

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF GOD ATTACHMENT, ROMANTIC
ATTACHMENT, AND RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION IN CHRISTIAN COUPLES
COMPLETING AN EMOTIONALLY-FOCUSED MARITAL INTENSIVE

by

Shanon Kaye Roberts

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

With professional counseling ethics and organizations moving to more spiritual and cultural sensitivity on behalf of their clients, there is limited research on Christian couples in the area of marital intervention. This phenomenological study examined the shared experiences of five Christian couples who participated in a Christian emotionally-focused therapy marital intensive and who reported maintaining relationship satisfaction one year later. The study assessed the effectiveness of this Christian marital counseling intervention; and identified emergent processes and themes that occurred specific to Christian couples in a marital intervention setting; and added to the God attachment and romantic attachment literature through a Christian EFT marital intervention model. I operated as the interviewer for each couple. Results yielded three major themes for the three research questions, several minor themes and a few points of interest. The SHRM was found to be an effective intervention for Christian couples to move to a secure presentation in God and romantic attachment presentation that resulted in relationship satisfaction. The recommendations for future research included conducting a longitudinal quantitative study by operationalizing the outcome themes from this study, conducting a qualitative study with couples who did not achieve relationship satisfaction through SHRM, and conducting a qualitative study with other counselors who have used this model. The outcome model can be used as a diagnostic tool at intake to better individualize each couple's treatment focus and inform the clinician as to the couple's attachment presentation in the area of God attachment, romantic attachment, relationship satisfaction and attachment outside the relationship.

Keywords: attachment, God, romantic, relationship satisfaction, Christianity, marriage, emotionally focused therapy

Copyright Page

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Todd. Thank you for 31 years of being my constant. It is this constant that has allowed me to travel this journey, which is the very nature of this research. You are my safe haven and secure base. You have been the one encouraging me along the way, accepting time not dedicated to us, and filling in where needed to make our crazy, wonderful life work. I love you.

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List of Abbreviations

American Association of Christian Counselors (AACC)

American Counseling Association (ACA)

American Psychological Association (APA)

Association for Spiritual, Ethical and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC)

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)

Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT)

Haven of Safety Marital Intensive (HSMI)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Internal Working Model (IWM)

Research Question (RQ)

The Safe Haven Relationship Center (SHRC)

Safe Haven Relationship Model (SHRM)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Christian couples enter into marriage with influences from their faith's values and traditions that are different than other couples (Marks, 2005). These values influence Christian couples' belief that God is directly involved in their marriage (Goodman & Dollahite, 2006). Lambert and Dollahite (2008) found that Christian couples' beliefs of God's involvement in their marriage influence how they prevent, resolve, and overcome marital conflict. Christian couples demonstrate a commitment to seeking reconciliation, rather than divorce, for their marital conflicts (Lambert & Dollahite, 2008; Marks, 2005). Marks (2005) called for scholarly understanding, clinical awareness, and sensitivity to this minority. To that end, the Association for Spiritual, Ethical and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC; 2016), exists for the purpose of assisting counselors in honoring diverse populations while providing them evidence-based interventions. Herein lays the problem. Glass and Levchak (2014) identified the need to conduct evidence-based research towards establishing an empirically supported marital intervention for those of the Christian faith. With promising evidence in support of emotionally focused therapy (EFT) as an effective treatment intervention among couples (Johnson, Hunsley, Greenberg, & Schindler, 1999; Wood, Crane, Schaalje, & Law, 2005), the safe haven relationship model (SHRM) incorporates EFT principles with Christian faith elements in the intervention (Hart & Morris, 2003). Research on this model adds to the body of research toward an empirically supported treatment intervention for Christian couples while honoring the movement of spiritual and ethical awareness for the counselors who work with this population.

Summary of the Problem

Understanding Christian marriages is complicated and multi-layered. The divorce rate in America has been at 50% for the past couple of decades (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015). Some researchers have found, despite the conservative values and importance placed on marriage and family, Christian marriages see approximately divorce similar rates (Lesthaeghe & Neidert, 2006). Glass and Levchak (2014), through statistics taken from the National Surveys of Family Growth, found that Christian conservative beliefs can positively relate to divorce risks. The belief in abstinence from sexual relations before marriage drives couples into marriage younger. This can impact educational and income levels. Younger age in marriage, lower educational and income levels and younger age in parenting are known divorce risks (Glass & Levchak, 2014). The impact of their beliefs, not necessarily the beliefs themselves, can bring additional stressors to Christian marriages.

Upon closer scrutiny, however, other researchers have found that not all conservative Christians can be put into the same category (Wright, 2010). Differences within this group merit a closer look at the divorce rate. Within Christian marriages, those who do not or rarely attend church have divorce rates higher than the national average, while Christian couples who are active in their faith and church attendance, experience divorce rates significantly below the national average (Wilcox & Williamson, 2007; Wright, 2010).

In addition to the unique stressors and differences of practices within the Christian population, their specific beliefs bring unique nuances as well. Although Christian couples differ in how they incorporate God into their marriage, what is uniquely believed is that God is intrinsically connected to and involved in the marriage (Goodman & Dollahite, 2006). This belief influences the couples' faith practices to include prayer, forgiveness, and a tendency

toward reconciliation rather than divorce (Goodman & Dollahite, 2006; Lambert & Dollahite, 2008).

Christian couples are being seen for marital therapy. Highly religious couples create a special situation in the counseling process in that these couples prefer counselors who identify themselves as Christian and prefer interventions that respect and incorporate their values and beliefs into the counseling setting (Hook & Worthington, 2009; Ripley, Worthington, & Berry, 2001). Christian couples use God to prevent, resolve, and overcome marital conflict (Marks, 2005).

Professional ethics in the counseling arena promote awareness of and sensitivity toward client's religious views by incorporating them into their code of ethics (American Psychological Association [APA], 2010; American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014; American Association of Christian Counselors [AACC], 2014). ASERVIC, serving under the spirit of the ACA Code of Ethics, encourages the counselor to understand each person's worldview and incorporate the client's specific religious/spiritual belief set into the assessment, diagnosis, and intervention of the client. Further discussion of these constructs will be more fully developed in Chapter Two.

Problem Statement

Although professional counseling ethics and organizations are moving to more spiritual and cultural sensitivity, there is limited research for Christian marital intervention. Initial research shows favorable outcomes for efficacy of religious and spiritual techniques (Hook, Worthington, Davis, Jennings, & Gartner, 2010); however, there is a limited amount of empirical research to support marital counseling techniques specifically effective for Christian couples (Hook & Worthington, 2009).

Nature of the Study

This study used a qualitative research design. Qualitative research methods reveal information that is not typically gathered from a quantitative design because it looks at phenomena of human experience, subjective views, and what people perceive or feel in their situations (Kazdin, 2011). Christian couples who completed a Christian counseling marital intensive intervention and reported sustained gains of relationship satisfaction one year after the intensive was conducted. The marital intensive used a Christian EFT model. The interview content was coded and analyzed, allowing any emergent themes and/or processes to be identified. Further detailed discussion of this methodological design will be presented in Chapter Three.

Research Questions

As a result of the gap in the research regarding an evidenced-based marital intervention for Christian couples, three research questions were examined:

RQ1. How do Christian marital couples who have maintained gains after participation in a Christian EFT marital intensive counseling program perceive and make sense of the impact this treatment had on their Christian spirituality and their marriage?

RQ2. What role does a couple's Christian spirituality play in the marital conflict and EFT reparative process?

RQ3. What specific Christian processes emerge with uniquely Christian themes and variables that contribute to the marital conflict and EFT reparative process?

Research Objectives

As a result of this study, three objectives were identified:

1. To assess the effectiveness of a particular Christian marital counseling intervention as it pertains to Christian couples.
2. To identify emergent processes and themes that occur specific to Christian couples in a marital intervention setting.
3. To add to the God attachment and romantic attachment literature through a Christian EFT marital intervention model.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness of a particular Christian counseling marital intervention. This intervention was the Safe Haven Relationship Model (SHRM), which is built on attachment theory and informed by the EFT model, adding principles of God attachment research and intervention techniques. It further explored the relationship between God attachment and romantic attachment within the context of marital and relationship satisfaction and the reparative process among Christian couples. The relationship between these two constructs is sparse in the literature. This study adds to the research literature toward an evidence-based Christian counseling marital intervention.

Conceptual Framework

A recent review of the research on couples counseling spanning the last ten years indicated that 70% of couples participating in therapy have seen positive change (Lebow, Chambers, Christensen, & Johnson, 2012; see also Baucom, Hahlweg, & Kuschel, 2003; Shadish & Baldwin, 2003, 2005). One intervention that is empirically supported as an effective treatment is EFT (Johnson et. al, 1999; Wood et al., 2005). EFT is a structured counseling approach

developed by Sue Johnson and Les Greenberg (1985, 1988) built on attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969/1982) and romantic attachment research (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Attachment theory purports that a biological driving mechanism is present within infants to attach to their primary caregivers for purposes of survival (Bretherton, 1990). The attachment behavioral system developed within the infant is used to keep the caregiver in close proximity. If this proximity is breached, distress ensues. The attachment system is activated to reduce the distress response. Over time, children develop internal working models (IWM) of beliefs about themselves and others through the patterns of interactions that arise between the child and primary caregiver (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994).

In cases of romantic attachment in adults, research reveals a similar organization of patterning. These IWMs are present to ensure close proximity of the loved one as well as behavioral reactions when this proximity is breached, resulting in distress. This distress is followed by the individual's approach to restoring the safety and security of the relationship (Collins & Read, 1990). Early relationships influence the development of an attachment style through IWM. The attachment style is replicated later in adult romantic love relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1990). EFT uses this framework as an understanding of the distress couples present in the counseling setting (Baucom, Shoham, Mueser, Daiuto & Stickle, 1998; McRae, Dalgleish, Johnson, Moser, & Killian, 2014; Wood et al., 2005). This distress is expressed by states of negative emotion and rigid patterns of interactions towards one's partner. The demonstrations of particular characteristics of these patterns are dependent on one's attachment style (Van Alstine, 2002).

The goals of EFT are to expand and restructure emotional responses, positively shift each partner's interactional patterns, and create a secure bond between partners (Greenman &

Johnson, 2013; Johnson, 2004). The EFT model works both interpersonally within the individual's attachment network and intrapersonally between the two partners' attachment interactions (Johnson et al., 2013).

EFT generalizes beyond typical couples counseling settings and is proven effective with several different populations, such as infertile couples (Soltani, Shairi, Roshan, & Rahimi, 2014), childhood trauma survivors (Dalton, Greeman, Classen, & Johnson, 2013), end-stage cancer patients (McLean, Walton, Rodin, Esplen, & Jones, 2013), couples with a depressed woman (Denton, Wittenborn, & Golden, 2012; Dessaulles, Johnson, & Denton, 2003), couples with early diagnosis of breast cancer (Couture-Lalande, Greenman, Naaman, & Johnson, 2007; Naaman, Johnson, & Radwan, 2011), couples with chronically ill children (Cloutier, Manion, Gordon-Walker, & Johnson, 2002), and families in which a member is bulimic (Johnson, Maddeaux, & Blouin, 1998), but a couples counseling model has not been tested within the specialized population of Christian couples.

Even though there is no specific outcome research for the use of EFT with Christian couples, EFT theory and intervention have commonalities with spirituality and religiousness (Furrow, Johnson, Bradley, & Amodeo, 2011). Included in one therapist training casebook is a chapter on how to incorporate EFT techniques while working with Christian couples (Furrow, Johnson, & Bradley, 2011). This casebook includes God attachment research that is relevant to not only couples counseling but specifically Christian couples counseling. This particular chapter focuses on ethical and cultural sensitivity toward this population and allowing for discussion of spiritual matters if they are relevant to the counseling room.

The conceptual research on seeing religion through the lens of attachment theory was begun with Kirkpatrick (1992). In later research, God was portrayed as a personified caregiver

to whom one turns to for a safe haven and secure base, meeting the definitions of an attachment figure (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008; Granqvist, Mikulincer, & Shaver, 2010). The same IWM presents in ways similar to how an individual perceives God as safe and secure, the way the individual believes they are perceived by God, and the behaviors with which one approaches God (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990).

Likewise, there is evidence that looking to God as a romantic attachment has similarities to other romantic attachments (Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002). Only a few studies have explored the intersections of God attachment, adult romantic attachment, and relationship satisfaction (Dumont, 2009; Myers, 2015; Straub, 2009). Straub (2009) found that beliefs about God not being safe and secure negatively impacted romantic attachments in Christian couples.

Alternatively, a more secure belief about God can operate as positive influence on the reparation of romantic relationships (Granqvist et al., 2010; Noffke & Hall, 2007). Likewise, Dumont (2009) found that secure God attachment resulted in greater relationship satisfaction levels among a population of Christian students.

Myers (2015) was the first to look at the components of God attachment and relationship satisfaction within married Christian adults. In a cross-sectional design utilizing self-report measures of 219 married evangelical Christian adults, Myers (2015) sought to address whether God attachment partially mediated romantic attachment relationship satisfaction as well as whether the constructs of prayer and forgiveness partially mediated God attachment and relationship satisfaction. The null hypotheses were accepted for both research questions. Contrary to prior research (Straub, 2009), Myers (2015) concluded that romantic attachment style is stronger than God attachment style in predicting relationship satisfaction in married Christian adults.

This finding leads me to understand that the interplay of the constructs of God attachment and romantic attachment needs to be better developed. More understanding of these constructs and processes can lead to an evidenced-based Christian marital intervention built from the attachment theory literature.

Terms and Definitions

To bring precision to the constructs presented in this study, the following terms are operationally defined as follows:

Attachment is a biopsychosocial system that bonds an individual with another and is demonstrated by proximity seeking to establish a safe haven and a distress protest that seeks to maintain a secure base in the relationship (Bowlby, 1969/1982).

Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) is a humanistic psychological theory based on an experiential and systemic approach to marital intervention with couples in distress. It views romantic relationships through the lens of attachment theory with the same components of proximity seeking and distress protest amongst adults (Johnson, 1996).

God Attachment is a conceptualized belief of God fulfilling the functions of a substitute attachment figure through a spiritual connection (Kirkpatrick 1992, 1999). Secure attachment, for the purposes of this study, is defined as when couples self-report their perception of God as being a secure base and a safe haven as communicated through God's trustworthiness, responsiveness, availability, and comfort.

Haven of Safety Marriage Intensives are a two-to-three-day marital therapy one-on-one intensive setting aimed toward couples' distress which "helps a couple heal their hurts, foster a new way of relating to each other, and emotionally reconnect so they can experience each other

as a safe haven” (Haven of Safety, n.d., para. 1). Marital intensives are all conducted under the care of Dr. Sharon May (Haven of Safety, n.d.).

Relationship Satisfaction is the overall degree of closeness or the quality of the couple relationship in which a level of happiness and contentment is experienced. It pertains to the presence of communication and openness, ability to resolve conflict, ability to demonstrate affection and caring, and reciprocate intimacy and demonstrates a satisfaction with an individual’s and partner’s role in the relationship (Burns & Sayers, 1988). For this study, these attributes are assumed to be present in couples who self-report perceiving and experiencing their partner as safe and secure.

Romantic Attachment is the aforementioned biopsychosocial system between two adults in a romantic relationship similar to what is formed in an infant and primary caregiver relationship with the exception of the presence of reciprocity between the two adults (Zeifman & Hazan, 2008). Secure attachment, for the purposes of this study, is defined as when couples self-report their partners as being a secure base and a safe haven as communicated through their trustworthiness, responsiveness, availability, and considerateness.

The Safe Haven Relationship Model is a marital model originated by Dr. Sharon May that is an integration of EFT, Christian principles, neurobiology of relationships, and relationship and emotional intelligence research (Hart & Morris, 2003).

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations

This study was limited to a sample of married adults who self-report as Christians. Due to professional code of ethics in the field of counseling, studying the unique cultures and beliefs of diverse populations fulfills the necessary competencies for counselors as they seek to honor spiritual and religious values diversity in their clients (ASERVIC, 2016). Christian couples have

unique beliefs around spirituality and the attachment bonds felt through their connection with God, God's presence within the marriage, and God's participation in resolving marital conflict (Lambert & Dollahite, 2008; Marks, 2005). Using married couples in this study was important as there is only one other study that examined God attachment, romantic attachment, and relationship satisfaction in Christian marital couples (Myers, 2015).

The research was also limited to subjects who had gone through a Christian marital therapy model in an intensive format to determine if this model specifically addresses Christian couples, as opposed to a standard EFT program, as a marital counseling intervention. Therefore, these delimitations may prevent generalizability beyond Christian married couples who share a worldview with these participants.

In addition, the participants were therapy couples; therefore, any processes that emerged may not have been indicative of general spirituality processes of Christian couples who have not participated in this type of remediation. These emergent principles, however, can present themselves valuable as a reparative option to Christian couples in marital distress.

Limitations of this study stem from the dependence on the participants' self-report of having maintained gains from the marriage intensive experience. Also, each of the couples' gains was treated equally, whether small or large. Recalling processes that occurred least one year prior may bring recall bias from the participants. As with other qualitative measures, the nature of the model has limitations. Validity and reliability do not carry the same connotations with these types of measures (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research is assumed to: (a) utilize opportunities to gather information of human behavior in a natural setting, (b) drive hypothesis and theory of research (c) utilize the researcher as the instrument, (d) provide rich and descriptive data, (e) focus on creating an understanding of participants' perceptions and

experiences, (f) focus on the process as well as the outcome, (g) make interpretations from small strokes of data rather than wide generalizations, and (h) define data as intuitive and a felt knowledge (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, it is assumed that the qualitative research design allows powerful priming words to be used by the researcher in order to activate the attachment system (Mikulincer, Gillath, & Shaver, 2002). The qualitative design allows for application that is purposeful in religious contexts (Birgegard & Granqvist, 2004), which is recommended by and builds on Myers's (2015) research. This design also builds on the assumptions that these activation measures on previously distressed couples will effectively measure the constructs of God attachment and romantic attachment from a qualitative perspective (Dixon, 2013; Straub, 2009).

Significance of the Study

It is hoped that this study on the relationship of God attachment and romantic attachment of Christian married couples in distress will become a building block in the establishment of an evidenced-based Christian marital intervention. An intervention that is derived from the robust literature of attachment theory within an already evidenced-based intervention of couples counseling of EFT is what is suggested in this study. This research holds significance for counselors who work with Christian couples in their practices.

Organization of the Remaining Chapters

Chapter Two develops a review of the relevant literature within the pertinent constructs previously stated. Findings and results are developed with emphasis on the main variables of God attachment, romantic attachment, relationship satisfaction, and EFT. Based on the findings of the literature review, the interactions between some of these constructs, especially in the area of God attachment and romantic attachment and God attachment and relationship satisfaction,

are explained. It is proposed that this study will be valuable by adding to the body of research on evidenced-based practices for marital interventions with Christian couples.

Chapter Three outlines and describes the procedures and analysis for carrying out the experimental process. Participant selection and its corresponding methodology to secure the study's trustworthiness are presented.

Chapter Four, again, addresses the purpose and procedures of the study. Information collected from the study participants is presented. Demographic information, rich details of the interviewing results, and analysis of the hypotheses and research questions are discussed. Also, the analysis of the interviewers' responses as they pertain to the literature in the areas of God attachment, romantic attachment, and relationship satisfaction is presented.

Chapter Five presents a discussion of the study and conclusions from the results of the study. Contributions of the study are presented along with recommendations for further research in the same area. Lastly, the limitations and concerns are assessed.

Chapter Summary

Christian married couples who seek marriage counseling prefer Christian therapists and interventions that value their faith. With the established efficacy of EFT and the developing research in romantic and God attachment, the promise of an attachment-based marriage counseling model that incorporates God attachment could provide a valuable resource to Christian couples seeking a reparative counseling format. Understanding the attachment processes to God and partner within this model would further the research in this arena.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview

The purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness of a particular Christian marital intervention. It further explored the relationship between God attachment and romantic attachment within the context of marital/relationship satisfaction among Christian couples. Current work with couples counseling through EFT interventions is built on the attachment literature. The attachment theory background is presented in this chapter. The development of the research link between attachment theory and romantic attachment gives rise to the empirical support of EFT interventions within couples counseling. The EFT model of couples counseling is defined and the empirical support is presented.

Attachment theory literature is connected to not just romantic attachment, but God attachment as well. This research, as well as the connection between romantic and God attachment, is presented. Because these attachments contribute to the level of relationship satisfaction seen in couples, the link between romantic attachment and God attachment is defined as it pertains to relationship satisfaction. Building from romantic attachment and God attachment studies, an attachment-based intervention for Christian couples is introduced.

Attachment Theory and Research

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1944) is backed by substantial scientific research (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Main & Solomon, 1990). Childhood attachment style gives rise to persistent styles in adulthood, romantic relationships and one's approach to God (Collins & Read, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1990; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990; Mikulincer et al., 2002). Attachment style also plays a significant role in the degree of one's relationship satisfaction (Banse, 2004; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Levy & Davis, 1988; Simpson, 1990).

Theoretical Background

Working with juvenile offenders allowed Bowlby to make theoretical observations and predictions regarding early childhood experiences with primary caregivers that impact and shape one's psychological functioning throughout life (Bowlby, 1944). He asserted that infants are born with an internal biological mechanism that protects the caretaker and infant relationship, allowing for better survival and development. He referred to this mechanism as an attachment system (Bowlby, 1969/1982). There are four components that make up the attachment system: the presence of proximity maintenance, separation distress, a safe haven for comfort, and a secure base for environmental exploration.

The availability and responsiveness to the infant by the primary caretaker formulates an attachment bond. Availability and responsiveness fosters a secure attachment, while lack of availability and responsiveness fosters an insecure attachment. Depending on the level and characteristics of this responsiveness and availability, the caregivers' interactions shape and define the type of attachment bond that is developed between the infant and adult.

