23	54.13	8	58.94	1.48

Note: Means sharing a common subscript are not statistically different according to Mann-Whitney *U* tests.
$^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$. $^{***}p < .001$.

divorce experienced more anger and negative spiritual emotions than those who did not demonize their divorce at all. Finally, those who endorsed a high amount of demonization of divorce experienced more positive spiritual emotions than those who endorsed no or low levels of demonization of divorce.

Those who endorsed a high amount of demonization of the ex-spouse experienced more post-traumatic stress than those who endorsed no or low levels of demonization of the ex-spouse. In addition, those who endorsed any degree of demonization of the ex-spouse experienced more negative and positive spiritual emotions than those who did not demonize their ex-spouse at all.

Those who endorsed any degree of demonization of self experienced more post-traumatic stress than those who did not demonize themselves at all. Those who demonized themselves slightly or somewhat experienced more depression and anger than those who did not demonize their divorce at all. Contrary to expectations, those who endorsed high levels of demonization of self did not differ significantly from those who did not demonize themselves at all in their levels of depression and anger. Finally, those who endorsed some demonization of self experienced more negative spiritual emotions than those who endorsed no demonization of self, and those who endorsed high demonization of self experienced more negative spiritual emotions than either of the other groups.

Discussion

In this study we sought to learn more about the extent to which individuals form appraisals of demonization with regard to their divorce and whether such appraisals relate to postdivorce adjustment. Among the 100 participants, 48% endorsed some appraisal of demonization (36% demonized the divorce itself, 43% saw their ex-spouse as operating under demonic influences, and 31% viewed themselves as under demonic forces). Views of demonization were correlated with various indices of postdivorce adjustment. Trends in the differences in adjustment for those who endorsed varying levels of demonization were consistent with the hypotheses.

Generally, greater demonization was related to greater psychological maladjustment following divorce. Overall, the findings are consistent with the transactional stress model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Those who appraised their divorce as influenced by the devil likely viewed their divorce as more threatening in comparison with those who appraised their divorce in more benign terms (e.g., viewing divorce as a natural response to the decisions made by the adults involved rather than attributing it to the will of the devil). This theoretically could account for the links to greater post-traumatic stress, depression, and anger. In addition, demonization of divorce can involve experiencing the divorce as less controllable, perhaps diminishing confidence in the individual's ability to cope effectively, which, fitting with this model, could further exacerbate maladjustment. Thus, demonization as a spiritual struggle surrounding divorce may be one of the mechanisms that explains the nature of postdivorce adjustment as we know it.

An interesting theme among the data is that demonization of self with regard to divorce was the most rare, but perhaps also the most powerful experience among the current sample. Those who endorsed high demonization of divorce or ex-spouse experienced greater post-traumatic stress than those who endorsed no or low demonization of divorce or ex-spouse, whereas those who endorsed *any* degree of demonization of self (low or high) experienced higher levels of post-traumatic stress than those who did not endorse demonization of themselves. In addition, group differences in levels of depression were observed only for demonization of self and not for demonization of divorce or ex-spouse. Thus, one hypothesis is that demonization of self is a more powerful experience than demonization of another person or external event. It should also be noted that, counterintuitively, those with the highest levels of self-demonization, however, were not statistically different in their levels of depression or anger from either the low or no demonization-of-self groups. This may have resulted from a lack of power due to the small number of individuals who endorsed high levels of demonization of self (only 8 of 100).

In addition to psychological adjustment, demonization was also related to spiritual outcome measures. Each form of demonic appraisal was associated with more negative spiritual emotions. Divorce can challenge certain spiritually based assumptions about the world (Mahoney et al., 2007). When an individual's life is altered at what is perceived to be the hands of the devil, the person is likely to feel confused and spiritually lost or angry at God for allowing this to happen. On a similar note, demonizing oneself with regards to the divorce is likely to bring up painful feelings of spiritual guilt and unworthiness or fear of divine punishment.

Interestingly, demonization of the divorce and demonization of the ex-spouse were both also associated with higher levels of positive spiritual emotions. These emotions encompass feelings such as gratitude toward a higher power and feeling loved and accepted by an unseen presence. Although this seems puzzling, it mirrors previous research findings among individuals who demonized the perpetrators of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. These individuals not only experienced greater post-traumatic stress symptoms and illness, but also greater psychological and spiritual growth. This may be related to the fact that those who experienced the power of the devil at work in the terrorist attacks were more likely to consider and revise their priorities in life, reach out to others, and take actions to develop deeper spiritual roots (Mahoney et al., 2002). Additionally, some prior research has found divorce to be related to positive spiritual experiences (Ferch & Ramsey, 2003; Spaniol & Lannan, 1985). For example, Blomquist (1985) and Nathanson (1995) each found that those who experienced their divorce as more traumatic experienced higher levels of positive spiritual change. They speculated that higher levels of crisis might push individuals toward deeper integration on a spiritual level. Thus, it is possible that grappling with demonic appraisals of divorce could lead to a reinforcement of the spiritual realities in an individual's life, including positive ones.

