

Marital satisfaction : a qualitative psychological analysis

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Boston College

The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

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MARITAL SATISFACTION:
A QUALITATIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

a dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the phenomenology of marriage as experienced by couples who professed to enjoy a successful marriage. A qualitative approach was chosen to elucidate the multifaceted levels of experience in the marital relationship. In-depth interviews were conducted with twelve middle class, Caucasian couples from an urban area on the East Coast. Subjects were chosen from volunteers who had been married for at least twenty years and whose youngest child was out of high school. The interview covered the development of the couples' relationships from the initial attraction through the child-rearing years, and into the current post-child-rearing stage. Expectations, roles, and problem-solving were examined. Socioeconomic factors, religion, family, ethnicity, and finances were discussed as they related to the marriage. The influence of participants' parents' marriages was explored. The data collected were analyzed for salient themes, categories and critical issues in marital satisfaction. Twelve major themes emerged from the data. Of the twelve, four were salient: expectations of marriage, similarity of values, mutuality, and selective understanding. The strategy of selective understanding proved to be the core category, the one which related to the majority of other categories. These findings are useful for clinical and preventive applications, for their contribution to theories of marital satisfaction, and for guiding future research.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Marital satisfaction is a subject of interest to researchers, theorists, clinicians, and the general public. The family is seen as the basic unit of society, and the marital relationship is considered the key to the quality of family life (Nichols, 1978). Divorce rates are increasing and numerous trends are influencing marriage in America (Bjorksten & Stewart, 1984). In addition, as they age, men and women change in their behavior and outlook in ways which have a number of implications for marriage (Zube, 1982). Many studies have been conducted to explore specific areas of marital satisfaction in a quantitative manner. What is missing from this body of literature is a comprehensive look at marriages termed successful by the couples in them. The phenomenology of successful marriage can be elucidated by taking on the burden of carrying out "value-laden research" (Lewis & Spanier, 1979, p. 271). The qualitative method of Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss (1987) is an appropriate and effective way in which to bridge this gap between studies based on limited facets or idealized notions of marriage (Lewis & Spanier, 1979), and the reality experienced by couples who profess to have negotiated a satisfying relationship over time.

Some of the trends influencing marriage in this country are articulated by Bjorksten and Stewart (1984). Marriage has come to be seen as a source of personal fulfillment rather than an institution for procreation. The role of

women in society has changed as have patterns of sexuality. Marital role expectations are changing and the manner in which the roles are determined is through negotiation by each couple rather than being determined by tradition. The increasing numbers of women in the work force, of divorces, and the increasing complexities of the demands of multiple roles all combine to affect marriage. One important ramification of these trends for research is that they challenge the validity of attempting to study a representative sample and highlight the need for the careful examination of particular subgroups (Bjorksten and Stewart, 1984).

One such subgroup is middle-aged and older couples. Zube (1982) discussed changes in the outlook and behavior of this population as they relate to changes in the marital relationship in later years. She stated "there is some evidence that changing pathways of men and women lead in opposite directions" (p.147). Men tend to seek an increase in personal fulfillment, in family focus and in the need for affiliation. Concomitantly they experience a decrease in focus on achievement and power. Women, on the other hand, become more assertive and more interested in achievements outside of the home. They are likely to experience an increase in stress from this outward focus, especially if there is little support for them in these efforts.

In spite of these gender differences in personality development in later life, couples have been shown to derive satisfaction from their relationship in several similar ways. A sense of companionship, love, and of openness in communication were reported to be the most satisfying factors. An increase in sharing, in equality, and in activities done as a couple were related to happiness in both marriage and life in general (Zube, 1982). Zube (1982)

suggests that the later years of marriage should be studied from the "longer perspective" (p. 154) of changes which began in the middle years. Lewis and Spanier (1979), however, illustrated that the premarital influences on marriage which begin in each individual's family of origin cannot be overlooked.

Statement of the Problem

This study investigated the phenomenology of marriage as experienced by a specific subgroup of middle-aged and older couples who professed to enjoy a successful marriage. A qualitative approach was chosen in an effort to elucidate the multifaceted levels of experience in the marital relationship in a comprehensive manner which was lacking in the existing literature. In-depth, structured interviews were conducted with twelve couples who had been married for at least twenty years and whose youngest child was out of high school. The interview covered the development of the couples' relationships from the initial attraction through the child-rearing years and into the current post-child-rearing stage. Expectations, roles, and problem-solving were examined. Socio-economic factors, religion, family, ethnicity, and finances were discussed as they related to the marriage. The influence of participants' parents' marriages was explored. The purpose of the study was to discover the portrait of successful marriage as it emerged from the data. No definition of "successful" was imposed by the researcher. Instead, the method gave each individual the opportunity to express his or her own views in a comprehensive manner. Therefore, self-report was the method of choice. The data collected were analyzed for salient themes, categories, and

critical issues in marital satisfaction.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

The major strengths of this study derive from the qualitative method which was also the source of some of its limitations. The in-depth interview with subjects about the many facets of their marital relationship and influences on it provided the researcher with a wealth of information which could not be assessed by means of a questionnaire, inventory, or other formal assessment tool. This approach opens the door to the collection of data in areas which are ignored by a structured instrument. The grounded theory method allowed for concepts to emerge from the data. This approach was preferable for this type of phenomenological research as it minimized the limitations imposed by operational definitions and preconceived hypotheses. The qualitative method best meets the goals of developing an understanding of complex phenomena from the point of view of the subjects (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). These data provide an invaluable adjunct to efforts such as those by Lewis and Spanier (1979) who attempted to understand the quality and stability of marriages based on the quantitative and conceptual literature.

The weaknesses inherent in the method are both mechanical and conceptual. Collecting the data through in-depth interviews is time-consuming. In addition, it is difficult to standardize the data collection procedure for two reasons: 1) each interviewer has his or her own particular style as does each subject (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982); 2) by definition the method is one which evolves, with initial interviews informing and guiding subsequent data collection. This evolution affords a comprehensive quality

to the analysis but makes it difficult to prescribe an exact step-by-step procedure for future studies to replicate. Although Strauss (1987) states that it is not necessary to transcribe every interview, this researcher found that it was indispensable in order to respect the doubling back process of coding which afforded the results their conceptual density (Strauss,1987).

The use of self-report has been criticized from the point of view of validity. Orden and Bradburn (1968) suggested several ways to compensate, including obtaining independent ratings from husband and wife, from friends or from independent judges. In this study, subjects were interviewed separately and were often referred by friends as an example of a successful marriage. Further, subjects became a part of the study only through consent of both partners. Thus, they were in agreement that their marriage was successful.

The results of this study are not generalizable in the traditional sense of the word. The sample is a fairly homogeneous one comprised of white, middle to upper middle class professionals. The findings are useful to the clinician, however, through the process of "logical generalization" (Barlow, Hayes, & Nelson, 1984). That is, clients may be compared to this particular sample to determine the utility of these findings to individual cases. Future studies of both similar and different subgroups can be compared to this one to examine whether the theory grounded in this particular set of data will emerge from other data sets. It may prove to be necessary to build several theories of successful marriage depending on race, ethnicity, or social class.

Significance of the Study

This qualitative study was designed to elucidate the meaning of marital satisfaction. Its broad focus generated a thorough picture of how certain couples achieved success in negotiating a long-term, satisfying relationship. The findings will enhance the development of a theory of marital satisfaction and will be important for preventive and clinical use. The results are useful for counseling couples premaritally and at different stages of marriage.

The implications for counseling are relevant to both theory and practice. In highlighting the need for research which focuses on the healthy aspects of family functioning, Wilcoxon (1985) noted practical and philosophical concerns. Knowledge of healthy family systems is important for assessment and intervention, as well as for the assumptions a counselor brings to the counseling relationship. Wilcoxon (1985) emphasized the tendency of mental health professionals to overpathologize their clients. A shift in focus towards models of wellness would benefit both clients and counselors. By increasing their awareness of the changing spectrum of what is a "normal" relationship, therapists will be better equipped to educate and help couples negotiate the different stages of their marriages (Bjorksten & Stewart, 1984).

Markman (1981) stressed the need for preventive measures. He evaluated couples' communication patterns before marriage and at both two and five years later. He found that unrewarding patterns of communication which existed premaritally predicted distress on both follow-up investigations. Markman (1981) suggested that early interventions could be designed to improve communication. Improving communication skills in

the beginning of marriage might lessen the incidence of the stability of dissatisfaction found over time in the unrewarding patterns detected premaritally. Sager's (1976) concept of marriage contracts included both a need for premarital intervention and Noller's (1984) notion of nonverbal communication. Sager's (1976) term "contract" refers to the expectations, both explicit and implicit, that each individual brings to the marriage. One of the goals of intervention mentioned by Sager (1976) is to bring these expectations into a conscious, spoken realm. The present study contributes to the clarification of individuals' expectations of marriage.

Hare-Mustin (1981) noted the developmental focus of family therapy as useful for both the preventive and the wellness purposes. By focusing on the stages which can be expected in normal family life development, counselors can target their interventions to avert crises which may arise at certain transition points. Exploring the three phases of marriage, the current study elucidates the developmental process of the marital relationship. The shift of the study is away from content and towards process. The same shift occurs in interventions in communication: what is important is not so much what is said, but how it is said, that is, the process of communication (Noller, 1984). While supporting the strength of the relationship of communication to marital satisfaction, Haynes, Chavez, and Samuel (1984) cautioned that their findings also confirmed the contribution of other factors to marital adjustment. The process orientation of the qualitative method focuses not only on the process of communication but also on the process of negotiating meaning in the marital dyad.

As noted in the limitations section, the results of this study are

restricted in their generalizability due to the small, nonrepresentative sample. However, the use of "logical generalization" as suggested by Barlow, Hayes & Nelson (1984) will allow clinicians to compare their clients to the participants in this study in order to assess the utility of these findings for particular couples. A model of healthy marital functioning will provide practitioners with a base on which to build preventive and corrective interventions. Clients can be compared to the present sample in terms of demographics to determine if the issues important to the sample would be relevant to the clients. The richness of description provided by the qualitative method will facilitate comparisons in such areas as family of origin, expectations, gender typology, communication and problem-solving skills.

The significance of the study is enhanced by the fact that Mackey and O'Brien (Boston College) are presently supervising other studies using the same interview schedule and method of analysis. Future studies of samples from different socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic groups will serve as a basis for comparison of these results and further define their generalizability. Thus, the current study contributes to a larger research project which is already under way.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Marital satisfaction has been the subject of investigation for many decades as studies have explored the relationship of a broad variety of variables to marital satisfaction. Finances, stepfamilies, career, attitudes, intelligence, self disclosure, emotional expression, sexuality, personality, and power are some of the variables which have been investigated (Gottman, 1982; Hicks & Platt, 1970; Lewis & Spanier, 1979). One element common to all of these variables is communication. Several authors have specifically stressed the importance of the relationship of communication to marital adjustment (Haynes, et al., 1984; Markman, 1981; Noller, 1984; Yahraes, 1980; Yelsma, 1984). Peterson (1968) reported that effective communication was related to good problem-solving skills in many of the above mentioned variables: finances, career, and sexuality. More recently, studies have added the focus of gender differences in communication as they relate to marital satisfaction (Barnes & Buss, 1985; Chelune, Rosenfeld, & Waring, 1985; Henley, 1973).