Ainsworth et al. (1978) conducted research using the strange situation. Through a controlled setting of observations, researchers activated the attachment system of 23 babies by having the primary caregiver leave and return to the room as well as by allowing a stranger to enter and leave the room. The child's behaviors and caregiver's behaviors were noted. The interactive patterns of the infant with the mother, with the stranger, and during the reunion with the mother were observed and recorded. Specifically, the researchers watched for the babies' ability to seek comfort and explore their environment when distressed. Also noted were the mother's behaviors with the baby before exiting as well as her behaviors upon returning, including how she comforted or greeted the child.

Three classifications of “secure,” “avoidant,” and “resistant” were identified to describe the different categories of behaviors from the mothers’ and their babies’ responses (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Later, Main and Solomon (1990) added another widely-accepted category of attachment patterning, “disorganized.” The three attachment categories other than secure were defined as an insecure attachment bond between the caregiver and the baby. The securely attached babies could use their caregivers as a safe haven for comfort when distressed and a secure base from which to explore an unfamiliar room. Securely attached mothers exhibited a significantly higher attunement to their child in the areas of sensitivity, acceptance, cooperation, and emotional accessibility. The insecurely attached mothers exhibited a lack of warmth and availability to their children. The babies’ responses determined what category they were placed into for attachment style. The anxiously attached babies could not be consoled, the avoidant babies acted aloof and distancing, and the disorganized babies followed a disorganized pattern (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Main & Solomon, 1990). It is these interactions that repeat themselves in attachment relationships that give rise to internal mental representations of self and others that Bowlby (1969/1982, 1973, 1980, 1988) termed IWMs.

Internal Working Models

Based on memories of interactions with primary caretakers over time, the brain forms representational constructs allowing people to better predict, anticipate, and formulate responses to attachment figures (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008). Cognitive scientists later adapted Bowlby’s findings (Johnson-Laird, 1983), as did neuroscientists (Adolphs, 2003; Gallese, 2005; Siegel, 2007; 2010; 2012; Siegel & Solomon, 2003), who confirmed this theoretical model. Through the development of IWMs, Bowlby (1979) asserted that the attachment style is present through life, from “the cradle to the grave” (p. 129). Likewise, Ainsworth and Eichberg (1991),

in a study that followed up on the infants and their mothers from the strange situation study five years later, found that the attachment system exhibited a stable tract across the development of the lifespan. As early as adolescence, an emerging and consistent attachment system presents both within and outside the family (Allen, 2008). For a complete literature review on IWMs, see Bretherton and Munholland (2008).

Adult Attachment

Adults exhibit similar patterns of interrelating with other adult connections that were exhibited in their childhood/caretaker bonds (Hazan & Shaver, 1990; Mikulincer et al., 2002). Collins and Read (1990) found that the attachment styles in adulthood had the same characteristics of the categories presented by Ainsworth et al. (1978). The four categories are determined by one's view of self and others and are reflected in the areas of one's comfort with closeness and anxiety about being abandoned or loved (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). These patterns have the same biological drive to ensure felt security and guidance of interpretation within close relationships, as well as formulation of the individual's behavior within them (Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985). Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) named these patterns as secure, preoccupied, fearful-avoidant and dismissive-avoidant depending on one's dependency on another and intimacy avoidance. These align with Bowlby's (1969/1982) categories from childhood and are predictive of the categories exhibited in adulthood.

Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) categorized these attachment categories as follows. Within a secure attachment style in adults, an individual typically values intimate relationships, is motivated to maintain close relationships while also maintaining independence, and demonstrates coherence and thoughtfulness while discussing relationships. A dismissive-avoidant adult attachment style typically downplays the importance of close relationships,

demonstrates restricted emotionality, has a rigid emphasis on self-reliance, and reveals a pattern of a lack of clarity when discussing relationships. In a preoccupied attachment, adults tend to demonstrate an over involvement in close relationships, overemphasize needing acceptance for their well-being from others, idealize others, and show an incoherent and exaggerated emotionality while discussing relationships. Lastly, the fearful-avoidant attachment style in adults reveals an avoidance of close relationships due to the fear of rejection or abandonment, demonstrates personal insecurities, and has a distrust of others.

Several measures were developed to determine what adults feel in these four categories (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Collins & Read, 1990; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994; Simpson, 1990). Fraley, Waller, and Brennan (2000) found that the Experiences in Close Relationships inventory have the best psychometric properties of any self-report inventory. George, Kaplan, and Main (1984, 1985, 1996), however, developed the Adult Attachment Interview, which is widely-accepted as it utilizes the face-to-face technique, allowing recipients to tell their stories of attachment. This technique has the capacity to activate the attachment system through priming. For a full empirical review, see Hesse (2008). The attachment style determined from this inventory can help inform behavioral predictors in romantic attachments.

Romantic Attachment

Weiss (1982) was the first to theorize that attachment features were specifically seen in marital or romantically committed relationships. Hazan and Shaver (1987) studied this theory in adult romantic behavior attachment by submitting a questionnaire in a local newspaper and analyzing the results of 1,200 adult responses. They found that the same features of child/caregiver attachment such as proximity maintenance, separation distress, seeking a safe haven when in need of comfort, and a secure base allowing for environmental distance and

exploration were present in adult romantic attachments. Further research revealed that the adult romantic attachment is also a significant driving force of survival; in some instances, its absence, can be life-threatening (Zeifman & Hazan, 2008). Other qualities that are demonstrated both in child/caregiver and adult romantic attachment relationships include: ongoing and unique physical contact that releases oxytocin pleasure hormones (Zeifman & Hazan, 2008), distress response to separation and loss (Hazan & Shaver, 1992), and physical and psychological health threats in the absence of these attachments. Additionally, in the presence of these attachments, a buffer to stress is provided, allowing for increased coping (Bloom, Asher, & White, 1978). Both child attachment bonds and romantic attachment bonds involve protection of a weaker vessel, relate to the reproductive cycle, and have sexual reward (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1975).

While the patterns, the features, and the styles of attachment are similar across the lifespan and specifically within romantic attachment, romantic attachment bonds demonstrate some unique qualities of their own. For example, each partner offers a reciprocal role of providing and receiving a safe haven and secure base as well as an equal distribution of power (Zeifman & Hazan, 2008). These unique close attachments are maintained through communication (Bretherton, 1990) and appropriate affect regulation (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Pietromonaco, Greenwood, & Barrett, 2004). A secure bond allows for affect regulation during conflict and vulnerability (Pietromonaco et al., 2004), problem-solving strategies in conflict (Pistole, 1989), decreased negative affect and withdrawal from one another, a greater amount of constructive conversations (Simpson & Rholes, 1994), high amounts of self-disclosure (Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991), more reciprocity, flexibility and open expression of emotions (Feeney, 1995), more positive moods, better mental health, positive mental representations of one another when not together, higher self-esteem, creativity in positive

coping strategies when threats to attachment are felt, better anger management, and a greater capacity to access emotional experiences (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Finally, a secure bond allows for higher amounts of intimacy, passion, commitment, individual self-confidence, trust, relationship satisfaction, and positive interdependence and lower interpersonal self-consciousness (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Levy & Davis, 1988; Simpson, 1990).

When threats to close attachment are felt or perceived, the attachment system is activated. When one does not perceive his or her romantic partner as a secure base or safe haven, insecure attachment styles can have a negative impact to the romantic bond (Feeney, 2004, 2005).

Insecurely attached couples are negatively correlated to the attributes mentioned previously.

Insecure attachment demonstrates negativity in emotional escalation, poor conflict management skills with fewer positive conflict tactics (Creasey & Hesson-McInness, 2001), a higher amount of conflict, a greater amount of distress and hostility (Simpson & Rholes, 1994), and narratives that indicate painful attachment yearnings, defensive emotional disengagements, anger, and despair within the relationship (Solomon, 2003). Within the insecure attachment styles, there are individual differences of responses depending on the category of insecure attachment.

Anxiously attached individuals have a louder protest when conflict is present (Sternberg, 1986) and more hypervigilance to prevent separation (Mikulincer et al., 2002). Avoidant attached individuals are less obliging of partners in conflict (Pistole, 1989) and have more negative affect and withdrawal (Simpson & Rholes, 1994). For a thorough review of romantic attachment strategies and differing characteristics within each of the insecurely attached categories, see Feeney (2008), Mikulincer and Shaver (2008), and Shaver and Hazan (1993).

Over time, these patterns of protest/withdrawal or push/pull become rigid patterns of interaction (Gottman, 1994; Solomon, 2003). These patterns, coupled with childhood insecure

attachment histories, reinforce a defensive working model, leading to relationship difficulty, dissatisfaction, and an inability for growth in intimacy, empathy, understanding, and healthy dependency (Solomon, 2003).

God Attachment

Another form of adult attachment is formed with God. Bowlby (1969/1982) theorized that an inanimate object could fill the role of a substitutionary attachment figure. Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990) theorized that attachment theory would be a good framework for the study and understanding of the psychology of religion. They predicted that beliefs about God, an inanimate object, can be informed by the child's attachment classification, coupled with parental religiousness. God was introduced as a substitutionary attachment figure that could compensate for the lack of another attachment figure (Kirkpatrick, 1992). God attachment meets criteria of other attachment relationships such as proximity seeking, secure base for exploration in the world, haven of safety for comfort, and evidence of distress with a perceived separation or loss (Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999, 2000), which provides a framework to understand interpersonal images of God, conversion experiences, and prayer (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). Research reveals two attachment pathways to God, compensation and correspondence (Birgegard & Granqvist, 2004; Granqvist, 1998, 2002, 2005; Granqvist & Hagekull, 2000; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2004; Granqvist, Mikulincer, Gewirtz, & Shaver, 2012; Granqvist, Mikulincer, & Shaver, 2010; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990; McDonald, Beck, Allison, & Norsworthy, 2005). Insecure attachment histories are linked to a compensatory pathway to God attachment in adolescence and adulthood that often involves a dramatic and sudden conversion experience. The correspondence attachment pathway, which forms gradually over time, stems from secure attachment histories, coupled with religiousness of parents.

Adults who had an insecure attachment in childhood but report feeling that God is warm and responsive tend to have more religious behavior, report a closer relationship with God, and have greater religious change as an adult (Granqvist, 1998). However, individuals who have a history of being secure in their God attachment have more commitment to religion and positive images of God (Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002). Secure God attachment promotes mental and physical health (Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002). In insecure attachment histories, secure God attachment is linked to better coping and affect regulation (Granqvist, 2005) and greater security in adult attachment (Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002). For a complete review, see Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2008). Specifically, studies conducted with Protestant Christians (Kirkpatrick 1998, 1999; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990; Pargament, 1997) reveal that this group has higher attachments to God (Cicirelli, 2004; Granqvist & Hagekull, 2000). God attachment also promotes personal transformation where human relationships cannot (Kirkpatrick, 1998) and can move someone from an insecure attachment to an earned-secure attachment status (Granqvist et al., 2010). An individual with an earned-secure attachment style is defined as one who describes a difficult relationship with a parent as a child but is currently working from a secure attachment model in adulthood (Pearson, Cohn, Cowan, & Cowan, 1994).

On the contrary, those adults who report seeing God as distant, rejecting, or inconsistent, which are all qualities of insecure attachment, experience more loneliness/depression, anxiety, and physical illness than those adults who report a secure attachment style toward God (Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002). Further, the higher one scores on anxiety and avoidant attachment toward God, the less correlation to favorable psychological outcomes (Sim & Loh, 2003).

God attachment and Christianity. Zahl and Gibson (2012) specifically examined God attachment as it pertains to Christianity. Two views of God were identified: doctrinal knowledge

and experiential knowledge (Zahl & Gibson, 2012). Doctrinal knowledge includes the theology and Biblical teachings a Christian should believe about God, while experiential knowledge is what Christians personally feel God is like. Christians who think that God is critical, despite what they “should” believe, typically fell within an anxious God attachment category. However, those who view God as less positive, despite theological beliefs, corresponded with the avoidant attachment profile. Lastly, those who experience the representation of God as a positive spiritual entity report satisfaction in life (Zahl & Gibson, 2012). A secure attachment with God amongst Christians predicts life satisfaction outcomes.

God attachment and romantic attachment. In some cases, God attachment in adults can have qualities similar to romantic attachment (Beck & McDonald, 2004; Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002). Kirkpatrick (1998) described the conversion experience as similar to falling in love. God can serve as a substitute when there is an absence of a romantic partner, as in single adults (Granqvist & Hagekull, 2000), when there is a loss of an attachment figure in the elderly (Cicirelli, 2004), and, when the attachment partner is perceived to be unsafe (Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002).

Specifically, within the Christian population, there is a connection between spirituality and sexuality (MacKnee, 2002). Highly religious couples believe God is relevant in their marriage in that God is also a presiding partner (Goodman & Dollahite, 2006). These couples believe that through their marriage a couple can draw nearer to God. Connection with God in highly religious couples also allows them to both prevent and remediate conflicts within their marriage (Lambert & Dollahite, 2008).

In a correlation study with 211 college student participants who self-reported as Christian, measurements of emotionally close relationships, God attachment, and relationship

satisfaction were taken (Straub, 2009). Relationship satisfaction was positively correlated to God attachment and romantic attachment. Anxious God attachment correlated with anxious romantic attachment and lowered relationship satisfaction. Anxious God attachment had a direct effect on relationship satisfaction. Avoidant God attachment occurring in conjunction with avoidant romantic attachment negatively influenced relationship satisfaction. Improving God attachment security positively impacts emotion regulation which can also positively influence romantic attachment and relationship satisfaction. These findings were replicated in Dumont's (2009) study with self-reported Christians who also reported being adult children of alcoholics.

In a cross-sectional design utilizing self-report measures of 219 married evangelical Christian adults, Myers (2015) sought to address whether God attachment partially mediated romantic attachment and relationship satisfaction as well as whether the constructs of prayer and forgiveness partially mediated God attachment and relationship satisfaction. The null hypotheses were accepted for both research questions. Contrary to prior research (Straub, 2009), Myers (2015) concluded that romantic attachment style is stronger than God attachment style in predicting relationship satisfaction in married Christian adults.

Relationship Satisfaction and Attachment

Research on what creates relationship satisfaction among marital couples has been the focus of studies for decades. With the development of attachment research, substantial findings have confirmed that securely attached couples find the greatest relationship satisfaction (Banse, 2004; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Levy & Davis, 1988; Simpson, 1990). There are numerous studies that reveal qualities of securely attached couples leading to relationship satisfaction. Some of these qualities are greater intimacy, trust and commitment (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Levy & Davis, 1988; Simpson, 1990), less fearfulness of closeness, fewer emotional extremes,

friendliness, feelings of being liked by one's partner, a benevolent view of their one's (Hazan & Shaver, 1987), a higher degree of intimate disclosure to their partner (Collins & Read, 1990; Keelan, Dion, & Dion, 1998; Kobak & Hazan, 1991; Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991; Pistole, 1993), and positive spouse behavior (Feeney, 2002). Other qualities include the ability to forgive one's partner (Kachadourian, Fincham, & Davila, 2004), sexual satisfaction (Birnbaum, 2007; Butzer & Campbell, 2008), an integrating conflict style which looks out for the concern of self and partner, a supportive style of humor in social settings (Cann, Norman, Welbourne, & Calhoun, 2008), and a communal relationship where there is not a felt obligation or debt to the partner when benevolence is shown (Clark, Lemay, Graham, Pataki, & Finkel, 2010).

In contrast, insecurely attached couples demonstrate attributes that ultimately lead to a reduction of relationship satisfaction, including violence (Roberts & Noller, 1998), an unfavorable view of spouse's behavior, more reactive responses to spouse behavior, an erosion of relationship satisfaction over time (Feeney, 2002), irrational beliefs of the partner (Stackert & Bursik, 2003), sexual dissatisfaction (Birnbaum, 2007; Butzer & Campbell, 2008), an exchange prototype relationship where there is a felt obligation toward the partner and tabs are kept between the two (Clark et al., 2010), and an insecure attachment to God (Straub, 2009).

Research reveals similar results in earned-secure couples in relationship satisfaction. Roisman, Padrón, Sroufe, and Egeland (2002) found that those who have an earned-secure attachment in close relationships go on to have success in their close romantic attachments while reporting a minimal amount of internalized distress. Paley, Cox, Burchinal, and Payne (1999) determined that earned-secure wives demonstrate affect regulation during problem-solving discussions better than wives with either a preoccupied or dismissing attachment profile.

In summary, adult attachment demonstrates the same styles as child patterns. Insecure attachment styles are connected to relationship dissatisfaction in couples. Likewise, God attachment exhibits similarly to the attachment styles as in adulthood. Insecure God attachment styles show similar relationship dissatisfaction as in insecure romantic attachment patterns. These same findings are present specifically in Christian couples. An intervention that addresses both insecure God and romantic attachment can bring Christian couples to a secure attachment connection through both of these pathways.

Interventions

The following sections outline interventions pertaining to the constructs within this study, such as Christian interventions and attachment-based interventions. A discussion of EFT, a specific attachment-based intervention, is provided, followed by Christian attachment-based interventions and EFT. Lastly, a specific model of Christian EFT is presented.

Christian Interventions

As the APA and ACA began emphasizing the need within clinical practices to integrate religion and spiritual interventions for cultural sensitivity toward clients' preferences, the field began to expand by identifying intervention-specific therapy to use with religious and spiritual clients (Miller, 1999; Miller & Delaney, 2005; Richards & Bergin; 2004, 2005, 2014; Shafranske, 1996; Sperry & Shafranske, 2005). The APA adopted a definition of religion as an organized system of beliefs and practices as well as a community toward the sacred. Spirituality is defined as the search for the sacred (Barnett, 2014). The terms are accepted as interchangeable terminology in the literature (Walker, Gorsuch & Siang-Yang, 2004, 2005). These terms are incorporated into interventions specifically for Christians (Garzon, 2005; Hawkins, Tan, & Turk, 1999) as well as the APA-credentialed Christian doctoral programs teaching religious and

spiritual interventions (Walker, Gorsuch, Siang-Yang, & Otis, 2008). The ACA developed competencies as a supplement to their code of ethics that incorporate evidenced-based interventions specifically for clients that match their spiritual and religious beliefs (ACA, 2014). Christian-based interventions began to be tested as well. One such outcome study looked at the results of a Christian cognitive-behavioral therapy intervention (CBT) versus a standard CBT intervention with depressed patients in an inpatient hospital setting (Hawkins et al., 1999). The patients who received the Christian CBT intervention were more oriented to spiritual growth and spiritual well-being. Religious and spiritual interventions unique to the Christian faith typically include Biblical scripture references, religious imagery, and Christian theology references (Garzon, 2005; Hawkins et al., 1999).

Attachment-Based Interventions

With the profound amount of attachment literature in place, there is a call to apply this knowledge to evidence-based interventions, especially in the area of couples counseling (Wampler, Shi, Nelson, & Kimball, 2003). Attachment-based therapy interventions help insecure couples develop a secure attachment to one another (Saunders, Jacobvitz, Zaccagnino, Beverung, & Hazen, 2011). EFT used attachment theory for this purpose.

Emotionally focused therapy. EFT, developed by Sue Johnson and Les Greenberg (1985, 1988), is the only systematic and empirically validated theory using the attachment theory framework of adult bonding as the basis of remediating relational conflict (Lebow et al., 2012). EFT focuses on the way contact with a romantic partner mediates the effect of threat on the brain that is present in insecurely attached couples (Johnson, 2008). As opposed to other behavioral or cognitive couples counseling models, EFT uses the emotional experience of the distressed couple in the present moment to form a more secure attachment (Johnson, 2004). Emotions are used as

the agent of change in key change events using specific therapeutic tools. EFT marries the most recent research on adult romantic attachment, brain and body, and therapeutic interventions (Johnson, 2003). In a meta-analysis, couples, after having participated in 10 to 12 sessions of EFT, showed 70 to 73% recovery from marital distress (Johnson, 2003). These results remain stable up to two years post treatment (Cloutier et al., 2002). Outcome research, reviews of research, and meta-analyses on the EFT model of intervention are substantial, making it, apart from the behavioral approaches, the most empirically validated approach to couples counseling to date (Ahmadi, Zarei, & Fallahchai, 2014; Moser et al., 2015; Dalglish et al., 2015; Dalton et al., 2013; Denton et al., 2012; Fitzgerald & Thomas, 2012; Furrow & Bradley, 2011; Furrow, Edwards, Choi, & Bradley, 2012; Greenman & Johnson, 2013; Halchuk, Makinen, & Johnson, 2010; Johnson, 2008; Johnson, Moser, et al., 2013; Johnson & Greenman, 2013; Johnson & Wittenborn, 2012; Lebow et al., 2012; MacIntosh & Johnson, 2008; McLean et al., 2013; McRae et al., 2014; Priest, 2013; Sandberg et al., 2015; Schade et al., 2015; Soltani et al., 2014; Swank & Wittenborn, 2013; Wittenborn, 2012; Zuccarini, Johnson, Dalglish, & Makinen, 2013). Because of the strong empirical evidence of this model, it was selected for this study.

Attachment-Based Christian Counseling and EFT

Kirkpatrick (1998) developed the theory that a person's religious beliefs and ability to change can result from the psychological attachment process. In other words, positive mental models of self and others can grow from a framework wherein God is seen positively and the self is perceived as positively related to Him. A secure God attachment is when God is seen as unconditionally loving and guaranteed to accept and forgive (Kirkpatrick, 1998). God attachment theory presents with similar anxious and avoidant styles and has empirical support. (Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002). Additionally, empirically supported God attachment

interventions are published (e.g., Noffke & Hall, 2007; Thomas, Moriarity, Davis, & Anderson, 2011).

According to Holeman (2003), Christian couples attribute their ability to reconcile with one another to their personal relationship with God. Incorporating God attachment into the framework of an attachment-based intervention to work with Christians in a Christian couples counseling setting seems to be the next step in the empirical literature. Hook and Worthington (2009) found that despite Christian couples counseling's popularity and increasingly widespread practice, there is relatively little testing done on the nature of Christian couples counseling, counselors' religiousness and its impact on the interventions, and the integration of religion and spirituality into couples counseling. They called for further collaboration in defining Christian couple approaches as well as further research on these models to determine their effectiveness (Hook & Worthington, 2009; Hook et al., 2010). Others suggest that the EFT model, in particular, due to its robust empirical support, be integrated into Christian counseling frameworks (McFee & Monroe, 2011; Mutter, 2012; Mutter, Ande, & Hugo, 2010; Verseveldt, 2006). Still others suggest this because EFT is complementary to a Christian worldview (McFee & Monroe, 2011; Mutter 2012; Mutter et al., 2010; Verseveldt, 2006). For this reason, one Christian EFT model, the SHRM, was selected for this study (Hart & Morris, 2003; Mutter, 2012).