Demonization of Divorce as a New Topic for Exploration

With almost half of the divorcing individuals in this sample engaging in some form of demonic appraisal related to divorce, we find it useful to introduce family practitioners and researchers to the concept of demonization as a topic that could be relevant to families going through divorce. We caution readers that these data represent initial findings on the topic of demonization

from a sample that represents a low response rate (perhaps the result of high levels of transition among divorcing individuals) and is limited in diversity. Therefore, we advocate a conservative stance with regard to drawing conclusions or generalizing the findings.

Implications for Family Practitioners

Results indicating that those with differing levels of demonization in this sample exhibited differences in indices of psychological adjustment offer initial support for the idea that it may be useful for family practitioners to have an awareness of the concept of demonization and the various shapes these cognitive appraisals can take for divorcing individuals. A lack of awareness of this topic may mean overlooking struggles related to how clients think about divorce, as well as how they perceive their ex-spouses or themselves.

Mental health practitioners, understandably, may be hesitant to address a topic such as demonization with their clients. We are unaware of research assessing the prevalence of views of demonization among mental health professionals. Given that practitioners tend to be less religious than the general population (e.g., Shafranske, 2001), we assume that many do not themselves subscribe to views of demonization. Even practitioners working in religious settings or those with personal faith may be unfamiliar with clinical presentations of demonization. Nevertheless, when this topic is salient to the client, as with any clinical issue, it should be addressed in the therapeutic process with sensitivity and respect. In a survey of clinical psychologists, 74% disagreed (with an additional 11% being neutral) that religious or spiritual issues are outside the scope of psychology (Shafranske & Malony, 1990). Only one third of the clinicians, however, reported personal competence in counseling clients regarding religious or spiritual issues. Thus, it seems there is a need for practitioners to work toward a position of spiritual literacy and competence (Pargament, 2007). This begins by adopting an attitude of openness and tolerance in the process of assessment and treatment.

It is premature to suggest that all practitioners should routinely assess demonization among divorcing clients on the basis of the present data. Having a theoretical understanding of demonic appraisals may, however, help practitioners recognize this phenomenon when it is present. We suggest that family practitioners listen for indicators that divorcing clients may be thinking in terms of demonization. Here we offer suggestions for assessment and treatment with clients who display that they view their divorce in demonic terms.

Listening for and assessing demonization among clients. Clients will often not speak in explicit demonic terms. Therefore, it is important for practitioners to listen for underlying views of demonization in the way clients describe their ex-spouses, themselves, and the divorce process. Practitioners should be alert to several potential signs of demonic appraisals: clients who present matters in stark contrasts, for example, presenting their position as completely good and their ex-spouse's position as completely evil, or drawing absolutes regarding life before and after the divorce; clients who use a suspicious or hostile tone, for example, second guessing every action and intention of the ex-spouse or threatening harm to the ex-spouse or individuals associated with the ex-spouse; and clients who display militant or radical attitudes, for example, desiring extreme forms of punishment or retribution (Alon & Omer, 2006). In such cases, gentle probing into demonic appraisals may be warranted. This involves collaboratively exploring with clients whether they appraise their divorces, themselves, or their ex-spouses as demonized.

Addressing demonization in treatment. If assessment indicates that clients are experiencing the spiritual struggle of demonization, there may be clinical value in addressing this topic further in treatment. One approach is to explore the anger associated with their demonic appraisals. Consider whom or what is the target of the anger. The nature of demonization implies that clients will have the tendency to blame the target that is demonized (e.g., the ex-spouse, themselves, or the devil). This could prevent awareness of other aspects of the situation requiring attention (such as their own or the other partner's responsibility). Therapy might focus on redirecting the anger in a more appropriate manner, such as using the energy to work toward a life goal. In addition, anger may be experienced as a secondary emotion. Therefore, it may be beneficial to assess and address underlying emotions such as fear and uncertainty.