This review discusses the research findings on marital satisfaction, communication, and gender differences and their interaction. Theoretical foundations were included when they have been articulated in the research. Methodological problems are explored. In particular, the problem of definition is inherent in all three of the areas considered: marital satisfaction, communication, and gender differences.

Marital Satisfaction

A number of methodological problems present themselves given the elusive character of marital satisfaction, the controversial nature of gender differences, and the complexity of the concept of communication. In the literature on marital satisfaction, many authors cited the lack of a theoretical framework, of consistent measurement tools and of representative samples (Barry, 1970; Hicks & Platt, 1970; Kelley & Conley, 1987). In terms of the most pervasive problem, that of assessing the successful marriage, Barry (1970) highlighted the difficulties in using stability or measures of happiness such as absence of counseling and self-report as indicators of satisfaction. Hicks and Platt's (1970), Swensen's (in Moore, 1980), and Kelley and Conley's (1987) findings of a category of subjects whose marriages were long in duration but low in satisfaction attest to the problem of using longevity as a criterion for satisfaction. Barry (1970) indicated that self-reports of marital satisfaction may be subject to a halo effect of satisfaction in a job, with self, or other factors external to the marital relationship.

Hicks and Platt (1970) stated that in the sixties society's norms for evaluating marriages were happiness and stability. As mentioned above, longevity of the marriage does not necessarily demonstrate satisfaction. In terms of research, stability is easy to measure. Agreement on the operational definition of happiness, on the other hand, is as elusive in the nineties as it was in the sixties. Some researchers suggest that the term marital happiness should be dropped entirely for research purposes (Hicks & Platt, 1970; Yelsma, 1984).

Several authors indicated that marital satisfaction has different meanings for husbands and wives (Bernard, 1972; Cunningham, Braiker, & Kelley, 1982; Wills, Weiss & Patterson, 1974). Wills et al. (1974), asked individuals to observe instrumental and affectional behaviors of their spouses for two weeks and to rate their interactions in terms of pleasantness. The sample was comprised of seven couples whose average age was thirty-three years, who had been married for an average of 8.4 years, and who had an average of 1.3 children. No socioeconomic information was given for the sample. The researchers examined the correlation of instrumental (necessary for day to day living) and affectional (serving to maintain the relationship) behaviors to ratings of pleasurable interactions. Their findings suggest that satisfaction is increased by behaviors which do not fit societal expectations in terms of sex role. In other words, if husbands are more affectional, and wives are more instrumental than would be expected, then they both expressed greater satisfaction with their marriages (Wills et al., 1974). Gove and Zeiss (1987) reported that for men, the simple fact of being married was related more strongly than for women to overall happiness. On the other hand, the quality of the marital relationship was more important for women than for men. More specifically, how close a woman felt to her spouse was a strong predictor for overall happiness.

After a comprehensive review of the literature on marital satisfaction from the nineteen-sixties, Lewis and Spanier (1979) attempted to build a theory of marital stability based on the quality of the relationship. They reviewed "virtually all of the empirical and conceptual propositions of social scientists who have attempted to investigate the quality and stability of

marriage" (p. 268). They maintained that the quality of the relationship is the key determinant of stability. Contrary to the suggestion that the term marital happiness be dropped from research (Hicks & Platts, 1970; Yelsma, 1984), Lewis and Spanier (1979) insisted that as the single most important determinant of stability, marital quality must be studied in order to be better understood. Lewis and Spanier (1979) viewed quality as mediated by a number of "threshold variables" (p. 269). The most significant variables they reported were:

1. marital expectations;
2. commitment to the marriage and its associated obligations;
3. tolerance for conflict and disharmony;
4. religious doctrine and commitment;
5. external pressures and amenability to social stigma;
6. divorce law and availability of legal aid;
7. real and perceived alternatives (Lewis & Spanier, 1979, p. 273).

In their review of several hundred studies in the sixties, Lewis and Spanier (1979) emphasized the fact that marriage is a process which begins before any union takes place and continues to evolve throughout the life of the couple. For this reason they highlighted the importance of including premarital factors in the study of marital satisfaction. These premarital factors included similarity of social, economic, educational and religious background, parental role models for and approval of the marriage, and personal resources such as physical and emotional health. Socioeconomic factors related to the marriage itself were a second major category of influences. These factors included occupational status and stability, the wife's

employment, household composition, and community involvement. Finally, the authors indicated a number of interpersonal factors which were important to the relationship which included positive regard, emotional gratification, and effective communication.

Communication

The relationship of communication to marital adjustment has been considered by a large number of authors (Haynes, Chavez & Samuel, 1984; Markman, 1981; Noller, 1984; Peterson, 1968; Yahraes, 1980; Yelsma, 1984). Peterson (in Noller, 1984) found that couples with effective communication skills had fewer problems in such areas as "time spent together, conflict of religious views, family responsibilities, lack of closeness, sex relations, criticism, differences in expectations, and planning and decision-making" (Noller, 1984, p. 25). In addition, he found that these couples solved problems better in the areas of use of leisure time, tension, low morale, sexual relations, and criticism.

In their review of the literature from the sixties, Hicks and Platt (1970) found what they termed a companionship marriage (as opposed to an institutional one), with an emphasis on the relationship rather than on situations. In these satisfactory marriages communication was open, effective and rewarding. Birchler (in Yahraes, 1980) studied a sample of twenty-four couples, half of whom defined themselves as happily married, the other half as unhappily married. Researchers observed the couples engaging in free conversation and in conflict resolution. The couples also recorded behaviors at home. Happily married couples engaged in more positive behaviors

during conflict resolution and reported more pleasing behaviors, more recreational activities engaged in together and more sexual activity than unhappily married couples. Unhappy couples reported four times as many problem areas as happy couples. Problem solving, and the clear expression of emotions were reported as difficulties for unhappy couples.

In her review, Noller (1984) cited numerous studies which attest to the importance of communication to marital satisfaction. The quality of communication was considered in terms of the amount, the kinds of communication, accuracy, effectiveness, and the individual's awareness of these elements. In addition, Noller (1984) stressed the impossibility of not communicating and the essential role of nonverbal components in all communication.

As the amount of communication decreased, marital satisfaction decreased. This further reduced communication, setting up a cyclical pattern of deterioration in the relationship. Avoidance of conflict may contribute to this cycle for some people. On the other hand, Noller (1984) indicated that for others avoiding conflict may be a functional way to cope. Generally, however, wives who expressed low satisfaction with their marriages stated that what they wanted from their husbands was an increase in the amount of attention and communication. They also wished their husbands would express their emotions more clearly. The kinds of communication behaviors seen to affect marital satisfaction were self-disclosure, sensitivity, listening and responding, confirmation, expressing respect and esteem (Noller, 1984). Communication accuracy was seen by Noller (1984) to be the most essential element related to marital satisfaction. She found many gender differences

and different ways that these related to marital adjustment. She highlighted the importance of the relationship of nonverbal communication to accuracy, the complexity of levels of communication and the importance of checking out the effects of communications (completing communication cycles). The gender differences found by Noller (1984) contradicted the report of no sex differences by White, Speisman, Jackson, Bartis, & Costos (1986) reviewed below. In short, Noller (1984) found that husbands' communication accuracy, in both sending and receiving messages, was crucial in distinguishing high satisfaction from low satisfaction couples. For wives, the distinguishing features of high satisfaction marriages were the wives' awareness of their own receiving accuracy and their ability to predict the likelihood of being understood by their spouses.

With respect to the task of defining communication, Henley (1973) has emphasized the artificiality of trying to divide communication into different components for the purpose of study. She reminds us that communication takes place on many levels simultaneously. Nevertheless, many authors have attempted to define communication in terms of its different components. Swensen (in C.D. Moore, 1980) viewed communication simply as the expression of affection, leaving out the role of thoughts about this expression. Other researchers emphasized the importance of perceptions and intentions in spousal communication (Gaelick, Bodenhausen, & Wyer, 1985). White et al. (1986) conceived of communication as distinct from the expression of affection. Still others stressed the need for self-awareness, awareness of one's own communication skills, and for commitment to

growth as essential to effective communication and marital satisfaction (Gottman, 1979; Mace & Mace, 1981; Noller, 1984).

Haynes, Chavez, and Samuel (1984) offered a broad definition of communication in marriage to include verbal and nonverbal behaviors, "satisfaction with marital communication, and perceptions of spouse's communication behaviors" (p. 316). In another variation on the theme of communication in marital relationships, Barnes, Schumm, Jurich, and Bollman (1984) suggested that the key variable is not communication but rather that it is the expression of positive regard which determines satisfaction. Spanier and Fleer (1980) took both communication and positive regard into account as these related to the direct satisfaction couples obtain from each other.

Perhaps the broadest conceptualization was proposed by Rubin (1983). She viewed marital communication as intimacy, "a reciprocal expression of feeling and thought, not out of fear or dependent need, but out of a wish to know another's inner life and to be able to share one's own" (p. 90). Rubin (1983) distinguished communication from nurturing which she saw as taking care of another, a tactic which may be used at times to defend against intimacy.

These different perspectives on the concept of communication have influenced the focus of studies of marital interaction. Some authors concentrated on the role of self-disclosure in intimate relationships (Chelune, et al. 1985; Chelune, Sultan, Vosk, Ogden, & Waring, 1984; Rosenfeld & Welsh, 1985). In general, these studies investigated the equity and clarity of self-disclosure as related to marital satisfaction. Others believed that the best

way to study couple communication is in terms of conflict resolution (Birchler, (in Yahraes, 1980); Billings, 1979; Gottman, 1982). Mace and Mace (1981), for example, believe that today's marriages are conflict avoidant and therefore shallow. They cited the need for the creative use of conflict as a solution to this problem. With regard to gender and conflict management, Yelsma and Brown (1985) suggested that sex-role identity is more predictive of differences than is biological sex.

White et al. (1986), in their study of thirty-one young married, middle class couples, reported no gender differences in communication skills of husbands and wives. This result was contrary to the findings of Noller (1984). Noller's basic premise was that nonverbal communication is an integral part of communication. Although White et al. (1986) did take into account cognitions and affect associated with verbal interactions, they made no mention of the nonverbal components of couple communication. Could it be that White et al. (1986) failed to give sufficient weight to the nonverbal components of their subjects' communication? While distinguishing between communication and other intimacy variables, White et al. (1986) suggested that a global notion of intimacy is supported by their results to include "such potentially diverse dimensions as sexuality, communication, and concern" (p. 158). They found that husbands' intimacy maturity was the most significant correlate of marital adjustment.

The White et al. (1986) study reviewed above is important because it represents an effort to avoid many of the methodological shortcomings noted in the literature. The theoretical foundation was clearly spelled out as developmental. The authors discussed Orlofsky's adaptation of Erikson's

stages to the development of intimacy in which the highest stage is that of individuation-connection. Thus, they provided definitions of terms both at the outset of and throughout the research project. In response to the problem of the lack of reliable measurement tools, White et al. (1986) employed multiple measures, a strategy suggested by many authors reviewed above. They used the Bem Sex Role Inventory, Spanier's Dyadic Adjustment Scales, their own intimacy scales, as well as personal interviews. In addition, they modified the terms of Bem's Sex Role Inventory to score it for an orientation towards agency or communion, as opposed to using the masculinity-femininity dichotomy. Spanier's Dyadic Adjustment Scales have been shown to take both quality and stability into account, thereby avoiding the confusion of longevity of marriage with marital satisfaction (Spanier, 1976).