Christian Model of EFT

SHRM integrates EFT, Christian principles, and the neurobiology of relationships while drawing from relationship and emotional intelligence research (Hart & Morris, 2003; May, 2007). SHRM is rooted in the Christian worldview that people are created by God to be in close connection with Him and others. The techniques of EFT and clinical principles from the God

attachment literature allow Christian couples to learn how to connect, love, and attach (May, 2007). The Haven of Safety intensive settings offer two- and three-day approaches to marital counseling using SHRM (May, 2007). Haven of Safety Marriage Intensives (HSMI), a two- to three-day marital therapy for distressed couples, aims at helping couples heal their hurts, foster new ways of relating to each other, and emotionally reconnect so they can experience each other as a safe haven (May, 2007). The intensive model of counseling is becoming a widely accepted format for marital counseling, especially for couples with high conflict/distress or betrayal and trauma, allowing them to get quick relief over a short period of time (Lalonde, 2014). A closer look at this intervention and the intensive model of delivery is provided in this study.

Intensive Psychotherapy Model for Marital Counseling

An intensive approach to couples counseling is not new (Boas, 1962; Brody, 1961), and the format gained new appeal through Focus on the Family's National Institute of Marriage (n.d.). An intensive setting provides counseling for many hours over the course of a couple of days rather than a limited number of hours at a time over the course of a few months. This setting allows for quicker relief, the ability to look outside one's limited community of professional availability, enhanced confidentiality and anonymity outside the couples' sphere of influence, a greater level of expertise and client/therapist fit for the couple, and the opportunity to acquire intervention while not having to focus in between sessions on other stressors of life such as work and family (Lalonde, 2014). The SHRM counseling intensive is conducted with one therapist and one couple using a two- or three-day model such as this.

In summary, the SHRM provides interventions that address both pathways, God attachment and romantic attachment, in couples within the empirically supported approach of EFT. This study provides empirical support that both these pathways provide reparative

attachment intervention in Christian couples, moving them from an insecure to a secure romantic attachment and establishing relationship satisfaction.

Chapter Summary

Attachment theory provides an empirically supported framework for understanding adult attachment, romantic attachment, and God attachment. There is much research that informs us that these constructs intersect and interrelate. Relationship satisfaction is most explicitly enjoyed within the context of a secure attachment. Using the framework of romantic attachment research, the development of an empirically supported intervention for insecurely attached couples was founded in EFT. It is within the context of the intersection of romantic attachment and God attachment that a gap in the literature emerges. Both romantic attachment and EFT have reparative qualities for an insecure attachment of individuals and couples; albeit, there is not a currently empirically supported intervention that incorporates both romantic attachment and God attachment repair. Researchers recommend incorporating these two into Christian EFT for couples and studying the result to determine counseling efficacy. This study was developed to explore the use of SHRM, one such version of a Christian EFT intervention. Because it is a preliminary, exploratory study, a qualitative methodology was used.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The previous chapter described the status of empirical literature on attachment theory, adult attachment, romantic attachment, and God attachment, as well as how these pertain to marital satisfaction. A gap in the literature was uncovered regarding how an attachment-based intervention such as EFT coupled with God attachment could enhance a secure attachment bond in Christian couples. This investigation is important because it contributes to the body of research on Christian attachment-based interventions for religious couples. This chapter presents the research methods used in this study. An explanation of the research design, selection of participants, data collection, ethical considerations, processing analysis, and summary follows.

Research Design

This study used a qualitative research design. Qualitative research methods reveal information not typically gathered from a quantitative design, exploring the phenomena of human experience, subjective views, and how people perceive or feel in their situations (Kazdin, 2011). Qualitative studies use rich descriptions to develop theory and are typically the beginning process of understanding a phenomenon and take place prior to the development of hypotheses (Kazdin, 2011). Additionally, the researcher is the key instrument and collects data by observing behavior while conducting interviews with research participants (Creswell, 2013). In this study, inductive data analysis was conducted with the recorded interview transcript by organizing patterns, categories, and themes that were similar across all the data sources (Creswell, 2013; McLeod, 2011; Patton, 2014). The focus was on understanding participants' meanings while coming to a holistic picture of the experience of engaging in SHRM based on the conceptual framework described above (Creswell, 2013). Of the options within qualitative research design,

phenomenological inquiry was selected because it emphasizes understanding lived experience and in-depth detail using a small number of subjects through extensive engagement (Moustakas, 1994).

Of the five qualitative research design approaches described by Creswell (2013), phenomenological analysis is used when there is a need to explore a construct, a need to obtain a detailed understanding of a complex construct, and a desire to empower individuals to share their stories (Creswell, 2013). This approach provides the early stepping stones to developing an evidence base for counseling interventions (McLeod, 2011).

Selection of Participants

Couples who completed an HSMI with Dr. Sharon May at The Safe Haven Relationship Center (SHRC) in Carlsbad, California, were selected. Each couple completed a self-report confirming that gains from the treatment were maintained for at least one year since completing the intensive. The target number of couples was between 4–8 couples.

After approval through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Liberty University was received (see Appendix C for IRB approval letter), a representative from SHRC contacted couples to confirm that gains were maintained. Each couple was presented a brief description of the study and consent was secured. At that time, detailed research procedures, participant expectations, and risks of involvement were provided. Consent for me to contact them directly was also obtained.

Initial contact (see Appendix D for recruitment letter) allowed any further questions to be answered. After agreement to participate was granted, a formal signed informed consent was sent via e-mail (see Appendix A for informed consent). Mutually agreed-upon interview appointments for videoconferencing were scheduled during the initial call (Bickman & Rog,

2009). A time frame of 60–120 minutes was set aside for each couple interview. Participants were given the ability to revoke participation in the study at any time by contacting me via e-mail or telephone if they did not wish to continue. The participants' first names were entered into the qualitative software program NVivo 11 (QSR International, n.d.) and were then assigned pseudonyms.

Role of the Researcher

To ensure trustworthiness in the findings of a phenomenological study, it is recommended that researchers have a space for self-reflection (McLeod, 2011). Through the process of intentional disclosure, the researcher is able to set aside personal experiences while differentiating them from the study's findings (Moustakas, 1994). For this reason, I have offered this section as a reflection of myself and my life.

I approach body of research with a lifetime of experience, good and not so good, that created a passion within me to explore it further. First, I am a product of divorce. In fact, my mother and father married and divorced many times throughout my childhood. I have experienced firsthand the financial, social, and interpersonal impact that divorce can have on someone. I grew up poor and always felt different than my friends. Going to their homes for events and observing a whole, intact family always left me feeling curious and subpar. To this date, I am not certain whether my mother or father sought out any type of counseling through which to possibly fight for the marriage, or, in my mind, the family.

Secondly, experiencing the freedom felt in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ from a young age after hearing I had a heavenly Father that would never leave or forsake me, I had a place of refuge and peace from the tumultuous years of childhood. I knew pretty quickly into college that helping others with their hurts was a way of repurposing the pain that was healed

from my past. I also knew that others would benefit from the same refuge and peace that I had experienced. I studied psychology and religion. Currently, I am a licensed mental health counselor with a private Christian counseling practice. I am honored to walk beside couples who are struggling to keep their marriages intact. Many, of course, do not want to suffer the stigma, financial devastation, or brokenness of what divorce brings to them or their children. But sometimes, even above those priorities, Christians do not want to break the sacred vow that they believe they made to God. They show up to counseling with another person in the room, the personhood of God, not wanting to disappoint Him or their testimony to others. Sometimes through the journey of discord within the marriage, this relationship seems to be faltering as well. Alternately, this relationship with God can sustain them in the crisis. Working with Christian couples becomes a unique journey interpersonally and spiritually. Having worked with these couples, successfully and unsuccessfully, I have a 20-year passion of finding what works. Recently, the EFT model steeped in attachment theory has provided a positive clinical structure and approach, both for me and my clients. I have gone through two of the three levels of requirements toward certification as an EFT therapist.

Lastly, I am a pastor's wife. Having our marriage be put on display brings a lot of added pressure. Even though I married my best friend and high school sweetheart, we have experienced our share of trying times. Our commitment to God, my personal conviction to break the legacy of divorce for my own children, and my and my husband's life work held us to a greater degree of accountability. We have benefitted from good, Christian marriage counseling ourselves with success. It is my desire to provide this same quality of empirically supported interventions to those who share in these same convictions and to increase the empirical support for such interventions by engaging in this study.

Data Collection

During semi-structured interviews given through video-conferencing, each couple was asked the same interview questions (see Appendix B to view the Interview Questions). These interviews were conducted with the participants in the comfort of their natural setting, their homes, and were recorded. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and then immediately downloaded into NVivo 11 (QSR International, n.d.), a software program, so that sensitive participant information could be protected.

Couples were reminded that all data could be included as quotations in the final report so complete confidentiality was not possible. Anonymity, however, was offered as part of this study. Participants were also given the opportunity to read through their quoted excerpts from the interview in the final report before it was submitted in order to validate accuracy and to provide an opportunity for them to make any changes or additions to their quotations.

Once the interviews were completed, transcribed, and downloaded, the software assisted in analyzing the data from the interviews. Creswell (2013) noted that qualitative software packages allow for more efficient organization and manipulation of data and can efficiently replace manual coding of the data.

Evidence of Quality

While validity and reliability are the qualities that are discussed in quantitative designs, it is more common for researchers to look at trustworthiness (Kazdin, 2011). There are four areas to consider when evaluating a study's trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These categories correspond respectively to internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity in quantitative design trustworthiness (Morrow, 2005). Credibility in a study gives assurance that the findings

are true. Transferability shows that findings can apply in varying contexts. Dependability shows that the findings could be replicable. Lastly, confirmability shows that the findings are not shaped by bias but are neutral. Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were used to establish the trustworthiness of this study.

Credibility

There are several techniques used to verify credibility in a study's findings. Prolonged engagement in the field and persistent engagement by the researcher allows sufficient time for understanding the scope and depth of the particular phenomenon of interest (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I have been working in the field of professional counseling for over 20 years. For the majority of that time, I have worked with couples in a Christian counseling setting. In regard to the SHRM, I studied under Dr. May for many months observing and learning about the theory, constructs, and techniques. I have undergone two of the three levels of processes for emotionally focused therapist certification. I understand the concepts within the realm of this phenomenon and can rise above my own preconceptions. The richness of the interviews allowed for depth of understanding of the phenomenon to surface.

Another technique used to bring credibility to the findings is triangulation. For the purposes of this study, analyst triangulation was utilized. Using multiple analysts to review the findings reduces researcher bias in interpretation (Patton, 2014). A second, neutral analyst was employed to review the findings for this study.

Member checking was conducted as another way of increasing credibility. Member checking allows the participants to correct, revise, or add to the interpretations of the data collected and is considered the most crucial step for credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Each couple received a written transcript of their video-recorded interview. They had the opportunity

to revise the transcripts as they saw fit, making sure the best representations of their experiences were captured.

Transferability

Utilizing thick description is considered the best way of achieving transferability within the results of a qualitative design study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thick description is defined by a detailed account of the experiences described in the field that allows for patterns within the phenomenon to surface while the researcher is able to put them into contextual understanding (Holloway, 1997). The responses of the couples interviewed were examined from the verbatim text of each answer, the verbatim text as a whole of each couple, and the structural whole of all the responses. These multiple lenses allowed for patterns to surface. I was able to use the responses within the body of the research to bring constructs to light. I offer a synthesis of meaning and explanation of these responses.

Dependability

External auditing is conducted to ensure the dependability of a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This requires a person not involved in the research to conduct oversight of the process and interpretation accuracy. The chair of the dissertation committee was utilized throughout the research process to bring auditing into the conduction and results of the study.

Confirmability

For the purposes of confirmability in the proof of trustworthiness of the study, an audit trail was kept (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The videos, transcripts, data reduction manuscripts, code notes (see Appendix E), and synthesis notes have been kept. The themes or patterns were named and defined within the existing literature and incorporated with the findings into this final report,

which includes findings, conclusions, and interpretations. A detailed list of steps conducted is included in the following data analysis section.

Data Analysis

First Step: Listing and Preliminary Grouping

The first stage of the data analysis was the exercise of listing and preliminary grouping wherein the shared experiences from the interviews of the five couples were noted and assigned with initial codes. The practice of taking note of the significant responses and substantial patterns can also be considered as the *horizontalization* process of the analysis (Moustakas, 1994). During the first stage, all sources of bias were eliminated early.

Second Step: Reduction and Elimination

The second stage was the “reduction and elimination” process (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). In this stage, I employed Moustakas’s (1994) two questions to identify the invariant constituents or the other imperative perceptions and experiences of the interviewed couples. The questions were:

- (1) Does it contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding?
- (2) Is it possible to abstract and label it? If so, it is a horizon of the experience (p. 121).

Expressions not meeting the above requirements were eliminated. Overlapping, repetitive, and vague expressions were also eliminated or presented in more descriptive terms. The horizons that remained were the “invariant constituents of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121).

Through the two questions asked by Moustakas (1994), the five transcripts of the couples were carefully examined and reviewed. Upon review, I was able to determine which parts of the

data interviews would be included in the next five stages of the phenomenological study. The lived experiences collected were all based on the three research questions of the study.

Third Step: Clustering and Thematizing of the Invariant Constituents

The third stage of the phenomenological analysis was performed by collecting and grouping the established invariant constituents from the second stage of the method. Moustakas (1994) expounded that the “clustered and labelled constituents” (p. 121) can then be considered as the core themes of the analysis. Again, with the service of the computer software NVivo11 by QSR (n.d.), both the invariant constituents and core themes were methodically coded and the order of significance of the themes was projected. The section below incorporates the findings from the third stage of the analysis addressing the perspectives of the couples on the effectiveness of the SHRM marital counseling intensive on their marriage.

Fourth Step: Final Identification of the Invariant Constituents and Themes

The fourth step of the analysis was the verification and validation of the reported major and minor themes from the third stage of the analysis. This practice was performed in order to authenticate the findings as well as substantiate the themes with the verbatim responses of the couples found in their interview transcripts. Another three questions were shared by Moustakas (1994):

- (1) Are they expressed explicitly in the complete transcription?
- (2) Are they compatible if not explicitly expressed?
- (3) If they are not explicit or compatible, they are not relevant to the participant’s experience and should be deleted. (p. 121)

Fifth Step: Individual Textural Descriptions

During the fifth step of the analysis, I reported the individual textural descriptions of the couples' experiences. The purpose of textual analysis is to describe the content, structure, and functions of the messages contained in the transcribed responses of the interviews. This stage is required for the review and further validation of the previously reported major and minor themes. The verbatim responses of the couples were again reviewed. After the themes were identified, the individual responses were validated, establishing that each response fit the theme identification and truly explained the lived experiences associated with the effectiveness of the intensive program on the couples' overall relationships.

Sixth Step: Individual Structural Description

The sixth stage of the analysis was the reporting of the individual structural descriptions of the couples. The step again utilized the experiences of the five couples from the "individual textural description and imaginative variation" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121) step of the process. This was done in order to describe the quality of the experiences shared by the couples and report them individually. Whereas the textural experiences describe the meaning of each response, the structural analysis review involves looking at each couple's responses in its entirety and finding descriptions of the whole experience.

Seventh Step: Synthesis of Composite Textural-Structural Description.

The final stage of the analysis was the incorporation of both the minor and major themes discovered. This involved the synthesis of the individual perceptions in relation to the lived experiences being examined. Furthermore, the last step involved the synthesis of the meanings and essences of the experiences shared in the study.

Ethical Considerations

Before beginning the selection of participants, I obtained approval from the IRB to ensure that participants would not be harmed. The study did not begin until a letter of approval from the IRB was obtained. Once that was done, the representative from the SHRC obtained necessary consents before I was given any identifying or contact information. Upon first contact, I obtained a signed informed consent from each participant. Participants were allowed to perform a transcript review to ensure accuracy. Coding and removing personal identifying information ensured anonymity. Video and audio information will be destroyed three years post the completion of the study. Any identifying written information was stored in a locked location and will be destroyed three years after the completion of the study. The participants were assured they could, at any time, remove themselves from the study and their information would not be shared in the final report. Lastly, in qualitative research, a section allowing for self-disclosure of the researcher is included to establish trustworthiness in the process (McLeod, 2011).

Chapter Summary

The use of a qualitative design, specifically, phenomenological analysis, allows for emerging themes of constructs where little is known. Through non-directive interviewing, stories were shared by participants regarding their experiences with SHRC, and through their thoughts, feelings, images, sensations, and memories, a deeper understanding of God attachment and romantic attachment in a marital intervention setting emerged.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Overview

Chapter Four contains the findings from the phenomenological analysis of the interviews with five married couples. This phenomenological study examined the shared experiences of Christian couples who participated in a Christian EFT marital intensive and who reported maintaining relationship satisfaction one year later. The purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness of this Christian marital intervention. It also explored the relationship between God attachment and romantic attachment within the context of marital relationship satisfaction among Christian couples. Moustakas's (1994) method was used to analyze the interviews, and NVivo11 (QSR International, n.d.) assisted in the coding and tabulation of the themes. Three main research questions were asked in the study. These were:

RQ1. How do Christian marital couples who have maintained gains after participation in a Christian EFT marital intensive counseling program perceive and make sense of the impact this treatment had on their Christian spirituality and their marriage?

RQ2. What role does a couple's Christian spirituality play in the marital conflict and EFT reparative process?

RQ3. What specific Christian processes emerge with uniquely Christian themes and variables that contribute to the marital conflict and EFT reparative process?

In Chapter Four, the results of these questions are presented and discussed. This chapter contains the following sections: demographics, data analysis, and presentation of findings. A brief summary of the chapter will then follow.

Demographics

The target number of couples for this study was four to eight couples. Seven couples were identified who met the criteria for the study. One couple did not follow through in signing the informed consent to allow further participation. One couple was interviewed, but the recorded session was faulty and the results could not be transcribed. This resulted in five couples as participants in the study. These self-identified Christian couples have firsthand experience attending the SHRM marital counseling intensive. They were chosen as the participants because they reported sustained marital satisfaction at least one year after the completion of the intensive. Their ages ranged from late 20s to 60 years of age. The length of marriage ranged from newly married to married for more than 40 years. The stages of marriage included parents of newborns, remarriages, empty-nest couples, and couples with grandchildren.

Presentation of Findings

Final Identification of the Invariant Constituents and Themes Findings

The findings in the study included three major themes, five minor themes, and five points of interest. Some of these themes have supportive, descriptive sub-themes as well. The descriptive sub-themes do not have number of occurrences. Major themes were present in four or five of the couples. Minor themes were present in at least two of the couples. The points of interest, each having one occurrence, were not substantial enough to be considered a major or minor theme. Table 1 lists these in order of number of occurrences.

Table 1

Breakdown of the Major Themes, Minor Themes and Points of Interest of the Study

Theme	Number of Occurrences
Major Themes	
Having a God-centered relationship	5
Understanding partner better	4
Valuing God's words and teachings	4
Following the teachings of the Bible	
Allowing people to be used	
Minor Themes	
Becoming more self-aware	3
Feeling more secure with family and partner; increased trust	3
Communicating more openly to resolve issues	
Having a stronger faith in God	3
Following God's teachings	3
Responding in a loving and respectful manner	3
Fixing of relationships outside the marriage	
Becoming God-like, following His image and likeness	
Recognizing "dragons"	2
Points of Interest	
Helping one another with issues	1
Learning to acknowledge one's mistakes	1
Learning to listen to partner	1
Having the principles that can guide to decision making	1
Communicating with God through reflections and worship	1

Invariant Constituents and Themes Pertaining to the Research Questions

The following discussion will group these major and minor themes and points of interest according to the research questions of the study. Each research question has a corresponding table of major and minor themes and points of interest with number of occurrences. Each of these themes has corresponding textural evidence from the couples' interviews.

Research Question 1

The first research question asked, “How do Christian marital couples who have maintained gains after participation in a Christian EFT marital intensive counseling program perceive and make sense of the impact this treatment had on their Christian spirituality and their marriage?” This question addressed how the Christian EFT marital intensive counseling program affected the Christian spirituality and marriage of the couples interviewed for the study. The majority of the couples shared that they understood their partners better upon completing the program. Four other minor themes and three points of interest emerged, all pertaining to the first research question of the study. Table 2 contains the breakdown of these and the number of occurrences reported.

Table 2

Breakdown of the Major, Minor Themes and Points of Interest Addressing Research Question 1

Themes	Number of Occurrences
Major Themes	
Understanding partners better	4
Minor Themes	
Becoming more self-aware	3
Communicating more openly to resolve issues	3
Having a stronger faith in God	3
Recognizing “dragons”	2
Points of Interest	
Helping one another with issues	1
Learning to acknowledge one’s mistakes	1
Learning to listen to partner	1

Major Theme 1: Understanding their partners better. The first major theme of the study was the experience of being able to understand partners after completing the EFT intensive program. Four of the five couples shared that through this different understanding, they were

able to experience and perceive their partners in a better light; therefore, this impacted the way they responded to one another. This, ultimately, led to a change in their relationship.

Mrs. Smith stated that after the intensive program, she observed a greater understanding. She explained how the program allowed her to understand her partner on a deeper level by getting to know the factors that trigger one another; and working together to peacefully resolve them:

Just before the intensive, there was less understanding of the other person. For me, in my counseling with [counselor], just independently, I got to understand why I do things. That was step one. Then step two is how does it relate to my relationships outside of myself? Mainly being with [Mr. Smith], obviously, with the intensive. I would say that would be the only thing, our volatility, and then just a greater understanding of each other, where before, I was more probably self-focused.