Another therapeutic avenue is to explore the client's experience of pain and suffering

in relation to demonic appraisals. Pargament (1997, 2007) and Alon and Omer (2006) remind us that views of demonization can function as a person's attempt to understand the riddle of suffering in life. Therefore, clinical work with those who demonize aspects of their divorce may focus on exploring the pain they have experienced and discovering how they make sense of this suffering. Practitioners can help individuals become more aware of the causes to which they attribute the suffering in their lives, particularly if they are demonizing a specific target as the cause. Practitioners can provide support as clients grapple with, and perhaps find, alternative answers to the question of suffering.

This study indicates that demonization of self could be particularly hazardous. Attending to the sinister spiritual meaning that clients attach to themselves may provide a unique springboard from which to work toward internal psychological healing. Important considerations may be whether the demonic views are ego-syntonic or ego-dystonic and how the clients' demonization of self relates to their sense of identity and self-worth. Mahoney et al. (2007) have offered further considerations relevant to working with clients who have experienced divorce as a spiritual trauma.

Religious-based services. Practitioners should consider whether a client's religious background plays a role in demonic appraisals. Practitioners can explore this with clients as well as consult with religious leaders regarding normative beliefs and experiences in the client's religious culture (Mungadze, 2000; Pargament & Krumrei, 2008). Given that religious systems can provide a context for the meaning individuals ascribe to their divorce, some individuals will naturally go to clergy and members of the religious community for spiritual guidance following a divorce. Other times, clinicians may find it beneficial to refer clients to religious leaders for conversations about their views of demonization. These individuals can be important allies in the treatment process.

Faith-based service providers and religious leaders may be able to help divorcees work through their spiritual struggle of demonization in spiritual terms. Spirituality is a vitally important aspect of life for many individuals. Major events such as divorce can raise spiritual struggles such as grappling with views of demonization. Faith-based practitioners and religious leaders may be in a unique position to help individuals work through these struggles in a way that maintains spiritual vitality. In addition, religious leaders may be able to help individuals consider whether their particular conceptualizations of demonization represent sound doctrine. If not, religious authority may be useful in challenging unhealthy beliefs that are inconsistent with the larger faith system.

Implications for Family Research

The assessment of demonization in this study provides an example of an in-depth measure of a specific aspect of spirituality. In the past, research related to religion/spirituality and the family has overwhelmingly relied on global indicators of religion, such as religious affiliation, religious service attendance, or self-rated importance of spirituality (Mahoney et al., 1999). To help this subarea mature, family researchers need to become increasingly thoughtful about their conceptualization of religion and consider going beyond the assessment of general religiousness (Mahoney, 2010). Although demonization may be a relatively unique aspect of religious diversity, it offers a richer awareness of one way in which spirituality can be integrated into a family event such as divorce, certainly more so than can be provided by brief measures of general religiosity.

More comprehensive assessment offers insight into how aspects of religion and spirituality relate to family functioning. For example, Butler, Stout, and Gardner (2002) have described helpful and harmful ways that spouses incorporate God into their attempts to cope with marital difficulties. Appraisals of demonization may pose parallel processes related to beliefs about the devil's rather than God's involvement in family events. In this study we have considered demonization in instances of divorce. This phenomenon can, however, be explored in many other family experiences, including those of intact families. For example, it is possible that individuals would demonize stressful family occurrences such as infidelity and violence. Future research can explore how demonization of such events, or the individuals involved in them, impacts subsequent family functioning.

Further research is necessary for understanding the development and maintenance of demonization. Research might examine what circumstances and environmental factors are

associated with demonization. Research can also evaluate whether demonization is related to personality constructs. In addition, further information is needed to understand the mechanisms underlying demonization and to confirm whether demonization is a substantively unique phenomenon. The possibility exists that demonization reflects negative attributions more generally, such as externalizing one's problems. For example, it would be of interest to examine how demonization relates to Rotter's (1966) conception of locus of control. Perhaps attribution of events and behaviors to the will of the devil is a spiritualized version of an external locus of control. Future researchers can examine to what extent demonization predicts outcome measures beyond the variability attributable to locus of control in general.

This study offers an initial step toward understanding the role of demonization in divorce. It would be necessary to follow participants over time in order to assess how views of demonization relate to changes in measures of postdivorce adjustment. At the current juncture, it is unclear whether demonization impacts adjustment, whether quality of adjustment impacts views of demonization, or whether both are related to other factors embedded in the divorce process. In addition, replication of studies on the links between demonization and divorce is necessary to have confidence in the association of these variables. In particular, greater external validity can be gained in future studies on this topic through the assessment of samples with greater diversity of race and socioeconomic status. The topic of demonization has rarely been studied empirically in the social sciences. Therefore, there remains much to be learned about how people come to perceive themselves, others, and aspects of life as demonic and the implications of these perceptions for individual and family well-being.

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