Gender Differences

In addition to the problems in research in the area of gender differences related to sex-role identity versus biological sex (Yelsma & Brown, 1985), and the definition of communication (Henley, 1973; White et al., 1986), are those noted by Block (1984). She stated that most studies of gender differences compare means of males to those of females. These measures provide little information regarding within group differences and ignore the overlapping of scores. Miller and Mothner (1984) questioned the validity of current definitions of "self" for both males and females. New information about the differences between and within the sexes will contribute to a new definition of gender for both women and men (Miller & Mothner, 1984).

In his review of research on marriage and conflict theory, Barry (1970) viewed conflict as inherent in the marital relationship due to the different belief systems of males and females. No explanation or basis was offered for this assumption. Women were said to have more trouble adjusting to married life than men because they "are more dependent and anxious, less confident, less self-sufficient, and less self-accepting, more aware of personal problems" than men (pp. 49-50). According to Barry (1970), before becoming a mother, the wife's "fulfillment as a woman still lies ahead" (p.50). Towards the end of the same decade in which Barry wrote, other perspectives were proposed regarding gender differences.

Certain authors based their writings on marital satisfaction and gender on developmental theories (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Swensen, (in C.D. Moore, 1980); Nadelson, Polonsky, & Mathews, 1984). They suggested that relationships should progress toward "a maturity of interdependence" (Gilligan, 1982, p.155). Chodorow (1978), Rubin (1983), and Gilligan (1982) explained gender differences in terms of object relations and Nichols (1978) highlighted the need for understanding the marital relationship from the object relations perspective. In object relations theory, the psychoanalytic concept of drives is combined with the role of social relations in the individual's psychological growth and personality formation (Chodorow, 1978). According to this theory, males must reject their earliest love object, the mother, in the process of acquiring their own identity. They must repress their feelings of and need for attachment by developing defenses against the expression of emotions (Chodorow, 1978). Rubin (1983) contended that men do not withhold their emotions, but that they are unaware of their feelings.

According to Rubin (1983), men find the connection between words and feelings threatening since their earliest task was that of separation. This theory coincides with Miller and Mothner's (1984) notion that the earliest self for both sexes is emotional and interacting but that boys are taught to turn off that self. Miller and Mothner's (1984) view is that this cutoff is to the detriment of both individual males and society in general. If Gilligan (1982) is correct in her belief that males become more self-disclosing, and Chodorow (1978) in hers that women are more relationship oriented, then, long-lasting relationships should show increasing satisfaction over time.

For females, the rejection of the primary love object is not necessary, hence they retain a sense of self as connected to another (Chodorow, 1978). Moffitt, Spence and Goldney (1986) reported empirical support for the association of women's mental health to relationship factors in their study of thirty-three married couples in Australia. Their sample was randomly drawn from the electoral rolls and represented a diverse socioeconomic group, married from two to forty-six years. Couples completed four questionnaires related to psychological and marital adjustment, marital communication, the need for affiliation, and sensitivity to rejection. Moffitt et al. (1986) found that wives, but not husbands, had a higher need for affiliation and an increased sensitivity to rejection. The problem for women then is that of maintaining a sense of separation in a relationship while for males it is that of maintaining a sense of unity. This sets up what Rubin (1983) has called the "approach-avoidance dance" (p. 65) of men, women, and intimacy. For the present study, the question is, how do some couples manage to achieve an approach-approach dance. If certain couples are found to come into relationships

without the characteristic male-female fears of attachment and separation, respectively, what makes these individuals different? A look at family of origin experiences may begin to answer this question in terms of object relations.

Block (1984), pointing to the differences in socialization practices for boys and girls, noted the resultant sex differences in communication patterns. Males have been found to interrupt and to change the topic more frequently, while females ask more open-ended questions and are more self-disclosing.

Barnes and Buss (1985) explored gender differences in interpersonal behavior. They observed and gathered self report of 800 behaviors in 93 married couples in the Boston area for three months. Subjects were evaluated for gender typology using the California Psychological Inventory Femininity scale, and the Extended Personality Attributes Questionnaire. Barnes and Buss (1985) found three sets of behaviors in which females' performance was greater than males: "Coercive-Manipulative, Communal, and Flashy Attire" (p. 659). Males outperformed females only in initiative behaviors. These results support the existence of sex differences. At the same time, Barnes & Buss (1985) emphasized the need for multiple measures of communication in studying couple interaction.

While the majority of studies have found sex differences in communication, White et al. (1986) and Yelsma (1984) reported no sex differences in the effectiveness of couples' communication. White et al. (1986) did, however, find gender differences on the communion scale derived from Bem Sex Role Inventory. While husbands' degree of communion had a slight positive relation to some dimensions of their wives' intimacy

maturity, the reverse was not true. In fact, the higher the wives' degree of communion, the lower the husbands' degree of intimacy maturity on all scales. The question raised here is, can some wives be too "other-oriented", another way of saying communal? Once again, Henley's (1973) warning of the artificiality of dividing communication into too many pieces comes to mind. Can "communion" really be considered separately from communication when we define the latter as intimacy?

As Nichols (1978) stated, the marital relationship is the key to healthy family functioning. The comprehensive methodology of the White et al. (1986) study tapped many of the areas Lewis, Beavers, Gossett, and Phillips (1976) (in Wilcoxon, 1985) found as indicators of healthy family functioning. Lewis et al. (1976) used twelve expert raters to evaluate seven years of videotaped observations of family interaction. Healthy families were characterized in the following ways: by warm, trusting attitudes, open and honest communication, a tendency to use negotiation in problem-solving rather than power, a high degree of individual initiative and responsibility-taking, a definite but flexible family structure, "emotional maturity and autonomy," shared "perceptions of reality", encouragement of expression of affect, and "other signs of well-being such as spontaneity, humor, and recognition of other members' talents" (Wilcoxon, 1985, p. 497). Steil and Turetsky (1987) found that marital satisfaction was related to women's psychological well-being. Baruch and Barnett (1987) noted that the quality of a woman's role as both wife and worker corresponded closely to her well-being.

Summary

The literature on marital satisfaction, communication, gender differences and their interactions is complex. Communication has been seen to be a key element in the majority of areas of couple interaction. Gender differences were seen to exist in terms of expectations and experiences of marital satisfaction. Developmental theory suggests that marital relationships should evolve over time as the individuals develop. However, many methodological problems have been cited throughout the literature. Problems of theory, definition, measurement, and sampling prevail. The importance of pursuing this research, however, is underscored by the need for a theoretical framework, for a shift in focus towards healthy functioning, and by the potential applications of the findings to preventive and therapeutic interventions. The qualitative approach responds to the need to generate a comprehensive theory based on the actual experience of couples in a relationship.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

Choice of the Qualitative Research Method

Studies cited in the review of the literature highlighted the problems inherent in quantifying marital relationships. Many authors have explained the value of the phenomenological approach for studying the complexities of social phenomena (Giorgi, 1970; Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Strauss, 1987). The phenomenological approach focuses on the subjective nature of reality with particular attention to the unique way in which individuals experience life. The qualitative approach responds to the problem of defining marital satisfaction by allowing for individual expression of the meaning of marital satisfaction. "'Meaning' is of essential concern to the qualitative approach. Researchers who use this approach are interested in the ways different people make sense out of their lives" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 29). In addition, it obviates the need to decide on one particular variable as the key to success while allowing for the expression of all possible elements by the couples in the study.

The qualitative method captures the experience as a whole, in detailed description (Giorgi, 1985; Kvale, 1983). In the interest of building theory from research, Glaser & Strauss (1967) describe the process of developing "grounded theory." Collecting as complete a description as possible, analyzing it for salient themes and issues, and gathering input from the subjects on these analyses provided a rich base on which to "ground" theory. The qualitative focus on process rather than on outcome enabled the researcher to look at

such questions as how people negotiate meaning, what the natural history of the marriage is, and how expectations are translated into activities and interactions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). By definition, the qualitative method is one which evolves as the study proceeds, is flexible and open to input from subjects, and is guided by concepts which emerge from the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). This process of discovery distinguishes the grounded theory method from both purely descriptive studies and from those which set out to verify existing theories (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

Statement of Subjectivity

The subjectivity of the investigator is not to be underestimated (Kvale, 1983; Wertz, 1983). On the contrary, while striving to be objective, the researcher maintained a constant awareness of the personal interaction of the interview and of her own reactions. She brought to the research situation a combination of personal and professional experiences which influenced the process (Strauss, 1987). These influences were noted in writing memos and incorporated into the analysis of the data. A brief statement of subjectivity will serve to highlight the hunches I brought to the project.

The choice of the research topic is a very personal one. As a child, I watched a marriage based on commitment and love grow cold and distant. I began "studying" the contributors to marital dynamics in my early teens and was determined to learn from my parents' difficulties. When, in my early twenties, I met the man I would marry, it was a whirlwind romance. After three weeks we knew we would get married. I spoke to him of my perceptions that communication was a key element to a good marriage and

that a relationship needed to be nurtured. I also said that, although I was committed to the marriage for life, I would not stay in it if it did not work. He shared similar values. While we had never heard of a marriage contract (Sager, 1976), ours had been made explicit. We were married six months after we met and have been happily married for twenty years. We have two children who are now adolescents. I started the research project with the belief expressed by many of subjects - that marriage can be satisfying and stimulating if people are willing to work at it. Over the years, I have come to believe that for two people to have met and married so quickly and still be happily married after twenty years, there must be a component of luck or chemistry which we may have known only at some intuitive level.

I was influenced by the importance of the role of communication found both in the literature and in my professional and personal experience. The literature and my experience also led me to expect that women would place more importance on this component than men and may have different definitions of effective communication. Other factors which I expected to figure prominently were commitment and flexibility. I anticipated that there would be different definitions of "success" for different couples, and that people would have learned substantially about marriages from having observed their own parents' marriage. Some of these expectations were borne out in the study; others were not. These will be discussed in the results section.

Design of the Study and Procedures

The Sample. The in-depth interviews used in this method dictated the use of a small, nonrepresentative sample (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Since the focus of this study was couples whose marriages were not at risk, the sample was drawn from the general population rather than a clinical one.

Participants were solicited from two local chapters of the Rotary Club. The researcher personally presented the study to the groups. This sampling method resulted in a fairly circumspect pattern of socioeconomic status, of white, middle and upper middle class business people. Couples who had been married for at least twenty years, whose last child was out of high school, and who considered their marriages successful were asked to participate in individual interviews with the investigator.

The twenty-four individuals in the sample are described in Tables 1 and 2. The following is a summary of the characteristics of the subjects. The couples had been married between 24 and 44 years, the average being 32.5 years of marriage. Females ranged in age from 47 to 62 years, the average age being 54; they had an average of 3.6 years of college education. Males were between the ages of 48-76, with an average of 58 years of age; they had an average of 4.4 years of college education. The range of income reported by the subjects was \$30-180 thousand, for an average of \$80 thousand. Seven couples were Protestant, three were Jewish, one was Catholic, and in one couple one spouse was Unitarian while the other reported no religious affiliation. All twelve couples were residing in the greater Boston area, but only eleven individuals were native to this part of the country. Five subjects grew up in the Midwest, two in Maine, two in Pennsylvania, and four in New York.