Mr. Brown shared that his wife started to be more considerate and understanding after the program. He added that the program greatly helped their marriage as they are now able to care for each other's needs and think of each other's feelings before discussing their conflicts fully:

I just wanted to say that from a model perspective, it really had a ton of value for us. I think [Mrs. Brown] is much more considerate and I really appreciate that. To her credit, obviously, I started with expressing personal needs and aspirations. Better understanding of myself enabled me to do that as well.

Mr. Johnson highlighted how his wife is now able to understand the proper way of confronting him whenever there are issues. He gave an example in which his wife would correct him but would immediately use reassuring terms and words that would not intensify their situation further:

Some of the things that I already said really pointed to that. I feel like she understands it. When she corrects me on something, she would follow up with something like, “You are a good man, and I’m not saying this because you’re a bad person. We are going to be ok.” That puts her in a context where I can trust her more, that she’s working on the relationship and not trying to be mean to me. She’s learning to say those things. So, she looks at the five love languages and has really learned to affirm me with words, and I don’t think that was the case before. That allows me to trust her more.

Mrs. Johnson echoed this sentiment and stated that her husband now knows her wants and needs for their marriage. She gave examples, explaining that after the program her husband would try to accommodate her simple requests and would spend more time with her and her family:

Now he looks at me and communicates and talks and plans, and I seem to be more a part of that and that feels good to know I matter. The other thing is he says more often now that he wants to take a vacation with me. Before, the only time that we’d vacation together was if it was connected to our project, so it was work or history or something. Now he’s saying to go every year on a trip together, and we have never done that in 60, well, we’re 61.

Minor Theme 1: Becoming more self-aware. The first minor theme that emerged was the experience of becoming more self-aware after the program. Three of the five couples described this experience. The couples indicated that by becoming more aware of their own actions and emotions, they could make different choices in their behaviors, even becoming more vulnerable to one another and connecting to some understanding of why some of their internal working models were there.

Mr. Smith shared that the program allowed him to be more aware of his words and actions, especially during conflicts and fights. He indicated that he was able to develop this trait as he and his wife went through counseling. He was able to learn how to converse correctly and avoid escalating situations into larger fights and arguments:

I think just one, knowing more about myself and how I was responding in the moment of when we'd have a fight with my dragons. I think that's obviously a huge part of something we learned. . . . You could kind of see how patterns started to develop. I don't know if [counselor] calls it your dynamic, just where what the dialogue looks like and the spiral down in a fight between couples.

Mrs. Brown expressed that the sessions helped her and her husband to search deeper within themselves and find the emotions that they need to connect better to their partners. The Browns became self-aware as they tried to look for the root causes of their problems and, later on, their eyes were opened and they recognized the issues that needed to be fixed:

I felt like the sessions helped both [Mr. Brown] and I dig deeper into why we have certain emotions, things that we didn't even think about. I feel if I'm speaking for my spouse, I have seen [Mr. Brown] really dig deeper into areas that he and I would've never gotten there if we didn't have a third party guiding us to that, and to see him recognize that, at times were very painful, but recognizing it. I feel like it's opened his eyes.

Mr. Williams added that indeed, his wife also became more self-aware after the program. The participant shared that his wife started to be cautious of her habits and identify her issues that may be affecting their marriage. With the program, he observed that his wife changed and began trying to be more considerate of both their needs and feelings.

She became much more self-aware of her own habits. She's learned more about her background. She's learned more about me. She asks really good questions, tries to understand. But all I have to say we've come full circle because she is more trustworthy, more openly available, more caring and all that stuff today than she was. So post intensive, years later, we're better than we were.

Minor Theme 2: Feeling more secure with family and partner; increased trust. The second minor theme of the study was the experience of becoming more secure with one's family and partner given their increased trust. Three of the five interviewed couples shared that through the intensive interactions with one another, they gained the ability to lower the walls of defensiveness and begin experiencing one another as a safe haven and secure base.

Mr. Smith expressed that another lesson he learned from the program was that God's love provides His people with security. Through this teaching, he realized that God provided him with his partner and that she was always present in his life despite the changes and issues that they may have been faced with:

I would say the only thing I think is being secure in God's plan. As families change, and that's a part of what [counselor] focused on with the intensive, is every family's going to change, but some bend and others break. Families can still be strong and break and come back together, but there might be a tougher time. I think that's probably where I've gotten more security, because we both are unique in that we love our families a lot and we're both very family oriented. So, watching even my own family, we're changing, and my brother's doing this.

Mr. Brown explained that his wife has always been a trustworthy and honest. He continued by explaining that Mrs. Brown always worked from this strength. However, with the

help of the program, they were able to work together and build a stronger bond between them. He has security in terms of their family, kids, and financial concerns:

Now that we have this much clearer definition in terms of us and safe haven, I can even just say I feel more secure, and I guess, also, that our lives have changed in a business perspective and in a functioning life perspective in terms of family oriented and kids oriented, etc. We've matured a ton, and it's not only because of other things; it's largely because we've become a functioning unit between the two of us.

Mr. Williams found his wife to be more trustworthy after the program. Their counselor was then able to eliminate the wall that had been hindering them from fixing their issues as a couple. With both of them becoming more emotionally and physically available, Mr. Williams developed an increased trust for his wife:

[Mrs. Williams [is] more reliable, trustworthy, or perhaps even the other way around as we are more emotionally available [and] physically available; then I can trust more, so that is comforting. [Counselor] kind of chipped away at the walls that were resurrected between us.

Minor Theme 3: Communicating more openly to resolve issues. The third minor theme discovered was the experience of communicating more openly in order to effectively resolve their issues. Three of the five couples identified a new approach of talking with a common language as a part of the process of the felt relationship satisfaction they were experiencing.

Mr. Brown indicated that one of the most vital changes was the newfound ability to communicate and discuss the different aspects of the relationship and married life. He shared

that through the program, he and his wife were able to develop a common language that they shared as a couple and used with wisdom:

The first way is the house of communication. So, we've learned a lot as to how to communicate about tough topics, not around tough topics, but to communicate well and understand the tough topics as being a part of our lives but not necessarily dominating our lives. And if we're communicating an emotional spot, especially going through recognizing this is a dragon of mine coming out. So, communicating and having language and verbiage and being able to articulate this stuff has become really good.

Mrs. Jones highlighted that the improvement in their marriage took much work and effort from her and her husband. One of the main factors of improvements was having the ability and openness to discuss their issues and "talk things through":

I just guess with the events that happened in our marriage, to slowly just trust and open up again. It just took time and lots of work with [counselor] and with [Mr. Jones]. It just happens over time as you make the decision to go that way. I think it's just his commitment to keep . . . working on our marriage. Then, just being able to talk things through, and the things that are difficult. He definitely is more considerate, just with small things. I feel more cared for and that he's more attentive.

Mr. Williams described that he and his wife now had a "common language" that they share, post-intensive program. He shared that after the program; his wife became more open and approachable, ensuring that their utmost concern was always the health and security of their relationship:

So, after the intensive I perceived her to be more approachable and more open to trying to work it out. I know she was just trying to work it out on her own, reading her Bible and

all that stuff, but between us working it out, it was that we were kind of on our own island just trying to kind of heal and find our way back into a safe spot and it wasn't happening. The intensive helped us with a common language, "Oh we're triggered; you're not being emotionally available." It gave us a language and terminology that helps us make sure we are on the same page.

Minor Theme 4: Having a stronger faith in God. The fourth minor theme of the first research question was the impact of a stronger faith in God. Two of the five couples shared this experience. As a result of the intensive also focusing on the couples' relationship with God, some identified a strengthening of their faith and a reminder of God's love for them, which resulted in seeing Him as a safe haven and secure base.

Mrs. Brown shared that the program developed her faith further and increased her trust in God:

I feel that at certain points [counselor] helped me with trusting God with this, with trusting and having faith with what God put together here. Whether I did this and you did this, I would feel overwhelmed. I would learn to say okay, no, I am a child of God, I am His child.

Mrs. Jones added that the program provided her with the validation of God's love for His children:

I would say just more confirmation of how God cares for us in the little things and loves us and how powerful and strong He is. Just more of that than before. I think just more knowing and realizing that God is responsive and caring and a safe place.

Minor Theme 5: Recognizing their "dragons." The fifth minor theme under the first research question was the experience or effect of being able to recognize one's dragons.

Dragons are one's fears, vulnerabilities, and sensitive spots that become beliefs about self and others and how they will be there and continue to love or not (May, 2007). Bowlby (1969/1982) labelled these "dragons" as IWMs as previously discussed. As a result of being aware of their "dragons" the couples shared, they were able to stop the negative argument cycle by handling the negative emotional triggering differently, promoting safety.

Mrs. Smith stated that the program helped them recognize their "dragons." Their counselor allowed both of them to know their strengths and weaknesses as well as the factors that trigger them especially during critical situations. The participant described that now, they are more "equipped" to handle their "dragons" and have both become more understanding of one another:

I would say really just the dragons. When we work on each other's dragons, I feel like I would say something that triggers [Mr. Smith], and he responds, and that triggers my dragon and then we just get in this dark circle and spiral down. I feel like after the intensive, we're better equipped to recognize those dragons, so that then if he responds less that way, that makes me feel safer over a period of time.

Point of Interest 1: Helping one another with their issues. A point of interest that emerged was the practice of helping one another with their issues. The theme occurred once and may need further research to have its credibility validated. There was a sense that by understanding his partner's areas of vulnerabilities, Mr. Smith, as his wife's partner, could help her with them. Mr. Smith stated that from the start, he and his wife had been committed to make their relationship work despite their personal and family issues. With the program, he realized the importance of understanding his partner and working together to resolve their problems:

We really want to make sure we work on this so that we don't get into a bad pattern of me getting pouty and walking off or [Mrs. Smith] running hot and getting mad and whatever we do in our moments. I would say through that, we get a much better depth of understanding really myself and how I'm responding in it. Then, also too, I think we're able to watch our spouse go through the same process. That is what I do. So, you're both able to help each other, too, because that's really what it is, is how fast can you help each other get to the point where it's like, hey, stop.

Point of Interest 2: Learning to acknowledge one's mistakes. The second point of interest that emerged was the experience of learning to acknowledge one's mistakes. The theme again occurred once. When Mr. Smith's partner developed the ability to admit areas where she was responding defensively, he was able to better trust her words, especially at times when she was giving a perspective on sensitive areas. Mr. Smith stated that through the program, his partner was able to take responsibility for her negative habits. For example, Mrs. Smith could be overprotective and defensive about her family to the point that it affected her relationship with her partner. Mrs. Smith explained:

I can excuse a lot of things away. I'm like, no, they didn't mean that. I didn't see that that way, especially with my family. I would defend them a lot. It made me more want to trust [Mr. Smith]. He's not attacking my family at that moment. Maybe he wants to come from this place of just understanding and working it through with me, and I don't need to be so protective of my family. I felt like that really helped us because it just helped me take my guard down.

Mr. Smith continued:

Once I saw her really acknowledging that and taking responsibility of, hey, maybe I am defensive about my family sometimes, it helped me even trust her more with not just her view on my family or on something I'm doing, but because she saw it and she's vulnerable, then I'm able to take her word.

Point of Interest 3: Learning to listen to one's partner. The third point of interest that emerged was having the ability to listen and better understand the spouse. The theme occurred only once. One unique aspect of better communication was highlighted: Learning to listen to one's partner, despite hearing things that may be difficult, allowed for a deeper understanding of the partner. Mr. Brown learned through the program that listening leads to an increased understanding of the spouse:

[Counselor] mentioned that listening can just be the ability for someone else to just mirror some words or mirror just what we say in a way that makes it for us even more palatable or understandable; I think that helps a ton in recognizing what we won't necessarily see or what we won't necessarily hear from our spouse easily.

Point of Interest 4: Having the principles that can guide to decision making. The final point of interest discovered was the experience of developing the principles which couples can use as their foundation in improving their decision-making abilities. Moving into a decision-making conversation, after the intensive, allowed Mr. Brown to discuss issues in a more pragmatic way even in several aspects of life. He stated that the program enabled him to have the capabilities to better manage not just his relationships but also the other important aspects of his life:

I think the model safe haven and "us" first and always getting back to an "us," that model is amazingly helpful in guiding principles in decision making. Not only just

communication but really setting up your life that way; it's a principle thing and it's been amazingly helpful for us. Making sure that we can prioritize what we need to prioritize around that concept. That has to do with extended family, has to do with finances; it has to do with work relationships and with raising kids.

The couples who participated in the SHRM intensive and maintained gains at least one year later made sense of the impact of this treatment on their marriage in several significant ways. First and foremost, the couples came away from the experience with a greater understanding of their partners. This greater understanding allowed for more self-awareness and recognition of areas of vulnerability, which also promoted more open communication toward the resolution of issues. A component from the SHRM intensive that addressed the couples' felt experience impacted their individual faith in God. This impact influenced a more positive view of God, increasing their strength of faith. Some points of interest were that a minority of the couples learned to listen to their partners and acknowledge their mistakes and gained a belief that they could help their partners with their issues.

Research Question 2

Research question two asks, "What role does a couple's Christian spirituality play in the marital conflict and EFT reparative process?" This question explored the role of a couple's Christian spirituality in the marital conflict and EFT reparative process. From the analysis, the majority of the couples reported that having a God-centered relationship played a significant role in reducing their conflicts, which helped to fix their marriage. Under the second research question, another minor theme emerged, which indicated the positive role of following God's teachings as couples go through the journey of marriage. Table 3 contains the breakdown of the themes addressing the second research question.

Table 3

Breakdown of the Major and Minor Themes Addressing Research Question 2

Themes	Number of Occurrences
Major Theme	
Having a God-centered relationship	5
Minor Themes	
Following God's teachings	3
Responding in a loving and respectful manner	
Fixing of relationships outside the marriage	
Becoming God-like, following His image and likeness	

Major Theme 2: Having a God-centered relationship. The second major theme of the study was the active role of Christian spirituality and having a God-centered relationship as couples went through the different stages of marital conflict and the EFT reparative process. All five couples identified the said role and experience in their marriage.

Mrs. Smith explained that the trust in their relationship with her husband could be attributed to their decision to always put God at the center of their union:

I feel like we were really trusting. I think I trusted [Mr. Smith] from the get-go because there is a depth. Our relationship was definitely centered on our relationship with the Lord. For us, that provided a level of trust and depth to it. I would say I feel like I trusted [Mr. Smith] a lot before the intensive.

Mrs. Brown added that her faith in God made her feel secure about her relationship with her husband. For her, the foundation of their marriage would always be God and His words:

Our marriage is, and [Mr. Brown] is my husband and my protector and my provider that God gave me. In times when I feel insecure or unsure to hold onto the truth where we are a safe haven, I learned to be secure in God instead. Maybe we are wavering, and it may

be baggage that is pushing us off track a little bit; it doesn't change that we're married. . . . God is at the center of our marriage. It doesn't change that, we need to tweak a little bit and discuss, but it's not going to sink the boat, we're going to be okay. So, the foundation is key to me.

Mrs. Jones shared that among all the problems and pains that her marriage with Mr. Jones had to survive, God was always present in their lives, assuring them that they would be able to endure their conflicts. Mr. Jones echoed the idea that God never leaves them:

Through all the pain and events that were going on, I just felt God's strength upholding me and comforting me and assuring me that I would be fine by myself, if that's how this landed. Just that I would be okay. I guess, just reconfirm God never leaves us. He's always there. It's only us that walks away or messes it up; he's always there. I think I saw that more than ever as I went through . . . all this stuff. To be able to come back, the power of healing that's there. Then, like [Mrs. Jones], she was way better at this. I just normally in the past didn't let people in my space. Now, I've got at least one person I get together with once a week and just talk and pray. Nothing intense, but just that accountability.

Mrs. Johnson echoed that despite the painful conflicts that they had to endure; she never felt abandoned as God was always with her. Having God at the center of their lives gave her the hope that things would be fine at the end of the day:

I think that what it does to me to be able to talk about it is that [it] reminds me like I'm never abandoned by God like I felt with [Mr. Johnson] and never with intense fear of this in the relationship though I may feel that way with [Mr. Johnson]. And so, to see that in my faith, I'm not abandoned and I'm not without a relationship and that I'm

unconditionally loved, it gives me a lot of gratitude that I'm with all of those things. It is the best present in my life and I am grateful for that.

Mrs. Williams emphasized that God was the only one who could answer her doubts and bring back their marriage to a healthier and happier state. Mr. Williams added that relying on God was the answer to the problems and issues that they faced as a couple:

He's going to be the only one. I could only trust [Mr. Williams] through God, that God was going to make him the man that I could trust my heart to and God was the only one that's going to heal my heart and was going to bring our marriage to a healthy place. So, it was 100 percent on him.

Knowing that [counselor] herself relied on God, knowing that we are all imperfect, God is refining us but that she was leaning on God for some of her insights for some of her counseling, and as well as trying to take sort of a therapeutic model and trying to infuse it with Scripture to just again add a more uniqueness and weight to it, meant so much.

Minor Theme 1: Following God's teachings. The second and only minor theme that emerged for the second research question was the role of following God's teachings to the successful restoration of their marriage. The theme occurred three times in the phenomenological analysis of the interviews. Under God's teachings, three underlying themes emerged: responding in a loving manner; fixing relationships outside the marriage, and becoming God-like.

Mr. Smith stated that he made sure that even during misunderstandings and conflicts in his conversations with his partner, he still followed God's calling of responding with respect and

reverence at all times. He shared that it is his responsibility as a child of God and a husband to his partner:

Yeah, she never [speaks disrespectfully], but if she did, it still doesn't give me the right to then respond. I still need to respond in a loving way, which is what God calls us to do in loving someone. Knowing that and taking that responsibility, it was a huge part for us. Then, taking it one step further, and [counselor] uses so many great examples when she does it, but she somehow finds that point of where you as a couple really, really struggle. I think she also helps you say, now [Mrs. Smith], take responsibility for how you're responding. It doesn't matter what she just did. It does, but at the same time, you still have a choice. Then, take one step more which is then becoming soft and try and love and speak into that, which is like putting ointment on a wound rather than salt.

Mrs. Smith explained that aside from healing the relationship with her partner, she also found the need to restore her relationships with others, most importantly, her family members:

The best part is, I feel like, yes, the intensive helped us, but then it really helped all my other relationships and especially with my family because I feel like my relationship coming from a very close family and then going through a really hard time, my relationship with my family is so much better because it's more honest. It really helped. Even with [Mr. Smith]'s family.

Mr. Brown explained that he believed that his wife was the instrument that God gave him to help him become more like God:

I'm a child of God and I'm here for a specific purpose to try to identify that. So, I really worked from that perspective. But there's a few things I didn't get yet and I wasn't mature enough yet or that I had to learn, especially regarding my wife. Learning she isn't

out to get me, my wife is the mechanism and the person God put in my life to become more God-like and more like Jesus.

The couples reported that their spirituality played a significant role in the EFT reparative process. Whether the couple had an individual secure attachment prior to the intensive or this attachment was secured through the intensive, the couples reported that having secure attachment individually allowed them to establish a God-centered relationship together through this reparative process. This God-centered relationship allowed them to reduce the marital conflict in their relationship. Specifically, the God-centered relationship influenced the couples to follow God's teachings, with an emphasis in responding in a loving and respectful manner and desiring to continue to become more God-like in their actions and behaviors. One unexpected outcome of this spiritual connection in couples was a desire to fix relationships outside their marriage.

Research Question 3

Research question 3 asked, "What specific Christian processes emerge with uniquely Christian themes and variables that contribute to the marital conflict and EFT reparative process?" This final research question contained the discussion on the specific Christian processes that emerged from the interviews that the couples deemed to have contributed to their conflicts and process of restoring their marriage. The analysis revealed that the majority of the participants believed in the importance of valuing God's words and teachings through following the teachings of the Bible and accepting people or individuals as instruments of God's messages. Another point of interest emerged, which was the importance of communicating with God through reflections and worship. Table 4 contains the breakdown of the themes and point of interests and number of occurrences received.

Table 4

Breakdown of the Major Theme and Point of Interest addressing Research Question 3

Themes	Number of Occurrences
Major Theme	
Valuing God's Word and teachings	4
Following the teachings of the Bible	
Allowing People to be used	
Point of Interest	
Communicating with God through reflections and worship	1

Major Theme 3: Valuing God's Word and teachings. The third major theme that arose from the analysis was the experience of the need to value God's words and teachings to fix marital conflict after the EFT reparative process, as shared by four of the couples. Two specific processes were shared: valuing God's word communicated by people and following the teaching of the Bible.

Mr. Smith stated that the theme of being willing to receive the word of God through people was experienced. He believed that God sent their counselor to be an instrument to make them realize the value of marriage as well as the true meaning of loving unconditionally:

The value of great Godly counsel and that God can use a person that way was significant.

I think seeing how valuable a good marriage is with us and a good relationship and a healthy dialogue and being able to tap into that was important.

Mr. Brown personally found that individual and marital growth was attributed to his and his wife's openness to incorporating Christian processes by learning about the teachings of the Bible on a daily basis. He shared that he and his partner learned the Bible through the Scripture itself, music, and even videos

You need to consume the Bible, you need to consume the content, and what really helped me through the process is that we prioritized faith and God and our marriage as the subject matter to consume. So, whether its Bible studies or whether its YouTube videos or pastoral guide videos, whatever it is, we consumed a ton of content in order to really understand this and what is the Biblical way of looking at God and what lies in marriage and all of these things. I guess the safe haven experience or the [counselor] experience was foundational to that, but it's not the only thing.

Mrs. Jones expressed that another way of following the teaching of the Bible was by reading the Scripture itself and listening accordingly. In addition, prayer was also another method:

One of the lessons I felt God was bringing me through was that you can't be on your own, that you need to reach out to others. During the difficult times, I reached out to other people to pray for me, to speak words of faith of what God was saying or encouragement. Just to have that connection with others. You can learn some through books, and you can learn, listening to inspirational things or just reading, but it's the connection with other people.

Finally, Mr. Williams also believed in the need to take the time to put the words of God into his heart and apply them in daily actions as well as in relationships with others:

The fact that [counselor] is a Christian, the fact that she took the time to read Scripture and put God's heart into the model was therapy plus life and character infused into it with a lot of the characteristics of God. The grace, the caring, the gentleness, the kindness and all that.

Point of Interest 5: Communicating with God through reflections and worship. The only point of interest within that emerged Research Question 3 was the process of communicating with God through reflections and worship. The point of interest occurred once. Mr. Johnson emphasized that his counselor taught him how to reflect effectively. He then learned the importance of being reflective and listening to God's words for Him:

Yes, [counselor] taught me reflection for listening purposes. My partner and I would go and find a different place and listened to what God was saying to me, and I write about it. And I've been doing that. I've been keeping journals and it takes some of the strangest things and teaches me something about Him, something mundane and I can see it properly. And he taught me something about Himself that really interests me.

The couples communicated that their Christian beliefs influenced their mindset going into the intensive setting. They indicated that they valued God's word and teachings in such a way that the SHRM, with the incorporation of God's teachings, was an extension of this belief set, influencing them to value and follow the model. They also indicated that they regarded the counselor as an extension of God speaking and using this individual to influence or impact the condition of their marriage. They regarded the counselor's involvement as God's method to intervene in their marriage. Additionally, another point of interest that emerged was that some continued their close attachment to God after the intensive through personal time of reflection and worship. This allowed them to continue to foster their secure attachment to God and remember the value of His teachings.

Individual Textural Descriptions Findings

A textural description is a way of looking at each couple's responses as a whole rather than breaking the responses down individually by question. A summary of each couple's verbatim responses are presented in the following depictions.

Summarized textural description for the Smiths. Mrs. Smith believed that after the intensive, she started to understand her partner at a deeper level. She realized the issues and aspects that triggered their conflicts and became able to control and fix them. She shared: "After the intensive, it was just a better understanding, having a greater softness, not that I do it all the time, actually, but just—if I actually see where is he coming from and what's deeper." Mr. Smith also believed in the importance of being self-aware, especially during arguments and fights. He stated: "Knowing more about myself and how I was responding in the moment of when we'd have a fight with my dragons. I think that's obviously a huge part of something we learned." Mrs. Smith also believed that the program, through their counselor, allowed them to identify their "dragons." These "dragons" are their areas of vulnerabilities as individuals; since then, they have learned how to manage them, especially during conflicts and fights: "I feel like since the intensive, we're better equipped to recognize those dragons." Mr. Smith also believed in the need to immediately resolve their issues by understanding one another and working as one to resolve their conflicts. He shared: "That is what I do so that we're both able to help each other, too, because that's really what it is, is how fast can you help each other get to the point where it's like, hey, stop." In addition, the Smiths both believed that through the program, they gained the ability to realize and acknowledge their mistakes and negative practices. Mr. Smith shared an observation on his wife: "I saw her really acknowledging that and taking responsibility of, hey, maybe I am defensive about my family sometimes." Lastly, Mr. Smith believed that he

felt more protected by the love of his partner upon realizing that the changes in their lives and the issues are all part of God's plan for them. He shared: "I think that's probably where I've gotten more security because we both are unique in that we love our families a lot and we're both very family-oriented. So, watching even my own family, we're changing."

Mrs. Smith believed she and her husband benefitted from putting God at the center of their relationship. She stated: "Our relationship was definitely centered on our relationship with the Lord. For us, that provided a level of trust and depth to it. I would say I feel like I trusted you a lot before the intensive." Mr. Smith also believed in the need to follow God and always respond with love and respect to his partner:

She never [responds disrespectfully], but if she did, it still doesn't give me the right to then respond. I still need to respond in a loving way, which is what God calls us to do in loving someone. Knowing that and taking that responsibility, it was a huge part for us. Mrs. Smith believed in the significance of and the need for restoring her relationship with not only her partner but her family as well:

The best part is, I feel like, yes, the intensive helped us, but then it really helped all my other relationships and especially with my family because I feel like my relationship coming from a very close family and then going through a really hard time, my relationship with my family is so much better because it's more honest.

Mr. Smith believed in the need to embody the Word of God; he added that in his case, God used their counselor as an instrument to reveal God's teachings. He emphasized "the value of great Godly counsel and that God can use people that way."

The Smiths indicated that learning each other and themselves at a deeper level allowed them to make changes in their behavioral reactions to one another, especially when

vulnerabilities were triggered. Learning each other's "dragons" allowed them to help one another during conflicts rather than triggering one another. Their faith in God is attributed to their ability to now respond in loving ways to one another. This closeness with each other flows over into their other family relationships as well.

Summarized textural description for the Browns. Mr. Brown believed that his partner became more considerate of his needs and feelings after the intensive program. He shared: "I started with expressing personal needs and aspirations and these things better and understanding myself better, so that obviously enabled me to do that as well." Mrs. Brown believed that by digging deeper and finding the root causes of their issues, she and her husband were able to become more self-aware in terms of how they should deal with their issues. Mr. Brown believed that the program also allowed him to feel more secure with his wife. Upon completion, he was able to work together with his wife and trust her more in terms of their everyday concerns and dealings. He stated: "We've matured a ton, and it's not only because of other things; it's largely because we've become a functioning unit between the two of us." Mr. Brown also believed that one of the key changes he observed was the ability to communicate effectively with one another. He added:

The first way is the house of communication. So, we've learned a lot as to how to communicate about tough topics, not around tough topics but to communicate well and understand the tough topics as being a part of our lives but not necessarily dominating our lives."

Mr. Brown believed that the program also developed his listening skills: "I think that helps a ton in recognizing what we won't necessarily see or what we won't necessarily hear from our spouse easily." Furthermore, Mr. Brown believed that the program also equipped him with improved

decision-making skills. He shared: “Then I think the model as well, the model of safe haven and ‘us’ first and always getting back to an ‘us,’ that model is amazingly helpful in guiding principles in decision making.” Finally, Mrs. Brown believed that the program was instrumental in increasing her faith. She shared: “I feel that at certain points [counselor] helped me with trusting God with this, with trusting and having faith with what God put together here.”

Mrs. Brown believed that despite the issues and problems they faced, having God at the center of their marriage was the most important and effective foundation. She shared: “God is at the center of our marriage. It doesn’t change that we need to tweak a little bit and discuss, but it’s not going to sink the boat, we’re going to be okay. So, the foundation is key to me.” Mr. Brown believed in the need to be more God-like at all times and in all aspects of his life. He added: “I’m a child of God and I’m here for a specific purpose to try to identify that.”

Mr. Brown believed in the importance of following the teaching of the Bible content through various methods. He shared: “You need to consume the Bible; you need to consume the content, and what really helped me through the process is that we prioritized faith and God and our marriage as the subject matter to consume.”

The Browns found that their involvement in the intensive allowed them to increase their self-awareness and to subsequently effectively share their needs with their partner. This ability to communicate more openly led the Browns to experience one another as a safe haven, a partner who is considerate and mature. Their trust in God was also enhanced, which influenced their perception of their spouse as someone God gave to them for a good purpose. Having God at the center of their relationships became a source of security when difficulties arose within their relationship. Additionally, continuing to study God’s teachings kept these principles fresh in their relationship.

Summarized textural description for the Joneses. Mrs. Jones believed in the importance of being able to “talk things through” with her husband. She shared: “I just guess with the events that happened in our marriage, to slowly just trust and open up again.” In addition, Mrs. Jones believed that the program reassured her of God’s love and care for His children: “I would just say just more confirmation of how God cares for us in the little things and loves us and how powerful and strong He is.”

The Joneses believed that God was always with them and that they could endure their problems through His power. Mr. Jones shared: “Through all the pain and events that were going on, I just felt God’s strength upholding me and comforting me and assuring me that I would be fine by myself, if that’s how this landed. Just that I would be okay.”

Mrs. Jones believed in the effectiveness of reading the Scripture and reading and listening to the words of God. She shared: “During the difficult times, I reached out to other people to pray for me, to speak words of faith of what God was saying or encouragement. Just to have that connection with others.”

The Joneses emphasized that the strengthening of their assurance of God and His love for them achieved through the intensive was the foundation from which they were able to eventually open up their communication and trust in their partner again. They used God’s word and other people who shared God’s word as a way to stay strong in that secure base while they were moving to a better connection with one another.

Summarized textural description for the Johnsons. Mr. Johnson believed that the ability of his wife to understand how he should be confronted allowed him to trust his wife and gain the affirmation needed for their relationship. He shared: “I feel like she’s understanding it,

and I mean, when she corrects me on something, she would follow up with something like you are a good man and I'm not saying this because you're a bad person."

Mrs. Johnson stated her that God is always present; He never abandons His children: "Despite what happened with my husband, so first to be grateful that I have that always with me, gives me a gratitude of a hope or what can become with us."

Mr. Johnson believed in the effectiveness of practicing reflection to better communicate with God. He shared that the counselor "taught me reflection for listening purposes. My partner and I would go and find a different place and listened to what God was saying to me, and I write about it."

The Johnsons shared that after the intensive their partner's ability to respond differently was evident. Their connection with God instilled a continual level of hope within the relationship during the process of improving. This connection with God was reinforced through quiet moments of reflection and communication with God.

Summarized textural description for the Williamses. Mr. Williams believed that his wife realized her issues and adjusted for the better. She has become much more self-aware of her own habits. She's learned more of her background, she's learned more about me. She asks really good questions, tries to understand."

Mr. Williams described of the importance of having a common language as a married couple: "The intensive helped us with a common language. 'Oh, we're triggered; you're not being emotionally available.' It gave us a language and terminology that helps us make sure we are on the same page."

The Williamses came to believe that God is the only healer of their wounds and the only One who can restore their marriage. Mrs. Williams explained: "He's going to be the only one. I

could only trust [Mr. Williams] through God, that God was going to make him the man that I could trust my heart to and God was the only one.”

Mr. Williams also shared about the need to take the time and put the words of God into his heart and apply them in his daily actions as well as his relationships with others. He stated: “The fact that [counselor] is a Christian, the fact that she took the time to read Scripture and put God’s heart into the model was therapy plus life and character infused into it with a lot of the characteristics of God.”

The Williamses shared that through the intensive process, their connection with God and adherence to his relational ways grew and transferred into the marital relationship. This impacted the relationship in a positive way in that it brought an ability to understand one another better. The trust that they felt in their connection with God allowed them to see the hope and security in that He could help them heal from any relational hurts. They also believed that the counselor was an extension of God to them, and they trusted the approach due to the words of God being incorporated into the model. They, too, appreciated the common language from the model that allowed them to communicate more effectively.

Individual Structural Descriptions Findings

Structural descriptions, as opposed to the verbatim textural summaries of each couple, allow for a further summative description of the whole of each couple’s interview responses.

Structural description for the Smiths. Mrs. Smith believed that after the intensive, she started to understand her partner at a deeper level. She realized the issues and aspects that triggered their conflicts and was able to control and fix them after the intensive. Mr. Smith also believed in the importance of being self-aware, especially during arguments and fights. Mrs. Smith believed that the program, through their counselor, allowed them to realize their

“dragons.” These “dragons” were their vulnerabilities as individuals; since the intensive, they have learned how to manage them, especially during conflicts and fights. Mr. Smith also believed in the need to immediately resolve their issues by understanding one another and working as one to resolve their conflicts. The Smiths believed that they learned that they are able to realize and acknowledge their mistakes and negative practices. Lastly, Mr. Smith believed that he felt more protected by the love of his partner upon realizing that the changes in their lives and the issues were all part of God’s plan for them.

Mrs. Smith believed that she and her husband have benefitted from putting God at the center of their relationship. Mr. Smith also believed in the need to follow God and always respond with love and respect to his partner. Mrs. Smith also believed in the significance and the need to restore her relationship with not only her partner but her family as well. Mr. Smith developed the need to embody the Word of God. He added that in his case, God used their counselor as an instrument to know His teachings.

Structural description for the Browns. Mr. Brown noticed that his partner became more considerate of his needs and feelings after the intensive program. Mrs. Brown acknowledged that by digging deeper and finding the root causes of their issues, they were able to become more self-aware in terms of how they should deal with their issues. In addition, Mr. Brown shared that the program also allowed him to feel more secure with his wife. Upon completion, he was able to work together with his wife and trust her more in terms of their everyday concerns and dealings. Mr. Brown also identified that one of the key changes he observed was the ability to communicate effectively with one another. Mr. Brown shared that the program developed his listening skills. Furthermore, Mr. Brown attributed his improved

decision-making skills to the program. Finally, Mrs. Brown pronounced that the program was instrumental in increasing her faith.

Mrs. Brown shared that despite the issues and problems they faced; having God at the center of their marriage was the most important and effective foundation. Mr. Brown developed the need to be more God-like at all times and in all aspects of His life. Mr. Brown learned the importance of following the teachings of the Bible, which could be learned through various methods.

Structural description for the Joneses. Mrs. Jones learned the importance of being able to “talk things through” with her husband. Mrs. Jones believed that the program reassured her of God’s love and care for His children. The Joneses learned that God was always with them and that they were able to endure their problems through His power. Mrs. Jones was taught the effectiveness of reading the Scripture and listening to the Word of God.

Structural Description for the Johnsons. Mr. Johnson shared that the ability of his wife to understand how he should be confronted allowed him to trust her and gain the affirmation needed for their relationship. Mrs. Johnson was assured that God is always present and that He never abandons His children. Mr. Johnson emphasized the effectiveness of practicing reflection to better communicate with God.

Structural Description for the Williamses. Mr. Williams discovered that his wife realized her issues and adjusted for the better. Mr. Williams also shared the development an increased trust for his wife after the program. Finally, Mr. Williams identified the importance of having a common language as a married couple.

The Williams were impressed that God is the only healer of their wounds. With this, then, He is the only one who can restore their marriage. Mr. Williams also developed the need to take

the time and put the words of God into his heart. This allows him to apply them in his daily actions and relationships with others.

Synthesis of Composite Textural-Structural Descriptions Findings

The next phase of analysis, synthesizing the composite textural-structural descriptions, allows the textural and structural interpretations of the interviews to be combined. In this section, result summaries are provided in response to each of the research questions.

RQ1. How do Christian marital couples who maintained gains after participation in a Christian EFT marital intensive counseling program perceive and make sense of the impact this treatment had on their Christian spirituality and marriage? The majority of the couples reported that through the program, they were able to understand their partners better. In addition, the couples became more self-aware, felt more secure, and discovered the ability to communicate more effectively. There were couples who also reported having a stronger faith in God after the intensive. Two couples shared that the program allowed them to recognize their “dragons” or triggers during critical situations. Couples also found that their relationships became better as they helped one another with issues, learned to acknowledge their mistakes, and listened to one another. Finally, one couple identified the impact of learning the principles that can guide decision making, which allowed them to have the capacity to talk openly with one another regarding their issues.

RQ2. What role does a couple’s Christian spirituality plays in the marital conflict and EFT reparative process? The interviewed couples identified that having a God-centered relationship influenced the process of fixing and restoring their marital and relational problems. The more securely attached their relationship was with God, the more the couples felt securely attached with each other. In addition, couples also experienced the positive effects of following

God's teaching, particularly by responding in a loving and respectful manner, fixing relationships outside their marriage, becoming God-like, and following His image and likeness.

RQ3. What are the specific Christian processes that emerge with uniquely Christian themes and variables that contribute to the marital conflict and EFT reparative process?

The majority of the couples identified how much valuing God's words and teachings by following the teachings of the Bible and receiving people or individuals as instruments to be learned from positively contributed to their current marital status. Additionally, communicating with God through reflections and worship was also a key contributor to relational improvement.

Theme Patterns and Relationships

In evaluating the data outcome, patterns of the invariant constituent themes and points of interest are grouped around the domains of God, self, partner and others. The following table lists the study's major and minor theme, and points of interests in these grouping domains.

Table 5

Outcome Patterns of Themes Around Domains of God, Self, Partner, and Others

Theme	Domain
Major	
Valuing God's words and teachings	God
Understanding their partners better	Self
Having a God-centered relationship	Partner
Minor	
Becoming God-like, following His image and likeness	God
Following God's teachings	God
Communicating with God through reflections and worship	God
Receiving others' input	God
Becoming more self-aware	Self
Feeling more secure with their partner	Self
Recognizing their "dragons"	Self
Learning to acknowledge one's mistakes	Self

Having a stronger faith in God	Self
Communicating more openly to resolve issues	Partner
Learning to listen to their partners	Partner
Helping one another with their issues	Partner
Having the principles that can guide to decision making	Partner
Responding in a loving and respectful manner	Partner
Fixing of relationships outside the marriage	Others
Feeling more secure with family	Others

After the intensive, each couple reported having an individual attachment to God. This attachment influenced the attachment style presentation toward the partner. As this attachment presentation became safer and more secure within the couple, relationship satisfaction was impacted positively. The stronger the relationship satisfaction, the more the couple was able to maintain the positive gains from the marital intensive over time. The couples’ ability to perceive each other as a secure base influenced the relationships outside the couple as well. See Figure 1 for a graphic depiction.

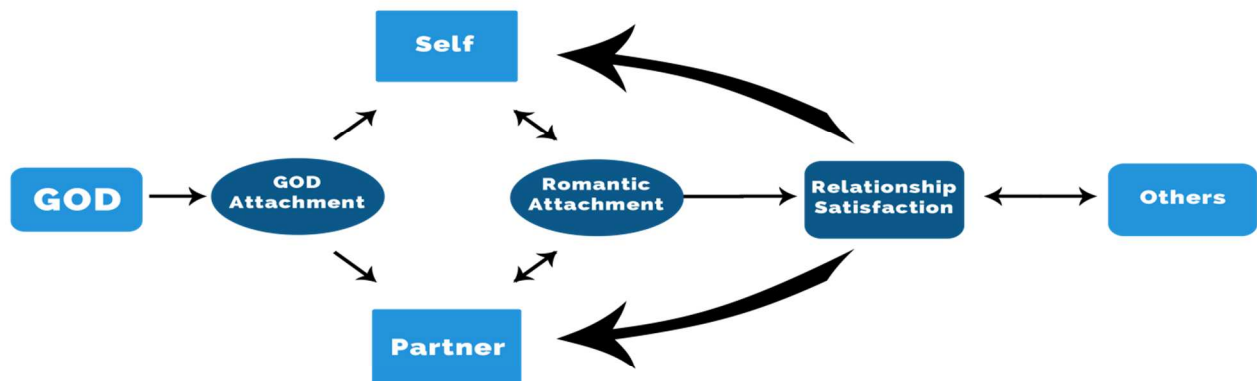


Figure 1. Outcome model from the SHRM intensive research (D. Jenkins, personal communication, July 20, 2017).

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness of a Christian marital intervention on Christian couples. This chapter presented the findings from an analysis of the interviews with five couples by using Moustakas's (1994) method. Three major themes were generated, as well as several other minor themes or important experiences, which addressed the three research questions of the study. These themes were then grouped in domains of God, self, partner, and others. Through these domains, a graphic depiction was presented and explained. The next chapter contains the discussion of the findings in relation to the literature, the recommendations, implications, and conclusions.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Overview

The purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness of the SHRM as a marital counseling intervention from a Christian perspective in an intensive format. SHRM builds on attachment theory and is informed by the EFT model of intervention (Hart & Morris, 2003). Furthermore, the relationship between God attachment and romantic attachment within the context of this marital intervention was explored. This study looked at subjects who participated in this intervention and maintained relationship satisfaction one year after their participation. The problem that was explored by this study was the lack of research on marital interventions for Christian couples, even though professional counseling organizations have moved toward increased spiritual and cultural sensitivity (ASERVIC, 2016). Research shows favorable outcomes for the efficacy of religious and spiritual techniques (Hook et al., 2010).

In this chapter, a discussion of the three research questions is outlined. Next, a comparison to similar research is examined. The importance of God attachment and romantic attachment on relationship satisfaction is highlighted as it pertains to Christian couples. Finally, limitations, considerations for future research, implications for both Christian marriages and counseling, and a conclusion of the study are presented.

Participants

The population sample for this study included five Christian couples who had completed a Christian counseling marital intensive intervention and had reported sustained gains of relationship satisfaction at least one year after the intensive intervention. The first research question explored how these couples perceived and made sense of the impact the treatment had on their Christian spirituality and their marriage. The second research question explored the role

a couple's Christian spirituality played in the marital conflict and EFT reparative process. Last, the third research question explored the specific Christian processes with uniquely Christian themes and variables that contributed to the marital conflict and the EFT reparative process.

Summary of Results

Through Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological method, three major themes, along with several minor themes, emerged from the analysis. The major theme for the first research question was "understanding their partners better," which explained how couples were able to learn their partners' areas of vulnerabilities and use this information to better shape responses to them after the EFT intensive program. The minor themes and points of interest for RQ1 entailed becoming more self-aware, feeling more secure with their family and partner (increased trust), communicating more openly to resolve their issues, having a greater faith in God, recognizing their "dragons," helping one another with their issues, learning to acknowledge mistakes, learning to listen to their partner, and having principles that can guide decision making. The major theme for the second research question was "having a God-centered relationship," which included the active role of Christian spirituality played in the course of the marriage and after the EFT reparative processes. Also seen in RQ2 was the minor theme of following God's teachings. The major theme for the third research question was "valuing God's words and teaching," which entailed the necessity of valuing God's words and teachings to fix the couple's marital conflicts after the EFT reparative processes, with the minor theme of communicating with God through reflection and worship.

Interpretation of the Findings

Research Question 1

The first research question explored how the Christian EFT marital intensive counseling program affected the Christian spirituality and marriage of the couples. The majority of the participating couples in the study reported that their self-awareness increased after the EFT reparative processes of the program. The first major theme derived from RQ1, “understanding their partners better,” involved an increased awareness of their partner’s triggers and areas of vulnerabilities. This also involved recognizing each other’s needs and feelings, which allowed the couples to discuss their issues properly. Emotions are important and are a key agent of change within the context of therapy (Johnson & Greenman, 2013).