Table 1
Age, Years Married, Offspring & Income of Couples

	<u>COUPLE</u>	<u>AGE</u>	<u>YRS MARRIED</u>	<u># OF CHILDREN</u>	<u>JOINT INCOME</u>
1.	Frances Fred	62 76	44	1	\$30-40k
2.	Kate Kevin	51 53	28	2	\$90k
3.	Arlene Al	47 48	27	2	\$50k
4.	Gladys George	50 53	30	3	>\$100k
5.	Cathy Calvin	50 56	24	3	\$85k
6.	Barbara Bill	48 48	28	2	>\$100k
7.	Holly Howard	51 51	28	2	>\$100k
8.	Irene Ian	61 63	40	5	\$57k
9.	Evelyn Ed	50 53	27	2	\$65k
10.	Lilly Louis	59 64	37	3	\$180k
11.	Jill Jeff	59 64	37	3	\$80k
12.	Doreen Dave	62 68	40	5	\$30k
		X=56 Range = 47-76	X=32.5	X=2.7	X=\$80k Range=30k-180k Median=\$65k

^aPseudonyms assigned with matching first initials for each couple.

Table 2
Individual Educational Level (Educ), Religion, Geographic (Geog) & Ethnic Origin, & Occupation

<u>NAME</u>	<u>EDUC</u>	<u>RELIGION</u>	<u>GEOG/ETHNIC ORIGIN</u>	<u>OCCUPATION</u>
Frances	B.S.	Protestant	IL/Eng ^a	Librarian
Fred	B.S.+	Protestant	Boston/Eng, Scot	Manager, ret
Kate	M.A.	Protestant	FL/German	Teacher
Kevin	B.S.	Protestant	MS/Eng, Scot, Irish	Engineer
Arlene	Assoc. ^b	Protestant	ME/Scot, Eng, NatAmer ^c	Self-employed
Al	H.S.	Protestant	ME/Eng, Irish, Scot	Manager
Gladys	H.S.	Jewish	PA/Russian	Own business
George	MBA	Jewish	NY/Russian	Engineer
Cathy	B.S.	None	MA/Irish, French	Sales
Calvin	M.S.	Unit	MA/Swedish	Engineer
Barbara	B.A.	Protestant	OH/German	Insurance
Bill	B.A.	Protestant	OH/Scot, Irish	Insurance
Holly	B.A.	Jewish	MA/Russian	Manager
Howard	B.A.	Jewish	MA/Russian	Sales
Irene	Assoc.	Protestant	MA/Irish	Real Estate
Ian	B.A.+	Protestant	MA/Irish	Own business
Evelyn	B.A.	Protestant	MA/English	Self employed
Ed	H.S.+ 3	Protestant	MA/Dutch, Eng, Scot	Banker
Lilly	Assoc.	Catholic	NY/Eng, Scot	Own business
Louis	B.S.	Catholic	NY/Scot, FrCan ^d	Own business
Jill	B.S.	Jewish	MA/Russian	Nurse
Jeff	DMD	Jewish	MA/Russian	Dentist
Doreen	B.A.	Protestant	PA/Scot, English	Homemaker
Dave	M.S.	Protestant	KS/Irish, Czech	City Planner

^aEng = English

^bAssoc. = Associate's Degree

^cNatAmer = Native American

^dFrCan = French Canadian

Eighteen subjects were of Anglo-Saxon origins and six were of Russian descent. Couples had between one and five children, the average being 2.7. At the time of the interviews twenty-three subjects were employed in professional capacities. The one female subject who did not work for pay was a homemaker and leader in civic and church organizations.

The Interview. The interview format (Appendix A) was developed and pretested by Mackey and O'Brien (Boston College) prior to the collection of the data for the present study. The present researcher conducted additional pilot testing and refinement of the instrument. The major areas suggested by Lewis and Spanier (1979), premarital, socioeconomic, and interpersonal factors, were included. While the questions served as a guide for the interview, an open-ended style was maintained to allow for the greatest freedom of expression (Kvale, 1983). Time and patience were essential (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). The interviewer's clinical skills were useful for facilitating open responses and probing when necessary (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). All professional standards were respected in conducting the interview. Particular attention was paid to respecting the "culture" of the couple into which the researcher entered (Lofland & Lofland, 1984) and taking care not to probe into particularly sensitive areas (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). The interviews took place in the couples' homes with the exception of one which was conducted in the researcher's counseling office for reasons of convenience to the subject. The in-home interviews allowed for additional observations of the life style of these subjects. Couples were informed of the purpose of the study, given an overview of the interview and were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. Written permission for the

audiotaping of the interviews was obtained in advance (Appendix B). Demographics were obtained in writing from each subject. Each spouse was interviewed separately. The average length of interviews was two hours per person. The interviews were conducted over a period of three months. Follow up phone calls were placed to each subject a few days after the interview to gather any further thoughts about either their own experience or the interview. Suggestions from subjects were incorporated into subsequent interviews. A thank you note was sent to each couple. The interviews were taped and transcribed and the participants were sent a summary of the results.

The Interview Guide. The interview schedule was comprised of four major sections: I. The Relationship, II. Socio-economic Influences, III. Parents' Marriage, and IV. Participant's Views of the Marriage Over Time and Wrap-up. The first section included initial attraction, life circumstances at the time of the marriage, and family reactions to the spouse and to the decision to marry. Expectations about the roles participants thought they and their spouses would have were compared to those that actually evolved. Participants were asked to describe how they got along in terms of communication, sexuality, decision-making and problem-solving, and fairness. Each person was asked to evaluate his/her own and his/her spouse's understanding, sensitivity, respect and trust.

The socioeconomic factors considered in relation to the marriage were religion, the role of extended families, and cultural factors including ethnicity and race. Economics such as financial status of family of origin, similarities and differences between the couple, income, control of and priority given to finances were discussed. Finally, a broad question was asked to allow for the

expression of other values, beliefs, or moral standards which had been important to the couple.

The participants' parents' marriages were explored from many of the same perspectives as the couples' relationships. Subjects were asked to consider their parents' relationships in terms of roles, relatedness, problem-solving and fairness. In addition, subjects were asked what their families' attitudes toward divorce had been. They were encouraged to reflect upon what they had learned about marriage from their parents' relationship and how their own marriages were either similar to or different from their parents' marriages.

In the final section of the interview, subjects were asked to name the personal qualities of their spouse and the factors in the relationship which kept them together. They were asked whether they believed their relationship had changed over time in terms of roles, needs, expectations, and communication. Each person was asked what words best described what his/her spouse means to him/her now and in the past. An opportunity was given for subjects to add any other significant factors about the marriage, themselves or their spouses. The subjects were requested to evaluate the interview for its thoroughness and relevance.

Analysis of the Data. A professional typist was employed to transcribe the taped interviews and was informed of the parameters of confidentiality. Analysis of the data was conducted according to the qualitative method outlined by Strauss (1987). The principle operations of this method are coding, writing analytic memos, and integrating the findings. The transcripts were coded following Strauss's line-by-line scrutiny method, reading each

transcript and making notes of categories and themes as they emerged from the data. Coding was begun early and continued throughout the research project, constantly doubling back to earlier interviews as the list of categories grew (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987). This "constant comparative method" ensured a thorough analysis of each interview (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Strauss' (1987) coding paradigm was used to guide the process by focusing on conditions, interactions, strategies and tactics, and consequences. The purpose was to find concepts that fit the data by looking at recurring themes, salient issues, and the meaning couples make of their lives together (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). As categories emerged, additional coding was conducted, comparisons were made between categories, and eventually, the major themes emerged from the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Strauss, 1987). In addition, theoretical memos were written throughout the coding. These served to guide future coding, to bring into focus emerging categories and the relationships between them, and to integrate previous memos and codes. To enhance reliability, trained coders were consulted for comparison with the results of the principle investigator.

A list of categories was kept and expanded as new categories emerged. A number was assigned to each category and subcategories were assigned letters, with parenthetical numbers under the subcategories where needed. Hence a reference to a subject's parents' marriage (category 26) as a negative role model (subcategory a) was noted as 26a in the margin of the transcript. On the list of categories the page number and initials of the subject were recorded under each category. Quotes and clarifications were also recorded on

the list of categories. This system of cross referencing facilitated the process of constant comparison.

The analysis resulted in thirty-five categories, with 184 subcategories. The categories were analyzed, synthesized, and integrated into meaningful themes. Thus, for example, information about the parents' marriages was included under the heading of expectations of marriage. If information was not relevant to the success of the marriage it was not maintained in the final list of categories. For example, the interview guide included asking subjects about their parents' reaction to their marriage. There was no salient theme which emerged from subjects' responses to this question. Therefore, it was dropped from the reported results. A master table of categories was compiled with participants' initials in the left margin. If a transcript included a category, a check was put next to the name of the subject. This master sheet facilitated the tabulating and summarizing of responses under the heading of the twelve major themes which are presented in the results section.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF KEY THEMES

Introduction

This chapter presents the key themes which emerged from in-depth interviews with twelve couples who professed to have successful marriages, who had been married for at least twenty years, and whose youngest children were out of high school. Analysis of the transcripts of these interviews was conducted according to the method outlined by Strauss (1987) in his book, Qualitative Analysis For Social Scientists. Coding is the essential procedure in this method. Strauss (1987) suggested a four-part coding paradigm to guide the researcher in analyzing and organizing data. The components of the coding paradigm are: conditions, interaction among the actors, strategies and tactics, and consequences. Initial open coding resulted in thirty-five categories with 184 subcategories. These categories were synthesized into twelve major themes. Three of the four elements of Strauss' (1987) coding paradigm were useful in organizing the twelve major themes which emerged from the data. The themes will be presented under the headings of conditions, interaction among actors, and strategies. In each section, the themes are arranged from most to least salient. Examples of each theme are given with direct quotes from the transcripts of participants. Husbands and wives are identifiable as such by the common first initial assigned to their pseudonyms. Thus, Arlene is married to Al, Bill To Barbara, Cathy to Calvin, etc.

Key Themes

Conditions

The conditions of the marital relationship included expectations and values which individuals brought to the relationship and were often based on their families of origin. Initial attraction was another condition of the early stage of the relationships. Commitment was both a condition at the outset of the marriage and of the growth of the relationship over time. The theme of money was a condition of the marriages which related to the shared values of the couple.

Expectations of Marriage

Among the conditions of marriage were the expectations each individual brought to the relationship. This theme included gender role expectations, the definition of traditional roles, and the evolution of these expectations over the course of married life. In addition, individuals described their perceptions of the effort needed to maintain a relationship before getting married and how these perceptions changed over time. Participants' families of origins were shown to influence their expectations and were described as positive, negative or mixed role models of marital dyads.

All twenty-four individuals expected what they termed "traditional" roles in their marriage. That is, they expected the husband to be the breadwinner and the wife to be the homemaker. It was, however, a complex process. Although all twelve women wanted to stay home with the children, only one did not also expect to work outside of the home. The woman who expected only to stay home is now a successful businesswoman. Eight

women expected to be and were breadwinners at some point in the relationship, either before they had children, or after, or both. Six of the men expected to share responsibilities in and out of the home. The remaining six males stated that they changed their expectations in the direction of a more shared view of roles during the course of the marriage. The following examples illustrate both these expectations and the ways in which families of origin influenced the mind-set each subject brought to his or her marriage. In addition, these examples attest to the departure from the division of labor which was assumed to be the traditional model. These variations of role models are linked to parental example as illustrated by the statements in of the sections below.

Traditional Roles

Gladys: My mom was a typical housewife even though she worked....From the time I was a little girl I wanted to grow up and get married. That was my goal in life. I wanted to be a mom and a wife. I expected to stay home and raise my family....I never planned on owning two businesses [her current employment]....My mother was a very great role model.

George: I expected to see myself as the professional breadwinner of the family. Gladys was going to be the homemaker. We were going to have kids. She would take care of them and that was going to be our life. That is the way I saw it. That is how I was brought up. At the time [of his marriage], my mother was working, but when I was a kid she was a homemaker....That was what marriage was gonna be.

George also expected to share responsibilities in the home and began to do so at the beginning of their marriage:

We kind of shared some of the housework....That is the way I was brought up....My father did not do very much housework but I did when I was old enough. I was used to doing it. There was never any contention that I should not do it because it is not a man's thing to do. Evelyn: I expected to be a housewife and a mom....to be my husband's help-mate. I grew up with very traditional values. I really did not enjoy working outside the home that much and could not wait to quit work and raise a family.

When it came to money, however, Evelyn was not willing to accept her husband's view of what "traditional" meant:

Ed was very immature about money when we were married....The first week we were married he brought home his paycheck. I said maybe we should open a joint savings account. He got really mad. He grew up in a family where the father paid the bills and handled the money. He said I was taking his role. We worked that one out.

Ed's definition of traditional roles was also based on his own family.

Of his father he says, "He did set a good standard in terms of the work, keeping a house, providing a nurturing environment. I expected to be a provider and to be a nurturer."

Louis did not expect his wife Lilly to stop working when they got married because they were not planning to have children right away. He had learned to cook, enjoyed it and expected to help with the cooking because both were working full time. Lilly did not accept his help and it became a source of

conflict. He finally decided to take the advice of an "old-timer" at work: "He said, 'Buy a newspaper and when you get home, stay away from the kitchen and read the newspaper.' I did that and was amazed how fast she became a good cook." He reported that he does cook now.

A Shift Towards a More Shared View of Roles. All of the subjects in this study entered into the marital relationship expecting some version of a traditional marriage. As noted earlier, for eleven of the women and six of the men, "traditional" included an aspect of shared responsibilities. Nine couples reported that their expectations changed with time towards a more shared view of roles and the one woman who did not want to work at the outset of her marriage became an independent businesswoman. The following examples illustrate the influence of the family of origin on expectations and the transition to a more shared view of role distributions.

Howard was brought up in a household where the women did everything for the men. In the early stage of his marriage he would take off his coat and throw it. His wife would tell him to hang it up. In the interview, Howard states "There is no such thing as woman's work and man's work today. It is just work." At the conclusion of the interview, he was picking up the kitchen chairs to get ready to wash the floor.

Holly: I expected him to be the total family provider, the stereotype, the one who would always help at home because my father always did. My husband will bend over backwards to this day. We share everything. This was long before anyone was sharing....I don't think he is the breadwinner. I have always been contributing.

Evelyn, who did not enjoy working outside of the home before she had children now states, "I think it [the relationship] has changed because our roles are somewhat different now. We are both breadwinners.

"Kevin expressed the transition by stating, "In the beginning of the marriage, Kate would do everything and I would just accept it. As time went by, she was working and I had to do a little more."

Influence of Family of Origin on Expectations. All twenty-four individuals related their expectations of marriage to their exposure to marriage in their families of origin. The family included parents, aunts and uncles, grandparents, and stepparents. Marriages observed were seen as either positive, negative, or a blend of the two. Seven people reported that the couples they had observed were strictly negative role models. Twelve individuals stated that they had seen in their families a blend of both negative and positive role models. The nineteen subjects who reported either negative or mixed role models stated that they sought to avoid the type of relationships they had witnessed. Four people reported that they were exposed only to positive role models and that they had learned from those relationships. Examples are presented of negative, positive and mixed role models. Under each subheading a summary is given of how participants defined negative, positive, and mixed.

Negative role models. Of the seven people who saw the marital relationships of their childhood as negative examples, most viewed those relationships as unfair, unhappy, and lacking in communication.

Ian brought what he learned were unfair expectations to his marriage as represented by the description of one the couple's early meals:

My mother always gave my father and myself bigger portions. I married Irene and our very first meal she broiled a steak and I cut a little piece off for her and a little bigger piece for me, and left some for seconds. She said, "Get out of here!", and put them back together again. She eats as much as or more than I do and everyone gets equal.

Lilly: [whose parents fought all the time] I was determined I was not gonna have that kind of marriage. It made [me] appreciate [my] spouse more, be more willing to go the extra mile, to work harder at it.

Lilly's husband, Louis states of his parents' marriage: I learned that I did not want one like it.

Bill: My father is a curmudgeon. That didn't make any sense to me. He was unthinking and uncaring and I still feel that way....He has a very short fuse which I inherited but having seen him yelling, kicking holes in doors, I've always tried to avoid that.

Cathy: My father made all the decisions in the house. We had one car....When my mother went to work full time she had to ride with someone else. She was good with numbers and liked math. She did that in her job but my father told her she could not take care of the check book.

Dave: [When he met his wife he remembered thinking]: I want children and I am gonna treat them right. I thought this when I was a teenager. It did not seem right that my father should treat my mother the way he did. After so many drinks he would say he was gonna leave.

Positive role models. The four individuals who saw positive examples of marital relationships in their childhood characterized them as caring, supportive, and committed.

Gladys: I just knew what a marriage entailed from watching my own parents' marriage. That was a very close, wonderful relationship. Each one, I could see, cared more about the other. My father had my mother on a pedestal and my mother had my father on a pedestal. They both cared.

Louis: They [his parents] seemed to have very good communication, carried on lovely conversations at the table. It was a lovely, nurturing family relationship. Holly: [What I learned from my parents' marriage] was that it was fun. It was special caring, two people who were willing to work together, stand by one another. Not only in good times but when things are really tough. There is just an understanding and caring.

Mixed role models. While some aspects of their parents' relationships were negative, twelve participants also saw positive examples within those relationships.

Cathy: I did expect [my husband to be involved with child-rearing] because my father was very involved. My father was a very domineering man. I did not want a man that was so domineering because I could not talk to my father lots of times. I was frightened of him. Yet he loved me very much and I knew he loved me so much but he had a temper....I knew I really did not want to live with that type

of person because I saw what my mother went through...and I thought, no person deserves that.

Frances: What I learned from my parents' relationship was tolerance, keeping the lid on. My mother had a real job when she married Dad. He was very difficult, violent and angry and she was a saint. I learned from her that you can't change a man.

Kevin: My parents did not have a real happy, loving relationship. They sort of were just there together all the time. We had a very comfortable home...a very happy childhood. This has been a big influence in my life....[But] my father was totally dominant and my mother was meek and passionate. I did not want to marry a person like that. Kate is the other extreme. Kate is not domineering. I could not stand being married to a domineering woman.

Expectation of the Need to Work at the Relationship. Nine respondents expected to work at the relationship from the beginning and stated that this was based on examples they had seen in their families. Thirteen individuals did not expect to work at the relationship but eight of these subjects indicated that they soon learned that an effort was needed.

Expected to work at the relationship.

Louis: I always thought you had to work at it...We both came from families that did not have a happy marriage. That was one thing we had in common.

Al: Oh, most definitely! I knew from my parents and five sisters. I'd seen fights, heard my parents talk over my sisters' problems, seen my parents' fights. It gave me an excellent background in...if nothing else,

the pitfalls that you can have going into a relationship. Both parents were divorced but were married to each other for forty years....My goal was to be married for as long as we live and I'll work toward that end... because marriage is hard work...every day, day after day, after day. But you make a commitment to do that. Commitment means being willing to do that work.

In contrast to this acceptance of the concept of marriage as work, five respondents stated that they objected to the negative connotation of the word "work" used in the question. Their responses indicate nevertheless that they were aware that an effort is necessary to foster the relationship.

Kate: I never felt I had to work at the relationship....I think you have to nurture every relationship, whether it's your friends or your children.

Cathy: Having to work at it, that is a hard word....I think of it as common sense, knowing a person's needs or limits and, yes, I suppose then that is called working at it.

Frances: People say you have to work at a marriage. I don't agree with the word work. I think it is something that comes naturally. Saying I am working at the marriage is a very poor expression....You don't work at something you enjoy doing, you enjoy doing it. I think it takes two people to nurture a marriage.

Did not expect to work at the relationship. Of the thirteen people who did not expect to work at the relationship, eight indicated that they learned very quickly that an effort would be needed. The following are some of their responses to the question, "Did you expect to have to work at the relationship?"

Holly: I never gave it a thought. But it's the hardest job anyone ever had. From the beginning I realized this does not come easy. You don't have good unless you work at it.

Barbara: I never thought of that. I would tell people that now [that they need to work at the relationship] but we didn't expect that.

Bill: No. Now obviously I know you do.

Jill: I think younger people want instant gratification. They don't realize what it means to work at a relationship. I didn't think I would have to work at it and then I realized that, yes, I was going to have to.

Values

The second theme which was universally present in this sample was the importance of the similarity of values between spouses. The specific values expressed differed amongst the couples but agreement between husbands and wives was unanimous. Eight couples mentioned the importance of values instilled by their religious upbringing. They spoke of the importance of the adherence to high moral standards, faith in God, and fidelity in the relationship. One couple stressed a more philosophical approach, coupled with an aversion to any strong religious affiliation. Three other couples cited the importance of altruism, civic responsibility, and a shared commitment to hard work. All twenty-four subjects saw shared values as important to the initial attraction and to their marital success over the years.

Frances: We both care a lot about other people. He [her husband] likes to give money. I like to do things for my church, and in the community.

Kevin [paraphrased from follow-up phone call]: To summarize what was important, I would highlight the importance of character, of being honest in all relationships, both inside and outside of the marriage. This character is a product of your upbringing. We were both from similar backgrounds - solid homes, with brothers and sisters where there was a basic moral fiber. These are values not based on any church per se, but on religion.

Kate: We had the same values. We knew that when we met. We discussed those kinds of things.

Arlene: Just trust....Be who you are, honesty.

Doreen: We are basic believers in ask not what your country can do for you, but what can you do for your country. We have a tremendous sense of civic responsibility. That is a common value that we share.

George: I think our moral standards are identical. We both look on marriage as it should be for a life time....We both think that intimacy outside of marriage is wrong....I think you have to have the same values as to what is right and what is wrong. It is not right to steal, cheat, things like that. All the things you are taught as a kid I think stays with us. Maybe that is very important. Maybe that's why people's marriages fall apart - because two people have different values. Gladys and I have just been lucky that we had the same values when we got married. Maybe that is why everything else gets worked out.

Commitment. Commitment to the marriage was expressed in different ways: attitudes toward divorce, the role of religion, and commitment per se. Seventeen individuals stated that divorce was not considered an option for them. Of these seventeen, thirteen said that divorce was "simply unheard of" in their family of origin. They carried this attitude with them into their own marriages.

Fifteen individuals saw the role of religion as important in terms of the choice of a mate, commitment, and shared values. The choice of a spouse was determined by similarity of either religion, values, or philosophy. In one instance the absence of any strong religious persuasion was more important than adherence to a particular religion. Of the three Jewish couples, one couple and one member of each of the other two couples made the point that cultural identity was more important than religion per se.

Fourteen individuals stated that they were committed to the relationship, to making it work and to growth within it. Two of those fourteen people explicitly equated commitment with love. Eight subjects emphasized the priority given to the couple's relationship as opposed to placing the children first. The following examples illustrate the elements of the theme of commitment: divorce not an option, the role of religion, commitment to the couple's relationship.