Another important facet of this theme was the careful usage of words when confronting their partners, meaning that couples were able to resolve their conflicts by also using reassuring words and terms that would mitigate strong emotions from either party. According to Johnson (2004), EFT uses the emotional experience of distressed couples in the present moment to form more secure attachments, which resonates with the findings of RQ1. The present study showed that regulation of one partner’s emotions can, in turn, help control the emotions of the other person involved. This involves preemptively recognizing how the other person would react and then moderating oneself to accommodate. By being aware of one’s own emotional responses to situations involving marital conflict, a partner is able to reduce the heightened emotion.

This major theme also entailed being able to understand the self in relation to the significant other. This means that as one understands their partner, one is also able to be more aware of their own self-regulatory processes involved in marital conflict resolution. Kirkpatrick (1998) stated that one’s positive mental models of self and others can grow from a framework in

which God is seen positively and an individual is perceived to have a positive relationship with Him. This was demonstrated by the Johnsons, who reported that the wife, through heightened self-awareness, was able to learn how to confront her partner whenever conflicts arose. Couples were able to manage their expectations and emotions and consequently communicate their issues and feelings in a healthy manner. Furthermore, according to Burns and Sayers (1988), relationship satisfaction pertained to the presence of communication and openness and the ability to resolve conflict, demonstrate affection and caring, reciprocate intimacy, and demonstrate a satisfaction of an individual's and partner's role in the relationship, which was also in agreement with the results of this study. These findings suggest that a relationship based on self-awareness and Christian principles may lead to increased relationship satisfaction.

The minor themes and points of interest for RQ1 included (a) becoming more self-aware, (b) feeling more secure with their family and partner (increased trust), (c) communicating more openly to resolve their issues, (d) having a greater faith in God, (e) recognizing their "dragons," (f) helping one another with their issues, (g) learning to acknowledge mistakes, (h) learning to listen to their partner, and (i) having the principles that can guide the decision making. Many of these minor themes represent aspects that are needed for relationship satisfaction, as stated by Burns and Sayers (1988). The second minor theme on increased trust and security relates to adult attachment patterns. These patterns have the same biological drive to ensure felt security and guidance of interpretation within close relationships as well as formulation of the individual's behavior within them (Main et al., 1985). According to Zeifman and Hazan (2008) a romantic attachment requires both partners to offer a reciprocal role of providing for and receiving from one another a safe haven and secure base and an equal distribution of power. Bretherton (1990) found that this is maintained through communication. With regard to the

study findings and the literature, EFT may be a successful and appropriate intervention for Christian couples. The couples who took part in the study showed significant gains from the EFT intervention.

Research Question 2

The second research question examined the role of a couple's Christian spirituality in the marital conflict and EFT reparative process. While RQ1 themes focused on the general relationship and conflict resolution dynamics of couples, RQ2 focused more on the belief that God must be the unitary focus of the relationship and how this belief affects how couples resolve their marital issues. Goodman and Dollahite (2006) stated that highly religious couples believe God is relevant in their marriage in that God is also a presiding partner. As such, the finding of this study echoed this principle. The major theme that emerged was "having a God-centered relationship." This theme reflected that for all five couples, having a God-centered relationship was important for them when going through different stages of marital conflicts and the EFT reparative processes. In agreement, Lambert and Dollahite (2008) found that a connection to God in highly religious couples allows them to both prevent and remediate conflicts within their marriage. The trust in the relationship can be attributed to always putting God at the center of their union; one participant mentioned that faith in God made her feel secure about her relationship with her husband. Interestingly, trust and security were also mentioned as minor themes for the first research question. Straub (2009) found that improving God attachment security could positively impact emotion regulation, which can positively influence romantic attachment and relationship satisfaction. The similarities in responses for RQ1 and RQ2 provide further support for the findings of Straub's (2009) study. One participant mentioned that God

provided assurance that everything would be okay, regardless of the outcome, amidst all the challenges.

The minor theme for RQ2 was “following God’s teachings,” which related to behaving according to the principles that are taught in God’s word for the successful restoration of the couples’ marriages. This theme also included responding in a loving manner, fixing relationships outside of the couple’s marriage, and becoming God-like. This theme is defined by emotional maturity through acting and reacting in a God-like manner, according to the example of Jesus, in order to avoid or resolve conflict. God attachment promotes personal transformation where human relationships cannot (Kirkpatrick, 1998). Furthermore, Granqvist et al. (2010) found that personal transformation moves someone from an insecure attachment to an earned-secure attachment status. These individuals describe a difficult relationship with a parent as a child but work from a secure attachment model in adulthood (Pearson et al., 1994). The literature in relation to the findings may indicate that behaving in a God-like manner encourages individuals to forgive people who may have hurt them in the past and resolving those relationships. Unresolved issues with previous relationships may have a negative influence on a marriage, and fixing past issues may have a positive impact on one’s present relationships. This idea is consistent with Dumont’s (2009) findings that adult children of alcoholics with secure God attachment are indistinguishable from those who did not grow up in an alcoholic home. One participant stated that aside from healing the relationship with her partner, she also found the need to restore her relationships with others, most importantly, her family members.

There were also mentions of respect and a responsibility toward God, as one participant explained that he believes that his wife is the instrument that God gave him in order for him to be conformed to God’s image and likeness. Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1992) found that individuals

with secure attachment histories who are secure in their God attachment have more commitment to religion and positive images of God. Participants mentioned that they would still respond respectfully even if they were treated with disrespect by their partners or other people. Secure God attachment promotes mental and physical health outcomes (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1992). These findings of the research largely agreed with the results of this study, providing a base for further research and extending the evidence that SHRM is a successful marital intervention program.

Research Question 3

The third research question investigated the specific Christian processes that emerged from the interviews that the couples deemed to have contributed to their conflicts and process of restoring their marriage. According to Kirkpatrick (1998), God attachment can promote a secure attachment when God is seen as unconditionally loving, guaranteed to accept and forgive. One can only learn more of God through reading the Bible and having an active relationship with Him. Participants relayed their experiences of valuing God's words and teachings to fix their marital conflict even beyond the intensive experience. This study corroborated Holeman's (2003) finding that Christian couples attributed their ability to reconcile to their personal relationship with God. The majority of the participants shared two specific processes: the importance of valuing God's words through following the teachings of the Bible and people or individuals being used as instruments to relay God's messages. God attachment meets the criteria of other attachment relationships such as proximity seeking, secure base for exploration in the world, haven of safety for comfort, and evidence of distress with a perceived separation or loss (Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999, 2000). One participant believed that God sent their counselor to be the instrument in making them realize the value of marriage as well as the true meaning of

loving unconditionally. Granqvist (2005) found that secure God attachment was linked to better coping and affect regulation. Another participant stated that his individual and marriage growth can be attributed to his openness to incorporate the other Christian processes mainly by learning about the content of the Bible on a daily basis.

Another point of interest emerged which describes the importance of communicating with God through reflection and worship. One participant emphasized that his counselor taught him how to reflect effectively. As previously stated, attachments are maintained through communication (Bretherton, 1990) and appropriate affect-regulation (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Pietromonaco et al., 2004). Furthermore, a secure bond allows for affect regulation during conflict and vulnerability (Pietromonaco et al., 2004), demonstrates problem-solving strategies in conflict (Pistole, 1989), involves high amounts of self-disclosure, and involves disclosure that demonstrates more reciprocity, flexibility, and an open expression of emotions (Feeney, 1995). The findings from this study support this. This study provided evidence for the success of SHRM intervention for Christian couples and generates several recommendations and implications, which will be discussed following the limitations.

Interpretation with the Literature

Romantic Attachment

Hazan and Shaver (1987) found, among other things, that romantic attachment bonds include seeking a safe haven and a secure base. Zeifman and Hazan (2008) found in secure romantic attachment bonds, this safety and security is offered by both partners in a reciprocal fashion of providing, receiving, and exhibiting trust (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Levy & Davis, 1998; Simpson, 1990). In this study, the couples after their participation in the intensive were able to see their partner as a safe haven and secure base. The minor theme of feeling more

secure with their partner or increased trust depicts this. Mrs. Johnson, for example, stated: “If [Mr. Johnson] is safe, then I feel safe because what comes towards that is love towards me . . . there’s just only safety in that. So, I think it means I trust him and that things can change.” Mr. Johnson said: “I want to be safe in her arms, safe in her heart and I want a safe place for her. So I think for the first time I’m learning that.”

Demonstration of secure romantic attachment bonds were found to be maintained through communication (Bretherton, 1990). In this study, the responses of the couples indicated that their experience in the intensive improved their communication. The minor theme of communicating more openly to resolve their issues and the point of interest of learning to listen to their partner depicts this. Mr. Brown disclosed: “We’ve learned a lot as to how to communicate about tough topics.”

Affect regulation has been found to be a significant quality in the maintenance of close attachments in couples (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Pietromonaco et al., 2004). Affect regulation allows for opportunities of vulnerability or self-disclosure in communication (Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991; Pietromonaco et al., 2004) more problem-solving strategies during conflict (Pistole, 1989), greater constructive conversations (Simpson & Rholes, 1994), and positive coping. The study’s points of interest such as learning to acknowledge one’s mistakes, responding in a loving and respectful manner, and having the principles that can guide decision-making indicate that the outcome from the intensive supports the literature in these categories. Mr. Smith said: “Then, once I saw her really acknowledging that and taking responsibility . . . it helped me even trust her more.” Mr. Smith also said: “I still need to respond in a loving way, which is what God calls us to do in loving someone. Knowing that and taking that responsibility, it was a huge part for us.”

Solomon (2003) found that understanding of one another reduces a defensive or rigid interaction pattern of negativity in romantic attachment. In this study, understanding their partners better was one of the major theme findings in support of this literature. Mr. Smith disclosed: “I would also say, just before the intensive, there was less understanding of the other person . . . and then just a greater understanding of each other where before, I was more probably self-focused.” Internal working models are representational constructs allowing people to better predict, anticipate, and formulate responses with attachment figures (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008). Throughout the lifespan, these attachment systems develop and present into adulthood securely or insecurely (Adolphs, 2003; Bowlby, 1979; Gallese, 2005; Johnson-Laird, 1983; Siegel, 2007, 2010, 2012; Siegel & Solomon, 2003) as well as in romantic attachments (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). These internal working models are referred to as “dragons” in the SHRM. Dragons are one’s fears, vulnerabilities, and sensitive spots that become beliefs about self and others and how others will be there and love or not (May, 2007). The model, by incorporating this awareness, has allowed more self-understanding and awareness as well as understanding of their partners. The themes of understanding their partners better, becoming self-aware, and recognizing their “dragons” and the point of interest of helping one another with their issue depicts this. The understanding of self’s and others’ “dragons” have contributed to experiencing, perceiving and responding to one another differently. This has led to secure attachment bonds. Mrs. Smith shared: “When we work on each other’s dragons, I feel like I would say something that triggers [Mr. Smith], and he responds, and that triggers my dragon and then we just get in this dark circle and spiral down. I feel like after the intensive, we’re better equipped to recognize those dragons, so that then if he responds less that way, that makes me feel safer over a period of time.”

In summary, all the couples after completing the SHRM intensive reported attributes, patterns, and themes which are consistent with the romantic attachment literature in support of a securely bonded romantic attachment presentation. These include the themes understanding their partners better, becoming more self-aware, feeling more secure with their partner with increased trust, communicating more openly to resolve their issues, responding in a loving and respectful manner, recognizing their “dragons,” helping one another with their issues, learning to acknowledge one’s mistakes, learning to listen to their partner, and having the principles that can guide to decision making.

God Attachment

God can be a substitutionary attachment figure (Kirkpatrick, 1992) for a haven of safety for comfort (Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999, 2000) especially in cases where a romantic partner is perceived to be unsafe (Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002). In this study, there was disclosure confirming that God attachment was secure prior to the intensive for these same reasons. Mrs. Williams disclosed: “He [God] was there for me. If I didn’t have Him, there is no reason to stay in this [marriage]. . . . It was just Him and me and He was the only one that’s going to make this work. . . . I could only trust [Mr. Williams] through God, that God was going to make him the man that I could trust my heart to.” Even though this isn’t necessarily an outcome result of the intensive intervention itself, it is of interest as a resiliency factor that can be built on leading the couple into a potential God-centered relationship. Individual God attachment can be a head start to this, whether this is a secure or an earned-secure attachment with God, both of which present with affect regulation during problem-solving in romantic attachments.

Those who present with a secure God attachment have more commitment to religion and positive images of God (Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002) and report life satisfaction (Zahl &

Gibson, 2012). Protestant Christians report higher attachments to God (Cicirelli, 2004; Granqvist & Hagekull, 2000; Kirkpatrick 1998, 1999; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990; Pargament, 1997). This study revealed that all the participants identified as self-proclaimed Christians, and several themes were found that corroborate the literature in these areas. After coming through the intensive, the couples identified themes that indicated a secure God attachment. These are the themes of valuing God's words and teachings, following the teachings of the Bible, having a stronger faith in God, following God's teachings by becoming more God-like and following His image and likeness, and communicating with God through reflections and worship. Mrs. Brown shared: "Prior to counseling, I was very much with my own head in this situation; I was trying to fix it. . . . I've learned to look to God to help me and give me wisdom." Additionally, Mr. Johnson shared: "The biggest change was of me learning to connect with Him [God] on an emotional level so I actually felt the first time alive."

The SHRM participants in the intensive shared attributes of moving to a more secure attachment with God that is consistent with the literature. These attributes are valuing God's words and teachings, having a stronger faith in God, desiring to follow God's teachings by following his image and likeness, and increasing communication with God.

Studies found that a closer attachment to God in Christian populations can remediate conflicts within marriages and, conversely, Christian couples can draw closer to God through their marriage together (Lambert & Dollahite, 2008). Additionally, Dumont (2009) found that improving God attachment security will impact one's positive emotion regulation which, then, impacts romantic attachment security. This study supports the literature in these areas, unlike the outcome in Myers (2015), where God attachment did not impact relationship satisfaction among Christians. The major theme with the highest number of occurrences described the development

of a God-centered relationship as the greatest impact of participation in the intensive. This came from the increase of both a secure romantic attachment with partner and a secure attachment to God by both partners. Mrs. Brown shared that through the intensive she could put God as the center of their marriage. She said Mr. Brown “is my husband that God gave me. When I feel insecure of us as a safe haven, it doesn’t change the fact that we’re married and God is at the center of our marriage, so it’s not going to sink the boat. We’re going to be okay. This foundation is key to me.” Mrs. Johnson shared after the intensive: “I think it is safer to me to feel that [Mr. Johnson] is listening to God.”

There is support in this study for the idea that the SHRM promotes the security of God attachment. This also is shown to impact the positive romantic attachment of the couples who participated in the intensive and helped maintain the relationship satisfaction one year later.

Relationship Satisfaction

Many studies have found that securely attached couples find the greatest relationship satisfaction (Banse, 2004; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Levy & Davis, 1988; Simpson, 1990). Of the many qualities that are present in secure romantic attachments that lead to relationship satisfaction, the ones found in this study that support the literature are greater trust (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Levy & Davis, 1988; Simpson, 1990), feelings of being liked by their partner, a benevolent view of their partner (Hazan & Shaver, 1987), positive spouse behavior (Feeney, 2002), and a conflict style that looks out for the concern of self and partner (Cann et al., 2008). These are reflected in the themes and points of interest to include feeling more secure with one’s partner with an increased trust, responding in a loving and respectful manner, becoming more God-like, understanding one’s partner better, communicating more openly to resolve issues, learning to acknowledge one’s mistakes, learning to listen to one’s partner, and having the

principles that can guide to decision making. Mr. Williams shared: “We’ve gone full circle and then some because she is more trustworthy, more openly available, more caring today than she was. So post intensive, years later, we’re better than we were.”

Part of the qualifier for this study was that the couples had already disclosed that they had sustained relationship satisfaction at least one year after the intensive. So, relationship satisfaction was not necessarily an outcome that was revealed through the interview process. The pathway these couples walked to get to relationship satisfaction was the focus. In this study, the path to relationship satisfaction came both through securing the romantic attachment and through God.

Interventions

Attachment-based therapy interventions help insecure couples develop a secure attachment with one another (Saunders et al., 2011). Additionally, religious and spiritual interventions unique to the Christian faith typically include Biblical scripture references, religious imagery, and Christian theology references (Garzon, 2005; Hawkins et al., 1999). The SHRM integrates Christian principles into attachment-based therapy techniques in order to allow Christian couples to learn how to connect love and attach (May, 2007). The importance of the inclusion of these Christian principles were depicted in the outcome themes of working toward a God-centered relationship, valuing God’s words and teachings, following God’s teachings by incorporating imagery of following in His image and likeness, and communicating with God through reflections and worship. Additionally, Christians prefer to see counselors who share their faith perspective (Hook & Worthington, 2009; Ripley et al., 2001). This, too, was evident in the theme that part of valuing God’s words and teachings was to allow people to be used by God to speak to them. Mr. Brown shared: “I would not want a counselor that doesn’t have that

baseline understanding.” Mr. Smith said: “God used [counselor], great Godly counsel, and that God can use people that way.”

The outcome supports the literature in that the SHRM is an effective attachment-based therapeutic intervention that fosters connection in couples with God. Mr. Brown shared: “If you can put your trust in something, it should not be just a husband or wife. This counseling model is being built on God and the Bible.” Holeman (2003) found that couples’ ability to reconcile with one another can be attributed to their personal relationship with God. Additionally, the study found that the SHRM Christian intervention is effective in promoting relationship satisfaction through techniques that foster a secure God attachment as well.

In summary, the SHRM utilizes two pathways of establishing security, romantic attachment and God attachment, which positively impact relationship satisfaction. This study has shown preliminary positive support of effectiveness. Additionally, this study is the beginning of the research to investigate effective Christian couple therapeutic approaches as recommended in the literature (Hook & Worthington, 2009; Hook et al., 2010) specifically in an Christian EFT format (McFee & Monroe, 2011; Mutter, 2012; Mutter et al., 2010; Verseveldt, 2006).

Unexpected Findings

Studies show that secure attachment presentations in individuals reflect secure attachment with family and community relationships (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Additionally, a secure God attachment is correlated with secure attachment with others (Pearson et al., 1994). Although this study focused on romantic attachment and God attachment intervention amongst couples, an unexpected finding was the theme that as the couples became more secure among themselves and God, the desire for this security to be felt amongst family and friends emerged.

The themes of feeling more secure with family through increased trust and following God's teachings by fixing relationships outside their marriage depict this concept.

Summary

In summary, the SHRM utilizes two pathways, romantic attachment and God attachment, in establishing security, which positively impacts relationship satisfaction. This study has produced preliminary findings of effectiveness. Additionally, this study is the beginning of the research to determine effective Christian couple approaches as recommended in the literature (Hook & Worthington, 2009; Hook et al., 2010) specifically in an Christian EFT format (McFee & Monroe, 2011; Mutter, 2012; Mutter et al., 2010; Verseveldt, 2006).

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to a sample of married adults who were self-reported Christians. Christian couples have unique beliefs around spirituality and the attachment bonds felt through their connection with God, God's presence within the marriage, and God's participation in resolving marital conflict (Lambert & Dollahite, 2008; Marks, 2005). Self-reported information is subjective and may influence the reliability of the study findings. However, the study yielded significant results with several major and minor themes, and self-reported data was not found to be a significant limitation.

The second limitation was that the research was limited to subjects who had gone through a Christian marital therapy model (SHRM) in a marital intensive format to determine if this model specifically addresses Christian couples as opposed to a standard EFT program as a marital counseling intervention. This delimitation prevents the generalizability of the findings beyond Christian married couples who share in the same worldview as these participants. This

was purposeful, however, to find a sensitive intervention specific to these unique beliefs among Christians. The results did provide implications for the Christian community.

The third limitation was that the participants were therapy couples and, therefore, any processes that emerged may not be indicative of the spirituality processes of Christian couples who had not participated in this type of remediation. However, as the findings of the study were largely in agreement with the available literature, this was not found to be a significant limitation. These emergent principles can be valuable as a remediation option for Christian couples in marital distress.

The fourth limitation of this study stemmed from the dependence on the participants' self-reported information regarding their maintained gains from the marriage intensive experience. Each of the couples' gains was treated equally, whether small or large. Furthermore, the recall of processes after one year may result in recall bias from the participants. As stated previously, this study provided significant findings, and bias and self-reported data were not found to be substantial limitations.

Lastly, as a qualitative study, the nature of this type of study limits any statistical support. The intent, however, was to gain preliminary information on the topic that does not have much literature on the topic in order to formulate a hypothesis. Gathering lived experiences through interviews in this manner is typically done initially. This will, however, speak to the recommendations from this point.

Recommendations for Future Study

One recommendation for future research would be to explore the impact of SHRM through quantitative study. A study utilizing operationalized terms from this study's outcome

themes with a larger number of participants could yield a deeper understanding of the success rates of this marital intervention.

The second recommendation for future research would be a replication of this qualitative study that would recruit couples who had gone through the SHRM intensive and did not report sustaining relationship satisfaction gains. Understanding their lived experiences of going through this same model without the same results could inform clinicians working within this model as well.

The third recommendation for future research would be to conduct a qualitative case study interviewing counselors who have applied SHRM. This study could explore their experiences and observations from working with this intervention program. A deeper understanding of SHRM from a counselor's perspective may provide information on how to improve the program further and adapt it to non-religious or couples of varying religions.

Implications for Counseling

Identifying the major and minor themes involved in God attachment and romantic attachment for Christian couples has several implications for the field of counseling. The results of this study may assist counselors, counselor educators, supervisors, and leaders in the counseling field to utilize, educate, and refer couples to SHRM more often, specifically for Christian couples. Counselors may recognize the significant impact of SHRM and may be willing to study and educate themselves on this intervention program even if they are not Christians themselves. Furthermore, counselors may want to adapt the basics of SHRM for couples who are not Christians but have a form of spirituality for use in marital interventions, as it may still have a positive impact on the relationship satisfaction of these couples according to adult and romantic attachment theories. Understanding the meaning-making processes of

Christian couples in resolving their marital conflicts by involving religious beliefs can help practitioners deepen their knowledge of which areas to focus on in their clinical practices.