Divorce Not an Option.

Jeff: [In my family] divorce was not talked about. Nothing like that was ever talked about. I do not recall hearing anything about that.

Doreen: We don't get divorced. Our kids were brought up with very strong feelings: no divorce....There was no question in my family. We

all are going to have no divorce. I have since modified that. There are circumstances - battered women, certain circumstances where it is better to get a divorce than to ruin your life.

Dave: I never knew of divorce, never heard of it in our family, because on one side it was all Catholic and the other side Catholic also. There was none of that from our stand point or in hers.

Howard: [My parents] did not believe in divorce. It was something that happened in other people's families. They could not even comprehend extra-marital kinds of things.

Louis: [Divorce] was never mentioned because the family was Catholic.

Lilly: I think divorce was not ever considered. I think divorce in my parents' generation was just not done. They never considered it, I am sure. They probably had a lovely relationship. I never considered divorce, not even a shadow crossed my mind.

Role of Religion.

Evelyn: [Religion has been] very important. It was more important for Ed to decide who to marry as far as religion than to me. We were of different faiths when we were married, but were respectful of each other's religions. When we started having children, then I decided that it was very important to worship together as a family. I became what he is. Religion has played a very important part in our marriage. We feel that we are in a threesome with God.

George: It was important that we were both the same religion. That was the way both of us were brought up. I know Gladys' parents would not allow her to date anyone who was not Jewish. I never even

dreamed of approaching that subject with my parents because I could imagine how upset they would get. Things are different now. In those days you just did not do things like that.

Jill: He had come from more of a religious family than my family. My family was more of a culturally Jewish family, not religiously Jewish. For our generation, it is certain that we both had to be Jewish in terms of getting married...to marry within the religion was extremely important.

Kevin: My mother was worried about what religion she [his wife] was. Myself, I asked her on the first date if she was Catholic. Somehow, when I was younger I had the feeling that I did not want to get involved in a cross marriage. I would prefer not to have that as an obstacle. She has basically the same general religious background. I have not been to church since I got married. I don't want to have some problem with the religion. My family almost drove me out of the house when I was sixteen or seventeen. My mother got involved in this church and they emphasized all these things, and they tried to shove it down my throat...It was not the Catholic thing so much as the religious hassle factor. I did not want that to block the relationship. I wanted to have someone who had a similar philosophy. It worked out fine that way. I just did not want to get involved with a person who had some strange religion. I would not see someone on a second date, that is how strongly I felt about it. It was not what I wanted, it was what I did not want.

Calvin: Religion is one thing, but I think a parent's upbringing is much more important than religion. Ninety-nine percent of ethics and morality is your parents, brothers, and how you grow up with that whole relationship. You carry that right into your marriage. She did the same with hers. Her parents were eminently good people. To me, that had to be there or I wouldn't have married her.

Commitment to the Relationship, to Growth.

Howard: You have to work on it, the same way you work on everything....The marriage could have and should have failed. The only thing that saved the marriage was that there were two people comfortable with each other and who had a history of interrelationship and a desire to make it work. Succeed and fail has to do with attitude.

Dave: She had a dedication to - she is going to make this thing work....It changes all the time. That is the beauty of it, constant change and both of us respecting that change. If you don't change you are dead and we both recognized that.

Jill: If you start off as good friends I think then it can really grow. You have to be willing to change. Jeff has changed a great deal. When I went back to work he did all the grocery shopping, I did the cooking, and he cleaned up. To this day, he cleans up. Now that I am not working I do the shopping.

Ed: Marriage is nothing more than a bond that grows and grows if it is nurtured and watered, just like a flower. The more you care for it, the more it grows.

Cathy: Love has kept us in the relationship. If we love one another, we are committed to each other. I don't know what it would be like if we did not have children. I still think we would be together if there were no children. It is primarily us first and then the kids. That is also another major factor: that we have to be happy as a couple. Our kids are very important to us but we come first and we will solve our problems first and then theirs.

Calvin: When the kids come along they have a way of bursting the bubble and making things less than perfect. But they in some cases try to drive a wedge there. I am very alert to those things. I wouldn't ever let that happen. So, when it comes down to it, we both agree. We would not let the children divide us.

Evelyn: The bad balance is being so totally consumed with kids that you don't have time for each other, a mistake a lot of people make. We have made an effort not to let that happen. We had to work at that. You can really get sucked into putting your kids first. You can't always do that.

Initial Attraction

Couples were asked about what initially attracted them to each other and what was going on in their lives at the time they met. The factors highlighted by their responses were looks, timing, personality and instinct. In some cases the husband and wife indicated the same factors of attraction; in others they did not. There was no universal agreement with regard to attraction. It is interesting to note that four couples met on blind dates.

Five couples and six individuals (n=16) indicated that looks played a major role in attraction. For fifteen people the element of timing was important. That is, one person or both felt a need to settle down, to get married just when they met.

Personality was indicated as a factor in attraction by three couples and six individuals (n = 12). Elements of personality which were seen to be important included complementarity, or specific characteristics such as kindness, sincerity, or spunk. For ten subjects their instinct told them that this was the person with whom they would like to spend the rest of their life. In contrast to this sense of "it just felt right", was the experience of thirteen people who said that they were not at all attracted to their spouse at first. The following examples illustrate the four salient factors of initial attraction: looks, timing, personality, and instinct.

Frances: It was a whirlwind romance. We met through my sister.

There was a very strong physical appeal. He was rather dashing, very kind and loving. I thought I could be happy with him....I had just finished college. My mother had died and my father had remarried.

Fred: Both of us had lost both of our parents...I didn't know right away, but I think I was ready to get married after two and a half years in the Pacific. But I wasn't aware that I was looking for a wife.

Jeff: She was very beautiful. Yeah, I think her looks first, and then her very gentle nature. At the time, she was very comfortable to be with. I guess it's looks and comfort and her family was very, very friendly.

They made me feel very comfortable. It was a whole combination of things. Everything seemed to blend in.

Jill: I knew when I picked up the phone, but I think part of it was in my generation. I was graduating from college and then you got married. So I think my decision then was based on the fact that "I am going to be an old maid at 22." I don't think I got married for the right reason. I think a lot of people in my generation didn't get married for the right reasons.... We knew each other for a very brief time. I didn't know he was the right guy, but you know our backgrounds were similar, he was a sweet person, he had a great sense of humor. My mother and aunt loved him the minute they saw him and it just felt comfortable. But, I was not madly in love at all.

Louis: I am usually very conservative by nature. I was sure because a person has something in the back of their mind of the kind of person they would like to spend the rest of their life with. Somehow, I don't know, the more I got to know her, the more I wanted to know her. I think it is unconscious that people have this in the back of their mind.

Lilly: It happened so fast. Actually, he was someone else's date....I fixed him up with my best friend at the time. My best friend decided she liked my date. She was hanging all over him. Louis and I were dancing. He said, "Why don't we leave here and go someplace else because they will never miss us." So we did. We went for a walk, wound up at some little pub. Since then we were never apart. It was just an instant recognition of a kindred soul. We started talking and never stopped....This was the first week in January that we met. I had the ring on my finger February fourteenth.

Money

The results of the question regarding the role of finances in a couple's life were interesting, with a nearly fifty-fifty split in opinion of the importance of money. Five couples agreed that money had been an important part of their relationship. For four of these couples financial security was deemed a part of their marital success. For the fifth couple the role of money in their lives was as a source of conflict. Four other couples stated that money was never seen as a problem, whether they had it or not. Two couples gave conflicting answers. That is, one spouse in each couple felt money was important and one did not. In six couples the wife controlled finances and in three couples the husband was in control. The following examples illustrate the mixed opinions regarding the influence of money in a marriage.

Gladys: When we got married George was earning \$6,700. We sat down. We had goals and we aimed towards them. We figured out that I had to go to work if we were going to reach our goals before we had a family....We never had to worry about where our next meal was coming from....When you're aggravated and scared about money you can't think of the relationship.

Calvin: I think that finances is a very big thing in divorce. Nothing is more devastating than having lousy finances. My own peace of mind and Cathy's is that we have always been on a cash basis.

Cathy: He is very adamant about any bills that come in and that they are paid....We planned well. I give him the credit for that. He has put good insight into that. It was a common goal to do well.

Barbara: I was from a very poor family. We had an outhouse. We have worked very hard for everything we have....It was important that we both came from similar backgrounds that way.

Lilly: I have often said we would be happy in a cottage. If we had a horrible reversal we could still be very happy. I think it is great to have what you want, to be able to do what you want. But I don't think it is important to either one of us. Louis: Having the money is just the frosting on the cake, not really the important thing.

Interaction of the Actors

The element of Strauss' (1987) coding paradigm which serves to integrate the next six themes is the interaction of the actors. The themes of interaction are mutuality, priority of spouse, love, communication, sex, and the improvement of the relationship over time.

Mutuality

Mutuality is defined as a balance of interdependence and independence. No direct question was asked in the interview to assess this area. It is a theme which emerged from the data as important to all twelve couples in the sample. Each couple had negotiated a comfortable level of separateness and relatedness in their relationship and felt that this was a significant part of the success of their marriage. Included in this balance was the fact that subjects maintained the belief that their spouse was the most important person in their life.

Barbara: He allows me the freedom that I need and that's very important....[A colleague at her job] said, "I don't understand.. You guys act like you're still in love." I thought that was really very perceptive because I do demand my freedom and I couldn't live with somebody who didn't allow me to have it. [In the follow-up phone call, Barbara said:] I think I thought of a motto which could apply to our relationship and that is, love me for who I am and that includes my freedom.

Bill: We're both very independent and very hard-working. We took pride in coming off the farm as we did and making it on our own. I think both being independent necessitates a give and take because it's definitely not a dominant or subordinate relationship. I think it's always been very equal.

Frances: I kept working when he retired because I didn't want to be around the house twenty-four hours a day. I needed some space for myself. I think when he retired, he secretly hoped I would, but I didn't want to and he was glad for me to be happy. Even now he realizes it's important for me to get out and do something.

Fred: Now we're in a new phase. I'm home all the time but she always escaped to work. Now she's retired and I'm delighted, but she has to have her thing. She volunteers two days a week and she needs that.

Lilly: Even though we work together we have separate roles, duties. He does what he is good at and I do what I am good at. Luckily, they

are not the same....He was very quick to recognize any abilities I had - very admiring and supportive in anything I tried to do.

Louis: We give each other space. She wants to read. I do something else. We work together all day but we don't see each other. She has different responsibilities than I have. We have lunch often....We have a relationship where she gives me space and I give her space. You don't feel smothered.

Priority of Spouse. Twenty-three subjects reported that their spouse was the most important person in their life. This was expressed in slightly different ways by different subjects. Ten individuals stated that their spouse was their best friend. Five people, when asked "What does your spouse mean to you?", answered, "Everything." Three subjects explicitly stated that their spouse was the most important person in their life.

Gladys: I still get a pitter patter when I know he is coming to meet me at the office. I look forward to seeing him. He is my best friend, best lover, best everything. He understands me the best.

Evelyn: I think we are best friends. We have a lot of mutual respect for each other. We love each other.

Howard: Companionship with a capital C....I would not know how I would live without her.

Al: [What spouse means to him.] Everything, along with my two kids. I wouldn't want to think about us not being together. If it doesn't come close to being everything then you should probably pack it in.

Kate: It is just wonderful to know that you have another person that you share everything in your life with. He is friend, lover. I think it

would be very lonely living life without having a person like that to be with.

Doreen: Foundation. Everything else flows from that. A rock, stable. Can be counted on.

Jeff: Jill is the biggest thing in my life, the reason that I'm happy. Without Jill I wouldn't be happy. She makes life worth living because we enjoy doing so much together. She is the reason that I am as happy as I am, because with her I have a good life and I can't see it any other way.

Jill: [He is] the mainstay of my life, the most important person in my life. I love my kids and grandchildren, but he really is the most important.

Love

In the first analysis, it appeared that love was mentioned relatively rarely. On further examination, fifteen people did talk about love in their relationship. It was expressed as the priority of the spouse, the "just feels right" quality, the "pitter patter" (Gladys, quoted above), as commitment, or in terms of the romance the couple has kept alive between them. Several examples already cited include the expressions of love in terms of priority, instinct, and commitment. Therefore, relatively few examples are given here of the expression of love in the marriage.

Lilly: He is lots of fun to be with. He has all positive qualities: honest, forward, intelligent, loving, everything you could want in a husband, a lot of fun to hang around with. He is still romantic. I think that is

important, keeping romance in your marriage. I still feel like I am on a date.

Calvin: It was like I was hypnotized...When you are in love, you just can't believe that anyone is against this thing.

Kevin: It is crazy yet I still love her.

Howard: It all goes down to three sentences. The first one is, I love you, will take care of you, will do everything not to hurt you.

Communication

Noller (1984) emphasized that communication accuracy was the most essential element in marital satisfaction. Her conclusion was not supported by the analysis of the present data. The review of the literature highlighted the need to maintain a broad definition of communication in the marital dyad. Subjects' responses corroborated this indication. Communication included the elements of trust and respect, and the perception that the spouse was understanding of his or her mate. Nineteen people reported that one hundred percent trust was a key factor in the success of their marriage. Trust was seen as synonymous with fidelity. Sixteen individuals stated that respect was essential. Fourteen subjects saw their spouses as understanding of them. Seven couples offered their own definition of "good communication." These definitions ranged from conflict avoidant to agreeing to disagree. Thus, one couple stated that their communication was good because they managed to avoid confrontation while another couple's version of good communication was "lashing out" at each other all the time. Differences which emerged were between couples rather than along gender lines. That is, no consistent pattern

of male-female differences in communication style or skills was evidenced in these results. The following examples illustrate subjects' views on the importance of communication as it includes trust, respect, and understanding. A separate section is given to illustrate the ways in which different couples defined good communication.

Barbara [re: respect]: Oh, that's always been there. I think that's important. If you don't respect someone, I can't imagine living with someone.....One hundred percent trust. We both travel and that's got to be there.

Bill: I have the utmost respect for her....I trust her absolutely, unequivocally. There has never been any thought of outside relationships.

Kevin [re: trust]: That has been one hundred percent. No jealousy, no outside sexual relations....Always temptations, I just decided that I am not gonna fool around on the side and she has not either. We talk about this. We don't take each other for granted. We know how important it is to feel comfortable. If you have to worry about your wife fooling around or vice versa, that is so destructive....I wanted to marry someone that you can trust and respect.

Kate: The most important thing is trust and respect and caring for each other, feeling affectionate....I could not live in a marriage that did not have trust and openness and total understanding of what the other person thinks. I think that trust is equal. I trust him to go anywhere.

Calvin: That [communication] is absolutely essential as far as the marriage is concerned. There is nothing more important than a candid

relationship. You can't go around not showing your emotions. Showing your feelings, we have always done that. That has not changed. We are like brother and sister. We tell each other everything, our innermost thoughts....Perfectly clear understanding is vital. As long as she understood my point, that is enough. It is not vital that she agree with it, as long as she understands it and vice versa. I understand her point. That was important to me from the beginning. I really think that all the wars in the world are caused by misunderstanding. Everything is a misunderstanding. As long as we all understand exactly what the other person's point of view is, that is sufficient.

George: If I had to summarize, if there is anything that is important, it is to understand the other person's outlook and listen to them. I think that is very important.

Lilly: Communication was important. We were always able to communicate well. We are both very verbal. We both like to talk.

Gladys: How much understanding has he had of me? On a rating from one to ten, about a thirty-five.

Definitions of "good" communication.

Bill: [I would describe the communication between us as] pretty good on the whole. I don't deal with conflict well. I just avoid it.

Doreen: I think you have to avoid confrontation, it's one of the secrets of marriage. Be yourself and stick up for what you believe in. If it is just a dream or an idea, there is no point in getting into an argument about it.

Louis [re: the couple's communication]: I'd say it is very open and interesting. I think we can tell each other what is on our minds without upsetting each other. Lilly: [Our communication has been] terrific, very good. I think that what I had to do in the beginning was, I sat down and wrote him a letter, would tell him how I felt about what was going on, whatever we were disagreeing about, whether it was cleaning the house, it was always something dumb. It was never anything earth-shattering. We did not disagree on any principal. It was just picky stuff. I would sit down and write him a letter. I did that two or three times. That worked fantastic. He would come home and say, "Gee, I did not know you felt like that. I am sorry." It was better to put a little distance when trying to tell him my side. Then he would think about it instead of flying off the handle.

Irene: We have no problem because we lash out at each other all the time. So there is nothing held back.

Ian: We would argue it out which I think is good. I had sisters that they tell me their husband did not speak to them for four or five days. I don't know how that could ever happen. We would never think of that. We shouted a lot, argued. Some people would probably say it was a constant argument, but it did not seem that way to us.

Sex

As in the case of money, couples were divided in their opinions of the importance of the sexual relationship to their marital success. Eight couples stated that a good sexual relationship was important to their marriage. These

same eight couples reported having a satisfying sexual relationship. Of the four couples who stated that a good sexual relationship was not essential, one male and two female respondents reported that the problem was that he or she wanted more frequent sex than his or her spouse. For one of those two women, this greater desire on her part was a reversal from the earlier stages of her marriage when the husband had more frequent sexual desires. The reversal of desire seen in one couple who reported having a good sexual relationship was the inverse. That is, the couple reported that the wife wanted more sexual contact in the beginning of their marriage but now it is the husband who would like increased sexual relations. The following examples illustrate the importance couples placed on the sexual component of their relationship.

Kate: It [sex] has been wonderful, gets better every year. I could not live in a marriage that did not have affection or a happy sexual life. All the other things I could deal with, but I could not deal without that. That's a very important part of our marriage.

Kevin: That has been excellent from the very beginning....We are just fortunate that it worked out that way....She is so thrilled about it she wanted to write a book about it. For years she said, "I want to write a book about sex."

Ian: If all else fails, sex holds it together. It's the mortar that holds the brick.

Lilly: That was always great. That's important. It kinda adds a little extra cement.

Louis: I think one of the things that helped us a great deal was that we have a very good intimate relationship.

Arlene: Of course, when we were younger he was rambunctious and ready any time and I was usually pretty much physically tired from racing with the kids all day. So I would not be as cooperative and as willing as he would like to have had me be. Now he's getting older and he's working hard and has long days and he's slowing down and I'm home and I have more time to relax. So, I'm the one who is a little more aggressive than he is. So, it's completely reversed.

Al: Well, you have your peaks and your valleys. When the kids were small, she didn't want it. Now I'm older, slower. So, when we were younger she'd say no. Now I do more often.

Bill: Sex has been all right. We never discussed it. It was very difficult at the beginning as most relationships are, especially since we didn't want to have kids. Condoms were difficult. We were old-fashioned, learning. Then it got better when the threat of pregnancy was gone. My wife wanted more sex than I did early in the relationship. Then it may've changed to now I want more, maybe, but we never discussed it.

Improvement of the Relationship Over Time

Seven couples and two individuals reported that their relationship with their spouse improved over time (n=16). Improvement was expressed as an increase in understanding, a deeper love, improved communication, or a more mature way of relating to each other.

Jeff: I think our relationship has grown, grown in depth. I think there has only been a maturation of love, whether the love initially may have been physical, it's still physical. I still find her attractive but I find her much more, a much deeper person which I didn't go into years ago.

Jill: Once they [the kids] were out, I was afraid that maybe we wouldn't have anything in common because you know when your children are growing up, so much of your life revolves around the kids. I thought, oh my God, when they leave, what is going to happen? It was a little scary. Plus, two very close friends got divorced after 25 years, ones that we would have never expected. It just blew our mind and it frightened us. It is just much better. We love being alone....It's grown.

Lilly: It has gotten better. I am more in love with him today than I was when I met him.

Louis: I think it has changed. It has become better. I have more sensitivity for her needs as time goes on. I seem to care for her more each day.

Gladys: The way we relate to each other has matured, has not changed yet there is a difference. Basically the same thing, we still kiss, hug, talk. Obviously we are in our fifties, we don't talk as much as we did when we were teenagers, but we still look for the same things, same values. It has just matured, mellowed, like a bottle of wine, as it gets older it gets mature and gets better, but it still looks the same.

George: I would say we're probably closer now than we have ever been....I feel that we are closer because at least now there are a lot of things we can discuss.

Strategies

Strauss' (1987) coding paradigm includes the focus on strategies and tactics. The strategies which emerged in the marital dyads studied include: selective understanding, decision-making, and problem-solving skills.

Selective Understanding

One strategy which emerged from the data was the use of selective understanding with regard to self, spouse, and situations. Subjects understood themselves, each other and their marital situations in terms of family histories, societal norms, or merely what was acceptable to them. In so doing, they were able to adopt an attitude that what may be construed by others as a problem was not a problem for them because of their understanding of the individual or social history and context. Alternatively, they used this strategy to justify accommodating to the peculiarities of their spouse or to the expectations of the times. In some cases, taking normalization one step further, individuals viewed what they had as a couple as better than normal. The strategy of applying selective understanding relates to the way in which individuals make meaning of their world (Bogdan & Biklen, 1987), that is, the phenomenology of marriage. Normalizing actions through an understanding of upbringing, personality or experience offers an explanation of behaviors which neutralizes affect and depersonalizes issues allowing

individuals to attach positive connotations to potentially negative situations. In ten of the couples interviewed this strategy of selective understanding was employed by both husband and wife. One member of each of the other two couples also utilized this strategy. The interpretations were not necessarily grounded in reality, nor did the spouses need to agree on the interpretations. In fact, it is unclear from the present data whether or not the couples shared this strategy in a conscious or verbal way with their spouses. This strategy appears to be the core category, the one that is central, relates easily to the majority of other categories, appears frequently, and accounts for the greatest amount of the variance (Strauss, 1987). The examples below illustrate the attitude that "a problem is not a problem," and the strategies of accommodation and normalization. Participants understood expectations of marriage, difficulties within the marriage, attitudes, choices, and their own and their spouses' personalities in terms of the understanding they brought to bear on their own situations. Because of the importance of this category and the number of categories it transcends, a large number of examples is given. Parenthetical remarks are given to clarify the strategy and the subject area to which it pertains.

Jill (regarding her family's reaction to the marriage): They were thrilled. They loved him. You know this is what you did. No one ever thought I was too young because we all got married in our early twenties.