The results of this study may also assist Christian couples looking for marital intervention counseling. Often couples suffer significant challenges in their relationships, and many have no idea how to resolve their issues. This study provides evidence of the success of SHRM, and instead of years of counseling and different treatments, Christian couples may find success and relationship satisfaction sooner. Finding successful treatment for marital problems could reduce divorce rates for Christian couples.

Furthermore, Christian churches could endorse SHRM and make it available to their members. Churches often provide counseling, yet they may not be aware of the SHRM intervention. Counselors at churches and private Christian practitioners may want to educate themselves on this intervention method and may be able to help the members of the Christian body more efficiently. Proper counseling can have a positive impact on the community of the church and the direct environment of the couple, such as their place of work and their circles of influence.

Lastly, the outcome model can be used by professional counselors, counselor educators, supervisors, and leaders who present, train, and advocate for the counseling field. Additionally, the outcome model can also be used as a diagnostic tool for clinicians. It can better assist them in the assessment and treatment planning phase, providing individualized treatment interventions for each couple.

Figure 2 provides a complete illustration of the diagnostic outcome model. Using the outcome model, the arrows between domains are used to indicate attachment style presentations. The sizes and colors of arrows differentiate between the attachment presentations. For example,

the arrow between God attachment and the individuals would indicate the current attachment presentation this individual has with God at the time of intake, whether that be none, secure, earned-secure, anxious, avoidant, or fearful. This is repeated with the other partner. The same would happen with the arrow between romantic attachment and the individual, whether the attachment is secure, anxious, avoidant or fearful. This is again repeated with the other partner for romantic attachment. The arrow between romantic attachment and relationship satisfaction indicates the presence or lack of satisfaction. The lack of an arrow demonstrates a lack of relationship satisfaction. This would be true of the arrow between the outcome models, as it flows out to others. The absence of an arrow indicates insecure attachment with outside family and community relationships, whereas an arrow would demonstrate some secure attachments in this arena. This model informs the clinician in the areas of treatment planning in the arena of God attachment, romantic attachment, and other attachment outside the relationship. The current literature in the arena of God attachment, romantic attachment, and relationship satisfaction as well as the outcome themes of this study can inform the clinician as to the ingredients that may be missing and the goals which need to be achieved through an attachment-based intervention such as SHRM.

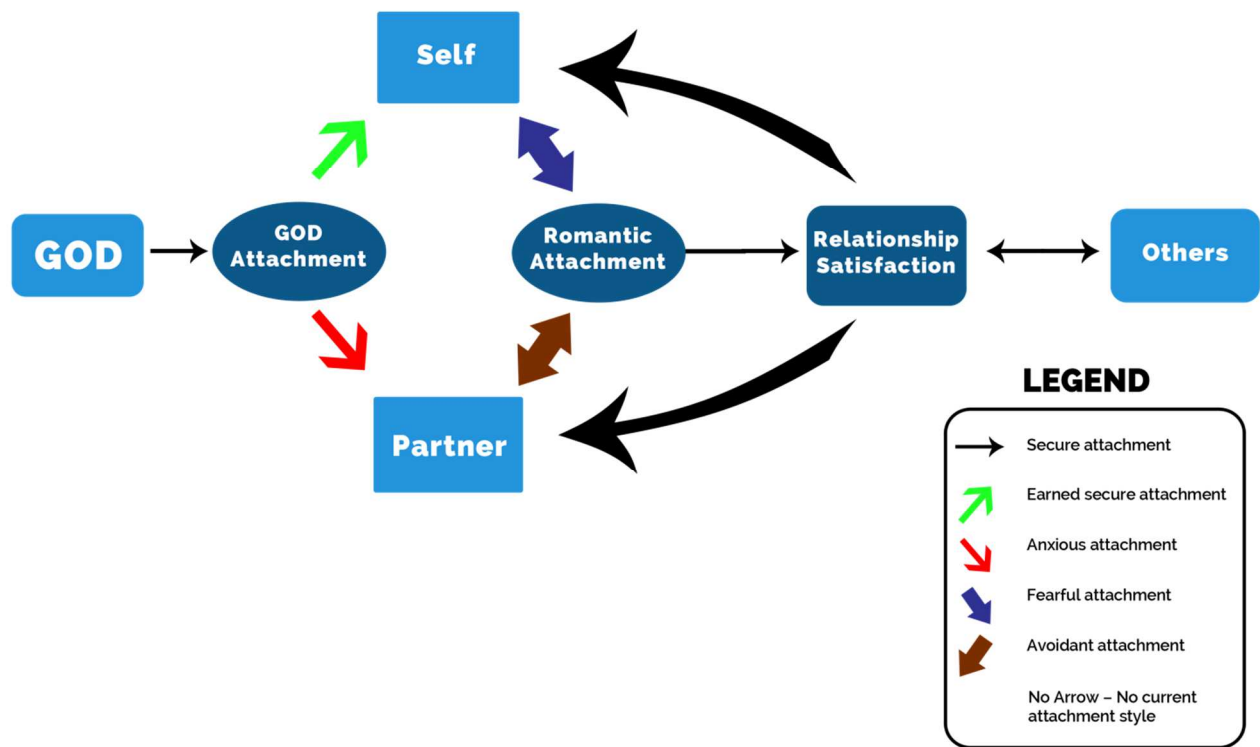


Figure 2. Outcome model as a diagnostic tool.

Figure 3 offers an illustration of the diagnostic model with an actual diagnostic presentation. This model depicts the female presenting with an earned-secure attachment to God while presenting with a fearful attachment to her romantic partner. The male is depicted with an anxious God attachment and an avoidant attachment style with his romantic partner. There is a lack of relationship satisfaction and there are some insecure attachments in their relationships outside the couple.

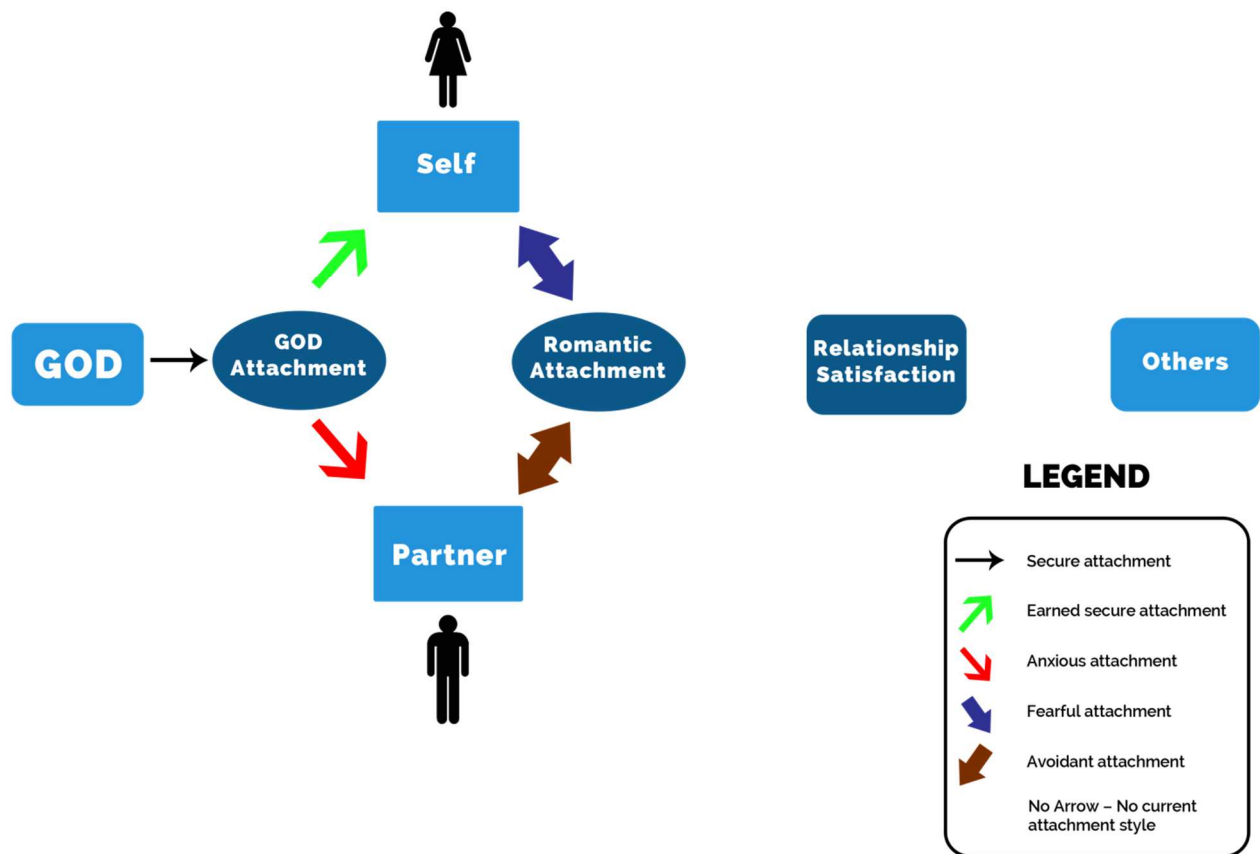


Figure 3. Illustration of use as a diagnostic tool

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness of the Safe Haven Relationship Model (SHRM) as a Christian counseling marital intervention, which builds on attachment theory and is informed from the EFT model of intervention. The literature suggested favorable outcomes for the efficacy of religious and spiritual techniques regarding marital counseling (Hook et al., 2010). Marks (2005) stated that Christian couples enter marriage with influences from their faith's values and traditions that are different than other couples'. The analyses of the data using Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological method yielded three major themes for the three research questions, several minor themes, and a few points of interest. The major themes included understanding partners better, having a God-centered relationship, and valuing God's

words and teaching. The minor themes included becoming more self-aware, feeling more secure with family and partner (increased trust), communicating more openly to resolve issues, having a greater faith in God, and recognizing “dragons.” The points of interest included helping one another with their issues, learning to acknowledge one’s mistakes, learning to listen to one’s partner, having the principles that can guide decision making, following God’s teachings, and communicating with God through reflections and worship. The recommendations for future research included conducting a longitudinal quantitative study by operationalizing the outcome themes from this study, conducting a qualitative study with couples who did not achieve relationship satisfaction through SHRM, and conducting a qualitative study with other counselors who have used this model. The implications of the study encouraged counselors to utilize SHRM more often, specifically for Christian couples, and Christian churches to endorse SHRM and make it available to their members. Lastly, the outcome model can be used as a diagnostic tool at intake to better individualize each couple’s treatment focus and inform the clinician as to the couple’s attachment presentation in the area of God attachment, romantic attachment, relationship satisfaction, and attachment outside the relationship.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

Consent Form

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF GOD ATTACHMENT, ROMANTIC ATTACHMENT, AND RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION IN CHRISTIAN COUPLES COMPLETING A MARITAL INTENSIVE

Shanon Roberts

Liberty

University

Department of Counselor Education and Family
Studies

You are invited to be in research study about the significance of having gone through a Haven of Safety Marriage Intensive (HSMI). This study seeks to understand the process of gains that couples obtained and have maintained in the area of their relationship with one another and with God. You were selected as a possible participant because of your participation in HSMI at least one year ago, your initial assessment, and your current report that the intensive has had a positive impact on your marriage. I ask that you read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Shanon Roberts MS, LPC, LMHC
Department of Counselor Education and
Family Studies
Liberty University

Background Information:

The purpose of the study is to understand and further the research knowledge base on how Christian couples make sense of what happens for them in the first year after participating in a Christian marriage intensive setting.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I will be asking you to do the following things:

- Sign and scan/email or fax this consent form back to me after asking any questions you may have.

- Agree to disclose demographic information to me, the researcher.
- Participate in a 60-90 minute video-conference interview as a couple which will be audio and video recorded and transcribed by the researcher. You will be required to obtain access to a video recording computer device and Internet access to VSee (downloaded software) in order to participate in the real-time video conference interview.
- Be available for follow-up questions if needed for the purposes of clarifying data, gaining further insights, and commenting on interpretations. These will be over the phone or via video-conference and should take no longer than 30 minutes. Again, all correspondence will be recorded and transcribed by the researcher.
- Read and provide feedback on final interpretations and documentation via e-mail.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

While the risks of participating in this study are not more than would be encountered in everyday life, there are some risks you should be aware of before agreeing to be in this study. Risks may include feeling uncomfortable, anxious, or having self-doubt due to having to share your story and personal details with a stranger. Some people may feel a sense of exposure. There may also be an emotional cost to openly and reflectively sharing your time, experience, and emotional resources. For example, some couples may have negative feelings stirred and brought back to the surface through sharing their stories.

Steps to minimize these risks include being able to ask as many questions as you require to feel comfortable participating in this study, my making you as comfortable as possible during the interview by really trying to understand your story and your experience the way you see it, understanding confidentiality listed below, being able to debrief with me or a SHRC counselor, and your ability to revoke your participation in the study at any time.

The possible benefits of your participating in this study include possible renewed hope, increased awareness and focus on your marriage, increased insight, greater self-awareness, and possible shifting in priorities. In addition, your sharing may help other couples going through similar experiences, may help SHRC and other Christian intensive programs make changes to make treatment continually more effective, and may help the research community identify new areas that require attention.

Compensation:

There will be no direct or monetary compensation for participation in this study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In the dissertation report or any subsequent journal publications or presentations, I will not include any information that will make it

possible to identify a participant.

All transcribed and audio/video-taped data or notes will be coded in such a way to remove your name and all other personally identifying information, and the code sheet will be stored separately in a locked and protected area in the researcher's office. All interview and research records will be stored on a secure, encrypted laptop that remains in the constant possession of the researcher, as well as, being backed up on a portable USB that will be stored in a locked and protected cabinet in the researcher's office. All video tapes will be deleted immediately upon completion of this study. All other transcribed data, notes, and identifying information (stored separately) will be destroyed within three years of completion of the study. Until that time, data will be stored in the office of the researcher in coded format and inaccessible to outsiders.

Limits of Confidentiality:

In a qualitative study, complete confidentiality is not possible because excerpts and descriptions from participants' interviews become an integral part of data reporting. However, anonymity will be upheld by assigning a code to each participant's identifying information and by allowing participants to review all information being included.

Further, in accordance with the US Department of Health and Human Services (see https://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/mandata.cfm), if the participant states or suggests that he or she (or his or her spouse) is abusing a child (or vulnerable adult), or a child (or vulnerable adult) is in danger of abuse, the researcher is required to report this information to the appropriate social service and/or legal authorities.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University, with SHRC, or with me, Shanon Roberts. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time without negative repercussions. Should you decide to withdraw, you can contact Shanon Roberts by phone and then in writing via e-mail to let her know of your desire to withdraw from the study. At that time, your transcribed data and video conferencing will be removed from the study and destroyed immediately.

Contacts and Questions:

I, Shanon Roberts, am the researcher conducting this study. You may ask any questions you may have now or at any time by contacting me at [REDACTED] or at [REDACTED].

You are also free to contact my Liberty University advisor, Dr. David Jenkins at [REDACTED] or at [REDACTED].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Suite 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

My signature below indicates that I have read and understood all the previous information. It also indicates that I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

The researcher has my permission to video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Participant's Signature: _____

Participant's Printed Name: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Researcher's Printed Name: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B: Questions for Couple Interviews

1. (a) How did you experience or perceive your spouse prior to the marital intensive?

- In what way was your spouse a secure and a safe haven?
- To what degree could you rely on your spouse?
- To what degree could you trust your spouse with your heart?
- How was your spouse emotionally and physically available?
- To what degree did your spouse respond in considerate ways?

(b) How did you experience or perceive your spouse after the marital intensive?

- In what way has your spouse been a secure and a safe haven?
- To what degree are you able to rely on your spouse?
- To what degree are you able trust your spouse with your heart?
- How has your spouse been emotionally and physically available?
- To what degree has your spouse responded in considerate ways?

2. (a) How did you experience or perceive God prior to the marital intensive?

- In what way was God secure and a safe haven?
- To what degree could you rely on God?
- To what degree could you trust God with your heart?
- How has God been available?
- To what degree did God respond?

(b) How did you experience or perceive God after the marital intensive?

- In what ways has God been a secure and a safe haven?
- To what degree have you been able to rely on God?
- To what degree are you able to trust God with your heart?
- How has God been available?
- To what degree has God responded?

3. During the time of the intensive, think of your relationship with your spouse and with God.

- How was your relationship with your spouse been affected during the intensive?
- How was your relationship with God affected during the intensive?
- How did having faith integrated into the intensive help to that end, if at all?

4. Is there anything else that you want to share or want me to know about your marital intensive experience?

Appendix C: Liberty University's IRB Approval Letter**LIBERTY UNIVERSITY**
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

January 25, 2017

Shanon K Roberts

IRB Approval 2755.012517: A Phenomenological Analysis of God Attachment, Romantic Attachment, and Relationship Satisfaction in Christian Couples Completing an Emotionally- Focused Marital Intensive

Dear Shanon K Roberts,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project. Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

The Graduate School

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Appendix D: Recruitment Letter

Date

Recipient

Address 1

Address 2

Address 3

Dear **Recipient**:

As a graduate student in the Department of Counselor Education and Family Studies at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy degree. The purpose of my research is to explore the effectiveness of the Safe Haven Relationship Model in which you recently have participated through Dr. Sharon May in an intensive setting, and I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If it has been at least one year since your intensive participation; and you have maintained positive gains, are married and are willing to participate, you will be asked to participate in a video-conference interview. It should take approximately 60-90 minutes for you to complete the interview. Your name and/or other identifying information will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate complete and return the consent document to me at [REDACTED] and you will be contacted to schedule an interview. This consent document is an attachment included in this email. It contains additional information about my research.

Sincerely,

Shanon K Roberts MS, LPC, LMHC
Liberty University Doctoral Student

Appendix E: Themes Compilation

Research Question 1 Themes Compiled

RQ1. How do Christian marital couples who have maintained gains after participation in a Christian EFT marital intensive counseling program perceive and make sense of the impact this treatment has had on their Christian spirituality and their marriage?

Theme A: Understanding their partners better

The first major theme of the study was the experience of being able to understand their partners after completing the EFT intensive program. Four of the five couples shared that they experienced the said change in their relationships. Mrs. Smith stated that after the intensive program, a greater understanding was observed. The participant explained that the program allowed her to understand her partner on a deeper level by getting to know the factors that trigger one another and working together to peacefully resolve them. Mrs. Smith believed that after the intensive, she started to understand her partner at a deeper level. She realized the issues and aspects that trigger their conflicts and was able to control and fix them after:

I would also say, just before the intensive, there was less understanding of the other person. For me, in my counseling with [counselor], just independently, I got to understand why I do things. That was step one. Then step two is how does it relate to my relationships outside of myself? Mainly being with [Mr. Smith], obviously, with the intensive. I would say that would be the only thing, our volatility, and then just a greater understanding of each other where before, I was more probably self-focused.

Mr. Brown shared that his wife started to be more considerate and understanding after the program. The participant added that the program greatly helped their marriage as they became able to care for each other's needs and think of each other's feelings before discussing their conflicts fully. Mr. Brown believed that his partner became more considerate of his needs and feelings after the intensive program:

I just wanted to say that from a model perspective, it really had a ton of value for us. I think [Mrs. Brown] is much more considerate and I really appreciate that. To her credit, obviously, I started with expressing personal needs and aspirations. Better understanding of myself enabled me to do that as well.

Mr. Johnson highlighted that his wife was now able to understand the proper way of confronting him whenever there are issues. The participant gave an example in which his wife will correct him but would immediately use reassuring terms and words that would not intensify their situation further. Mr. Johnson believed that the ability of his wife to understand how he should be confronted allowed him to trust his wife and gain the affirmation needed for their relationship:

Some of the things that I already said really pointed to that. I feel like she understands it. When she corrects me on something, she would follow up with something like you are a good man and I'm not saying this because you're a bad person. We are going to be ok. That puts her on a context where I can trust her more that she's working on the relationship and not trying to be mean to me. She's learning to say those things. So, she looks at the five love languages and has really learned to affirm me with words, and I don't think that was the case before. That allows me to trust her more.

Mrs. Johnson explained that her husband now knows her wants and needs for their marriage. She gave examples wherein after the program, her husband would try to accommodate her simple requests and would spend more time with her and her family:

Now he looks at me and communicates and talks and plans, and I seem to be a more part of that and that feels good to know I matter. The other thing is he says more often now that he wants to take a vacation with me. Before, the only time that we'd vacation together was if it was connected to our project, so it was work or history or something. Now he's saying to go every year on a trip together, and we have never done that in 60, well, we're 61.

Theme B: Becoming more self-aware

The first minor theme that emerged was the experience of becoming more self-aware after the program. Three of the five couples described this experience. **Mr. Smith shared that the program allowed him to be more aware of his words and actions, especially during conflicts and fights. The participant indicated that he was able to develop this trait as they went through group counseling with other couples. Through this, he was able to learn how to converse correctly and avoid escalating the situation into larger fights and arguments. Mr. Smith believed in the importance of being self-aware, especially during arguments and fights:**

I think just one, knowing more about myself and how I was responding in the moment of when we'd have a fight with my dragons. I think that's obviously a huge part of something we learned. . . . You could kind of see how patterns started to develop. I don't know if she calls it your dynamic, just where what the dialogue looks like and the spiral down in a fight between couples.

Mrs. Brown expressed that the sessions helped her and her husband to search deeper within themselves and find the emotions that they need in order to connect better to their partners. The Browns became self-aware as they tried to look for the root causes of their problems and, later on, opened their eyes and recognized the issues needed to be fixed. Mrs. Brown believed that by digging deeper and finding the root causes of their issues, they were able to develop and become more self-aware in terms of how they should deal with their issues accordingly:

I felt like the sessions helped both [Mr. Brown] and I dig deeper into why we have certain emotions, things that we didn't even think about. I feel if I'm speaking for my spouse, I

have seen [Mr. Brown] really dig deeper into areas that him and I would've never gotten there if we didn't have a third party guiding us to that and to see him recognize that, at times very painful, but recognizing it and I feel like it's opened his eyes. For things that on the surface saw that this wasn't right and it was causing an imbalance, but I didn't know what the root of the issue was.

Mr. Williams added that indeed, his wife became more self-aware after the program. The participant shared that his wife started to be cautious of her habits and identify her issues that may have been affecting their marriage. After the program, he observed that his wife changed and tried to be more considerate of both their needs and feelings. Mr. Williams believed that his wife realized her issues and adjusted for the better:

She has become much more self-aware of her own habits. She's learned more a lot of her background she's learned more about me, she asks really good question, tries to understand. But all I had to say we've gone full circle and then some because she was more trustworthy, more openly available, more caring and all that stuff today than she was. So post intensive, years later we're better than we were.

Theme C: Recognizing their “dragons”

The fifth minor theme under the first research question was the experience or effect of being able to recognize one's dragons. Mrs. Smith stated that the program helped her and her husband recognize their “dragons.” Their counselor helped both of them to recognize their strengths and weaknesses as well as the factors that triggered them, especially during critical situations. The participant described that after the intensive, they are equipped to handle their “dragons” and have both become more understanding of one another. Since the intensive, they have learned how to manage them, especially during conflicts and fights:

I would say really just the dragons—when we work on each other's dragons. . . . I feel like I would say something that triggers [Mr. Smith], and he responds, and that triggers my dragon and then we just get in this dark circle and spiral down. I feel like the intensive, we're better equipped to recognize those dragons, like [Mr. Smith] was saying so that then if he responds less that way, that makes me feel safer over a pattern or over a period of time. It's even less, I would say, putting the pressure on him like, if he responds that way, but understanding, okay, this is my thing. I have a choice with how I'm going to respond regardless of how he is or what he says and does.

Point of Interest D: Helping one another with their issues

A point of interest that emerged was the practice of helping one another with their issues. Again, the experience was mentioned only once. Mr. Smith stated that from the start, he and his wife have been committed to make their relationship work despite their personal and family issues. With the program, he realized the importance of understanding his partner and working together to resolve their problems. Mr. Smith believed in the need to immediately resolving their issues and that this can be done by understanding one another and working as one to resolve their conflicts:

We really want to make sure we work on this so that we don't get into a bad pattern of me getting pouty and walking off or [Mrs. Smith] running hot and getting mad and whatever we do in our moments. I would say through that, you get a much better depth of understanding really yourself and how you're responding in it. Then, also too, I think you're able to watch your spouse or your partner go through the same process and you're seeing them go, oh, wait. That is what I do so that you're both able to help each other, too, because that's really what it is, is how fast can you help each other get to the point where it's like, hey, stop.

Point of Interest E: Learning to acknowledge one's mistakes

The second point of interest that emerged was the experience of learning to acknowledge one's mistakes. The point of interest occurred once. Mr. Smith stated that from the program, his partner was able to take responsibility of her negative habits. One example was being overprotective and defensive about her family to the point that it affected her relationship with her partner. The Smiths both believed that from the program, they are able to realize and acknowledge their mistakes and negative practices. Mrs. Smith stated:

I can excuse a lot of things away. I'm like, no, they didn't mean that. I didn't see that that way, especially with my family. I would defend them a lot. It made me more want to trust [Mr. Smith]. He's not attacking my family at that moment, maybe. He wants to come from this place of just understanding and working it through it with me, and I don't need to be so protective of my family. I felt like that really helped us because it just helped me take my guard down.

Mr. Smith continued:

Then, once I saw her really acknowledging that and taking responsibility of, hey maybe I am defensive about my family sometimes. When I get into this mode, it does this, and this, and this. It helped me even trust her more with even not just her view on my family or on something I'm doing, but also even because she saw it and she's vulnerable, then I'm able to take even one more step, which is, okay, I take your word. If this is way your family is going right now and even though it looks this way to me, but you feel like we're having good boundaries and you really aren't doing this just because you want to do the Macarena. You're doing it because you want to love on your mom, not out of obligation. That's when I think I was able to go to a whole other level that I don't think I would have gotten to without [counselor]'s help. I actually know I wouldn't have.

Theme F: Feeling more secured with their family and partner; increased trust

The second minor theme of the study was the experience of becoming more secure with their family and partner given their increased trust. Three of the five interviewed couples shared the theme. Mr. Smith expressed that one lesson he learned from the program is the security that God's love provides His people. Through this teaching, he realized that God provided him with his partner and that she is always present in his life despite the changes

and issues that they may be faced with. Mr. Smith believed that he after the intensive, he felt more protected with the love of his partner upon realizing that the changes in their lives and the issues are all part of God's plan for them:

I would say the only thing I think is being secure in God's plan. As families change and that's a part of what she focused on with the intensive is, every family's going to change, but some bend and others break. Families can still be strong and break and come back together, but there might be a tougher time. I think that's probably where I've gotten more security because we both are unique in that we love our families a lot and we're both very family-oriented. So, watching even my own family, we're changing and my brother's doing this.

Mr. Brown explained that his wife was a trustworthy and an honest individual. However, with the help of the program, they were able to work together and build a stronger bond between them. He is more secure in terms of his family, kids, and financial concerns. Mr. Brown believed that the program also allowed him to feel more secure with his wife. Upon completion of the intensive, he was able to work together with his wife and trust her more in terms of their everyday concerns and dealings:

I think I have to firstly say [Mrs. Brown] has always been very trustworthy. She worked off of her strong best, being from a trust perspective. But, yeah, I guess now that we have this much clearer definition in terms of us and safe haven, I can even just say I feel more secure and I guess also that in some inconsequential or in such different consequence, that our lives have changed in a business perspective and in a functioning life perspective in terms of family oriented and kids oriented, etc. We've matured a ton, and it's not only because of other things, it's largely because we've become a functioning unit between the two of us. So I think I trust her more with work stuff; I trust her more with kids' stuff, not that I had not before, it's just that I mean she's my life partner; she's where I put my trust.

Mr. Williams found his wife to be more trustworthy after the program. Their counselor was then able to eliminate the wall that was hindering them from fixing their issues as a couple. With both them becoming more emotionally and physically available, Mr. Williams developed an increased trust for his wife. Mr. Williams shared the main factors that allowed him to develop an increased trust for his wife after the program:

I think it all takes as they are more reliable, trustworthy or perhaps even the other way around as they are more emotionally available physically available than you can trust them more so that comforts, but the answer again would kind of be about the same after each intensive, because again, ours is broken up into three or four different half days so sessions. [Counselor] kind of chipped away at the walls that were resurrected between us.

Theme G: Communicating more openly to resolve their issues

The fourth minor theme discovered was the experience of communicating more openly and effectively in order to resolve issues. Three of the five couples identified this experience during the interviews.

Mr. Brown indicated that one of the most vital changes was the ability to communicate and discuss the different aspects of their relationship and their married life. The participant shared that through the program, he and his wife were able to develop a common language that they share as a couple and use it with wisdom. Mr. Brown believed that one of the key changes he observed was the ability to communicate effectively:

The first way is the house of communication. So, we've learned a lot as to how to communicate around tough topics, not around tough topics but to communicate well and understand the tough topics as being a part of our lives but not necessarily dominating our lives. And if we're communicating an emotional spot, especially going through recognizing, "Listen this is a dragon of mine coming out" . . . and there might be some wisdom in it but also to recognize my dragon in it. So, communicating and having language and verbiage and being able to articulate this stuff has become really good.

Mrs. Jones highlighted that the improvement in their marriage took much work and effort from her and her husband. One of the main factors of improvements is now having the ability and openness to discuss their issues and "talk things through." Mrs. Jones explained the importance of this openness:

I just guess with the events that happened in our marriage, to slowly just trust and open up again. It just took time and lots of work with [counselor] and with [Mr. Jones]. It just happens over time as you make the decision to go that way. I think it's just his commitment to keep going to therapy every month and working on our marriage. Then, just being able to talk things through, and the things that are difficult, we save for [counselor]. He definitely is more considerate and more, just with small things. I feel more cared for and that he's more attentive.

Mr. Williams described that he and his wife now have a "common language" that they share, post-intensive program. The participant shared that after the program, his wife became more open and approachable, ensuring that their utmost concern is always the health and security of their relationship:

So, after the intensive full circle I perceived her to be more approachable and more open to trying to work it out I know I mean she was just trying to work it out on her own, reading her Bible and all that stuff, but between us working it out it was we were kind of in our own island just trying to kind of heal in the find our way back into safe spot and it wasn't happening.

He continued, explaining that he and his wife developed:

a common language. “Oh, we’re triggered; you’re not being emotionally available,” whatever, a language and terminology that helps you get in and makes sure you are in the same page, but she kind of does the same thing.

Point of Interest H: Learning to listen to their partner

Another point of interest that emerged was having the ability to listen and better understand the spouse. The theme occurred only once. Mr. Brown stated he improved in his ability listen to his partner. The participant learned through the program that listening leads to an increased understanding of the spouse:

[Counselor] mentioned that listen the ability for someone else to just mirror some words or mirror just what we say in a way that makes it, for us, even more palatable, I think that helps a ton in recognizing what we won’t necessarily see or what we won’t necessarily hear from our spouse easily.

Theme I: Having the principles that can guide to decision making

Another minor theme discovered was the experience of developing the principles which the couples could use as their foundation on improving their decision-making abilities. Mr. Brown stated that the program enabled him to have the capabilities to better manage not just his relationships but also the other important aspects of his life. Mr. Brown believed that the program also equipped him with improved decision-making skills:

Then I think . . . the model of safe haven and us first and always getting back to an “us,” that model is amazingly helpful in guiding principles in decision making. Not only just communication, but really setting up your life that way; it’s a principle thing and it’s been amazingly helpful for us. Making sure that we can prioritize what we need to prioritize around that concept. That has to do with extended family, has to do with finances, it has to do with work relationships, and with raising kids. It has to do with everything, so that’s a great foundation to work off of this model of safe haven and an “us” first of all. How do we get back to that trust place of us first? So that’s at least three kind of practical ways in which we were different, and why we are different, continuously different, not just- it’s not a Band-aid; listen, this is us functioning better because we’ve got the tools to do so.

Theme J: Having a stronger faith in God

The fourth minor theme of the first research question was the impact of a stringer faith in God. Two of the five couples shared the said experience. Mrs. Brown shared that the program developed her faith further and increased her trust in God and believed that the program was instrumental in increasing her faith:

I feel that at certain points [counselor] helped me with trusting God with this, with trusting and having faith with what God put together here and where I would describe a situation that one did this and this one did this, and I feel overwhelmed and to learn to say

“Okay, no, I am a child of God; I am His child.”

Mrs. Jones added that the program provided her with the validation of God’s love for His children:

I would just say just more confirmation of how God cares for us in the little things and loves us and how powerful and strong He is. Just more of that than before. I think just more knowing and realizing that God is responsive and caring and a safe place.

Research Question 2 Themes Compiled

RQ2. What role does a couple’s Christian spirituality play in the marital conflict and EFT reparative process?

Theme A: Having a God-centered relationship

The major theme of the second research question was the active role of Christian spirituality through having a God-centered relationship as the couple went through the different stages of marital conflicts and EFT reparative process. All of the five couples identified the said role and experience in their marriage. Mrs. Smith explained that the trust in their relationship can be attributed to their decision to always put God at the center of their union:

I feel like we were really trusting. I think I trusted [Mr. Smith] from the get-go because there is a depth. Our relationship was definitely centered in our relationship with the Lord. For us, that provided a level of trust and depth to it. I would say I feel like I trusted [him] a lot before the intensive.

Mrs. Brown added that her faith in God made her feel secure about her relationship with her husband. For her, the foundation of their marriage will always be God and His words. Mrs. Brown believed that despite the issues and problems they faced, having God at the center of their marriage is the most important and effective foundation:

[Mr. Brown] is my husband and my protector and my provider that God gave me. It’s like I said, in times when I feel insecure or unsure, to hold onto the truth where we are a safe haven. Maybe we are wavering, and it may be baggage that is pushing us off track a little bit; it doesn’t change that we’re married. . . . God is at the center of our marriage. It doesn’t change that, we need to tweak a little bit and discuss, but it’s not going to sink the boat, we’re going to be okay. So the foundation is key to me.

Mrs. ones shared that amidst all the problems and pains that their marriage had to survive, God was always present in their lives, assuring them that they would be able to endure their conflicts. Mr. Jones echoed that God “never leaves them”:

Through all the pain and events that were going on, I just felt God's strength upholding me and comforting me and assuring me that I would be fine by myself, if that's how this landed. Just that I would be okay.

I guess, just reconfirm God never leaves us. He's always there. It's only us that walks away or messes it up; He's always there. I think I saw that more than ever as I went through of all this stuff. To be able to come back, the power of healing that's there. Then, like [Mrs. Jones], she was way better at this. I just normally in the past didn't let people in my space. Now, I've got at least one person I get together with once a week and just talk and pray. Nothing intense, but just that accountability.

Mrs. Johnson echoed that despite the painful conflicts that they had to endure, she never felt abandoned, as God was always with her. Having God at the center of their lives gave her the hope that things will be fine at the end of the day:

I think that what it does to me to be able to talk about it is that, reminds me like I'm never abandoned by God like I felt with [Mr. Johnson] and never with intense relationship though I may feel that way with [Mr. Johnson]. And so to see that in my fate, I'm not abandoned and I'm not without a relationship and that I'm unconditionally loved, it gives me a lot of gratitude that I'm all with all of those things, best present in my life, to be grateful for that. Despite with what happened with my husband, so first to be grateful that I have that always with me, gives me gratitude of a hope or what can become with us.

Mrs. Johnson emphasized that God is the only one who can answer her doubts and bring back their marriage in a healthier and happier state. Mr. Johnson added that relying on God is the answer to the problems and issues that they are faced with as a couple:

The Williams believed that God is the only healer of their wounds and the only One who can restore their marriage. Mrs. Williams explained:

He's going to be the only one so, I could only trust [Mr. Williams] through God that God was going to make him the man that I could trust my heart to and God was the only one that's going to heal my heart and was going to bring our marriage to a healthy place. So it was one hundred percent on him. As I knew that [Mr. Williams] and I were, there's nothing to rely on either I had nothing and I didn't want anything from him.

Knowing that [counselor] herself relied on God knowing that we are all imperfect; God is refining us but that she was leaning on God for some of her insights, for some of [counselor's] counseling and as well as trying to take sort of therapeutic model and trying to infuse it with scripture to just again add a more uniqueness and weight to it.

Theme B: Following God's teachings

The only minor theme that arose from research question two was the role of following God's teachings to the successful restoration of the couples' marriages. The theme received three occurrences from the phenomenological analysis of the interviews. Under God's

teachings, three underlying themes emerged: responding in a loving manner, fixing of relationships outside the marriage, and becoming God-like.

Sub-Theme A: Responding in a loving and respectful manner

Mr. Smith stated that he makes sure that despite the misunderstanding and conflicts during his conversations with his partner, he still follows God's calling of responding with respect and reverence at all times. He shared that it is his responsibility as a child of God and believed in the need to follow God and always respond with love and respect to his partner:

She never responds disrespectfully, but if she did, it still doesn't give me the right to then respond. I still need to respond in a loving way, which is what God calls us to do in loving someone. Knowing that and taking that responsibility, it was a huge part for us. Then, taking it one step further, and [counselor] uses so many great examples when she does it, but she somehow finds that point of where you as a couple really, really struggle. I think she also helps you say, now [Mrs. Smith], take responsibility for how you're responding. It doesn't matter what she just did. It does, but at the same time, you still have a choice. Then, take one step more which is then become soft and try and love and speak into that, which is like putting ointment on a wound rather than salt. I think we've been so blessed. I've told [counselor] this. She came to our wedding because I felt like her and [Mrs. Smith], if it weren't for them, we wouldn't be together because she was really an angel sent by the Lord, I feel like. She was able to help us work through some really crazy issues really at the start. We would literally have her voice in our head, honestly, the things she's saying, because we went to more than just the intensive, but that was really the start of it.

Sub-Theme B: Fixing of relationships outside the marriage

Mrs. Smith explained that aside from healing the relationship with her partner, she also found the need to restore her relationships with others, more importantly, her family members:

The best part is, I feel like, yes, the intensive helped us, but then it really helped all my other relationships and especially with my family because I feel like my relationship coming from a very close family and then going through a really hard time, my relationship with my family is so much better because it's more honest. It really helped. Even with [Mr. Smith]'s family. He comes from a very close family, too, and both live locally. Just even understanding, without going to counseling with them, it's helped all of my relationships. The intensive didn't just help [Mr. Smith] and I. I would say we're way better in our talking about with each other. If his mom says something or his sister does something or if my dad does something, whatever, it's a much firmer foundation that's more stable and less volatility where it's acknowledging your feelings and your emotions without making decisions based on them and responding on emotions. That's really futile. It just helped not just us, but all of our relationships. I would say a lot more.

Sub-Theme C: Becoming God-like, following His image and likeness

Mr. Brown explained that he believes that his wife is the instrument that God gave him in order for him to be more like God's image and likeness. He believed in the need to be more God-like at all times and in all aspects of His life:

I'm a child of God, and I'm here for a specific purpose to try to identify that. So, and I really worked from that perspective. I almost want to say that everything in my life, but there's a few things I didn't get yet, and I wasn't mature enough yet or that I had to learn. Especially centered around my wife isn't out to get me, my wife is the mechanism and the person God put in my life to become more God-like and more like Jesus.

Research Question 3 Themes Compiled

RQ3. What specific Christian processes emerge with uniquely Christian themes and variables that contribute to the marital conflict and EFT reparative process?

Theme A: Valuing God's words and teachings

The third major theme of the study, shared by four of the couples, was the experience of the need to value God's words and teachings to fix the marital conflict. Two specific processes were shared, by using people or individuals; and by consuming the content of the Bible.

Sub-Theme A1: Using people or individuals

Mr. Smith stated that the theme of being willing to receive the words of God through other individuals was experienced. The participant believed that God sent their counselor to be an instrument in helping them realize the value of marriage as well as the true meaning of loving unconditionally. Mr. Smith believed in the need to embody the Word of God:

Also, just the value of great Godly counsel and that God can use people that way. I think seeing how valuable a good marriage is with us and a good relationship and a healthy dialogue and being able to tap into that. We've wanted to try and help [counselor] any way we can financially or even just showing up to be volunteers because we believe that it's one of the main ways that Christians can love on non-believers, which is having a good marriage. If we're not doing an intensive every year or every couple years, where you're really just fine-tuning it and checking in on it, that's definitely something we believe. I feel like God really showed us that his truth does really go to the core, which is in a relationship you can go back on his truths, which are everything from forgiving someone and really letting it go and loving someone unconditionally. Whether it's her mom, even if she's struggling to see something and I need to be patient, or I'm being a jerk and she's really trying to understand.

Sub-Theme A2: Consuming the content of the Bible

Mr. Brown personally found that their individual and marriage growth could be attributed to their openness to incorporating the other Christian processes mainly by learning about the content of the Bible on a daily basis. The participant shared that he and his partner learn the Bible through the Scripture itself, music, and even videos.

I think for us I think it's just a personal growth thing that is really meaningful to continue to align. And, obviously, we don't consider counseling as the only source of growth, we consider faith and Bible as other sources of growth in the process. But it's probably one of the pivotal pieces of growth and marital alignment.

So you need to consume the Bible, you need to consume the content and what really helped me through the process is that we prioritized faith and God and our marriage as the subject matter to consume. So whether its Bible studies or whether its YouTube videos or pastoral guide videos, whatever it is, we consumed a ton of content in order to really understand this and what is the Biblical way of looking at God and what lies in marriage and all of these things. I guess the safe haven experience, or the [counselor] experience was foundational to that, but it's not the only thing. So what we've dug deep into upscaling ourselves and understanding more and seeing principles in terms of how we do marriage. The love came from really digging into spending time with the Word of God, and listening to people who have explored those subject matters. So for me it changed a ton because we actually got into it more than what we did in the past and that helped us with the church for sure. We really got to know God's heart because we spent time there.

Mrs. Jones expressed that another way of consuming the content of the Bible is by learning again through the Scripture itself, reading, and listening accordingly. In addition, prayer was also another method:

One of the lessons I felt God was bringing me through was that you can't be on your own, that you need to reach out to others. During the difficult times, I reached out to other people to pray for me, to speak words of faith of what God was saying or encouragement. Just to have that connection with others. You can learn some through books and you can learn, listening to inspirational things or just reading, but it's the connection with other people. God was just showing me in a strong way that I needed strong connections with other people maybe in a deeper way than I had before.

Mr. Williams also believed in the need to take the time and put the words of God into one's heart and apply them in daily actions as well as relationships with others. He stated his trust in the counselor and the approach to counseling came from where she stood in her relationship with God:

The fact that [counselor] is a Christian, the fact that she took the time to read Scripture and God's heart into the model was therapy plus life and character infused into it with a lot of the characteristics of God. The grace, the caring, the gentleness, the kindness and all that. I'd give [counselor] a ton of credit as a saving part of our marriage or at least the civility part of our marriage.

Theme B: Communicating with God through reflections and worship

The only minor theme that emerged from the third research question was the process of communicating with God through reflections and worship. The theme occurred only once. Mr. Johnson emphasized how his counselor taught him how to reflect effectively. He then found the importance of being reflective and listening to God's words for Him:

Yes, [counselor] taught me reflection for listening purposes. And when I was out for the intensive, she was out and after the first day she'd go and find a different place and listened to what God was saying to me, and I write about it. And I've been doing that. I've been keeping journals, and it takes some of the strangest things and teaches me something about Him, something mundane and I can see it properly. And He taught me something about Himself. That's what really interests me.

Mrs. Johnson said:

I think it is safer to me to feel that [Mr. Johnson] is listening to God. We would be holy and all love, and all truth, and all on the right way, it's the right path. And [Mr. Johnson] following his heart and it's safe, and then I feel safe, because what comes towards me is love, fullness and "weness", and all of that. So I think for me to know that he is listening to worship music and praying and in tears sometimes, there's just only safety in that visual. So I think it means I trust him and that things can change. You know, because when a marriage is as long as we are, you start to believe things won't change. We'll never be better, but a lot of hope.