(regarding her expectations of her role in the marriage) Oh, I was supposed to make him happy. This is the way it was. The women did things for the men. You know, I used to even iron his underwear, his

socks, you know, all that kind of stuff. And that's the way it was. You know, there was a chair that he sat in, that was his chair. That went on for a long, long time. We still joke about it. We had a couch made for this house and it was custom made and when the man came to discuss the couch he said, "It will be a great couch, a great place for Jeff to stretch out on." I never thought that I wouldn't have a place. It never even entered my mind....This is the way it was done.

Bill (re: atypical role expectations): I didn't have preconceived notions about work and home. I was in school. Barbara brought home the bacon....My grandfather for example would bang on the glass and grandma would get up and serve him coffee....You were supposed to take care of the man....I think it is significant that my wife had no examples because her father had died when she was very young. She had no notion of a subservient relationship and I understood that.

Barbara (re: personality and attitudes): He's more perceptive in some ways and I'm more perceptive in others. He didn't notice cleaning things, the stuff that mother's normally would do. He didn't come from an environment, his mother wasn't a good housekeeper, wasn't a good cook. My background was German, that meant order, cleanliness.

Kevin (re: personality): The fact that she had a very strong personality, I would rather be married to a person like that than someone who is weak-willed and wishy-washy. Maybe if I was married to someone like that, maybe I would take a little more myself. When you marry

someone you have to accommodate your personalities. We have done that very well.

(re: crises): The day we bought this house one of our companies went out of business. I was out of work for three or four months. That was kind of a crisis, in a way. We were able to survive. She went back to work at that time. It took me a long time to get another job. We just survived one of the biggest financial crises. We have been lucky.

There have not been too many of those things.

Lilly (attitude towards problems): It is interesting because I read these books - grown up children of alcoholics - I don't relate to the way they say we don't overcome this. Fear of intimacy doesn't apply to me.

Being the caretaker, that was me. It's like you should be an emotional invalid the rest of your life. That applies to those people who did not make the conscious step to break it...I see it as an educational experience.

Doreen (normalizing their lack of sexual relations based on personality and upbringing): We basically drifted apart on any sexual relations. He has accepted that and it does not bother me. I have enough to do....No touching, hugging. I never saw it in my household. I have learned you are supposed to do more of other things. Give mother a peck on the cheek....We are just very reserved people and that all goes back to the way you are brought up.

Dave (normalizing): I see sex on a sunbeam. When it comes to sex, I really don't know what people are talking about. I think sex under any definition that I would understand isolates it out. That part of it, there

is a mind of its own that is working in your body that you cannot control, so forget it. The other part of the brain, the rational part of it where you try to think things through, that one tells me that there is sex everywhere, every moment, in everything beautiful and everything ugly. I have always thought that way. I get a big kick out of seeing her stepping out of a car a mile away. There is no way that I can give you a conventional answer because I don't believe it. I think life is such a precious event and unique to spoil a moment of it by talking about animal aspects leaves me cold. She would not understand the broader way I see it...I would not even ask her. We grew up in a family where we did not talk about sex. I still believe in that.

Holly (accommodation): Money was always one of the areas of conflict because he did not care. He never looked upon work as a source of enjoyment. It was something you had to do because you had to eat. He would work, but in different kinds of work. He knows that he has to support us, to contribute as much as I do, otherwise the bills don't get paid. He is the type that will hold seven jobs in one year, never had a pension plan, never stayed any place. The day he finds a job, the next day he is looking for another one....People would say, "How can you put up with it?" To me it's not putting up. Everyone always looks different until you live it yourself. I like what I live....He grew up in an abusive household....His mother was a very difficult person...a cruel, bitter woman. The whole world thought she was wonderful except the people who lived in the house. She was very good to her sisters and brothers and nieces and nephews. They were all wonderful. Just her

children were no good. When you realize where he came from and how far he has come, you know he is a pretty special person.

Ed (normalizing): You don't come near me in the budget, the budget is mine. I am very chauvinistic. In terms of the money I would say I was a total macho chauvinist. Not your domain, that is mine. Don't you dare do that. I think because of our culture and from what I have grown out of. Mother never worked. My wife works. That is something new in our culture....I am strong-headed, don't like to be told when I am wrong. Let me come to the conclusion that I am wrong and don't wipe me out. Males' egos are very shallow, sometimes very much at the surface, need to have some time and space....I think I have been a good father. I never changed a diaper....When our children were born, I took my wife to the hospital and was ushered out the door. You weren't supposed to be part of the process.

Evelyn: I don't think he knew what to do with babies. He certainly did not take the active child care role as most young fathers do nowadays. He would have if that had been expected of him. It did not really occur to us.

Mutual Decision-making

Nineteen subjects reported that the decision-making was shared in their marriages when it came to major decisions. This was reported as an expectation of the marriage, as a given for these nineteen individuals.

Barbara: Big decisions were never an issue. We'd always sit down and do the positives and the negatives. I always liked challenges. We always decided together.

George: I would say it was just discussion. She would have ideas and I would have ideas, more often than not they were the same, maybe different in detail. Occasionally they would be pretty different and we would chat about it. We never said, "This is a difference, let's talk some more." It was just what we did. We talked about it. If we could not agree, the next day or week we would talk about it more. At a certain point we were in agreement so we would stop talking about it and do it....All of our major decisions were made together.

Gladys: Every decision we have made, we discuss it, weigh it. If it is more important to someone, if one of us believes very much in a particular situation, the other one will listen. If both of us are equal to it we will balance it. When there is a really big decision, we sit down and discuss the pros and cons and if we can't seem to come to a conclusion, we ask for outside advise. We are not afraid to listen to what our friends have done or said. Some of the things that have happened we take for granted and we don't analyze. I would be surprised if George is aware of how we have made some of our decisions. Most of the decisions have been discussed. If one of us have felt really strong about the decision, we will go with the other one.

Ed: I wanted someone that was willing to say, "Yes, I think this is what we ought to do." A shared situation. I knew that early on....I have never made a major purchase without consulting Evelyn. We never

have done it. I've known of people spending fifty thousand dollars on a boat without even consulting. I could not do that because I think it is a mutual, joint decision....We both feel the same way.

Louis: We talk over the situation, try to analyze the minuses and the pluses, try to draw up logical conclusions on which way to go. We share that. It's not her decision or my decision.

Lilly: We always talked about every important decision and we usually came to a consensus. Never had a lot of trouble with that.

Conflict Resolution

When asked about how they handled conflict, ten couples reported that there was an agreed upon level of conflict between them. For three couples avoiding conflict was preferred. For one of those three couples there was an agreement to disagree about almost everything. "Everything", however, was not to include anything major, and conflict was avoided by keeping a constant level of bickering. Bickering over "stupid things," "dumb stuff" was mentioned by seven couples. In the words of one subject, it served to "let off steam." The impression of bickering as a safety valve was corroborated by two of the interraters. Nine couples stated that the conflict between them increased when their children became adolescents and that their children's adolescent years were the most difficult times of their marriages.

Agreed Upon Level of Conflict

Frances: We both have similar temperaments. I don't get angry easily. We've had some fights, usually over stupid things, like politics which I hate. We seldom have any violent disagreements and if we yell at each

other I say, "Fred, this is ridiculous. We can't do anything about this." And it usually passes over. I think we've both tried to keep an even keel.

Irene: We always bickered, but we did it all along while we were going together. I think it is because I am always trying to...Ian is chauvinistic and thinks that a man is better than a woman. He does not say so but it is so obvious. I am always in there trying to hold my own. There is no way I am gonna be put down. I always had that freedom of independence growing up. That might have been one of the reasons he was attracted to me...We have no problem because we lash out at each other all the time. So there is nothing held back.

Ian: She was spunky. We talked a lot when we went out and we had differences, little arguments. Everyone thought, how are they ever gonna get along married if they are arguing all the time. It has been that way but I think we are both Irish and I think there is something to the expression of the "thick mick." We are stubborn....We never kissed and made up, but never went long not speaking over a problem. We would argue it out which I think is good....We shouted a lot, argued. Some people would probably say it was a constant argument, but it did not seem that way to us.

Lilly: Even though we fought, we got along beautifully all the rest of the time. The relationship was punctuated every month or so by a terrific fight. In between we got along great, like when we first met. Since then our relationship has always been like that, always

consistent. When we are alone together everything is fine. We have not fought in years, a cross word now and then.

Bickering

Arlene: I mean we bicker, but we're individuals and we have different ideas and different opinions. We don't really have any serious fights about anything serious. It's stupid, picayune, dumb stuff most of the time. I'm stubborn and arrogant most of the time and he's easy-going and we bicker. But it's not serious.

Al: We argue all the time! We bicker. It's our way of letting off steam. [In a big argument] she'll get mad and not talk for days. She'll slam the door and I'll say, "Slam it again." We're not good at talking things out.

Children as greatest source of conflict

Doreen: Our marriage has been basically the same, but a lot of details have changed since the kids were born. It is different because kids can either make or break a marriage.

Lilly: The only trouble we had was with bringing up the children. We just had a lot of different ideas....We did have a lot of trouble with the boys as they were growing up. We handled it like intelligent, thinking people do. We sought professional help. It was not always very helpful. We did the best we could. That was something we agreed on together as soon as we really knew we were in something we could not handle. We went right away to see someone.

Louis: We got along better each year as the time went on. We did not have as difficult a time as the first two years but it was a difficult time

when the children were teenagers. We had all kinds of serious problems with the two boys.

Frances (who, along with her husband had sought to "keep an even keel"): The most difficult times were our daughter's teen years. The relationship between the three of us was difficult. We had screaming fights. She asserted her individuality and thought we knew nothing.

Bill: The toughest crisis was when our daughter was an adolescent. She was very rebellious - major league. It was very difficult. Barbara is German, very direct. Rules are rules in society and in life....You can't deal with teenagers by increasing the rules. I couldn't convince Barbara not to make it worse and I didn't really try. It was a very, very bitter relationship [between mother and daughter] that has only now begun to thaw....In all of our twenty-eight years of marriage that is the major thing. My approach would be to reason with Barbara for a couple of minutes and then if she didn't agree, I'd say, "Well, screw it. Do it your way. It's wrong but if you want to make her do it, do it." The only thing worse than what we did would have been to disagree. I always said, "The kids will be gone. We'll still be here."

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Significant Findings and Implications

The portrait of a successful marriage. This qualitative study generated a comprehensive picture of the multi-faceted dimensions of the phenomenology of successful marriage. Contrary to the expectations of certain authors (Bernard, 1972; Cunningham, Braiker, & Kelley, 1982; Wills, et al. 1974), marital satisfaction did not have different meanings for husbands than it did for wives. On the other hand, Lewis and Spanier's (1979) concept of threshold variables was supported by the present study. The most significant variables they had reported were: "1. marital expectations, 2. commitment to the marriage and its associated obligations, 3. tolerance for conflict and disharmony, 4. religious doctrine and commitment, 5. external pressures and amenability to social stigma, 6. divorce law and availability of legal aid, 7. real and perceived alternatives" (Lewis & Spanier, 1979, p. 273). In this study, there were four elements which were common to all of the marriages which subjects experienced as successful: expectations of marriage based on family of origin, similarity of values, mutuality, and the strategy of selective understanding. These four elements may be seen as a consolidation of six of Lewis and Spanier's (1979) seven variables. Included in the notion of expectations was commitment to the marriage, attitudes toward divorce, and the role of religion. Couples had worked out tolerable levels of conflict between themselves. Lewis and Spanier's (1979) variable of real and perceived alternatives relates to the strategy of selective understanding which

subjects used to make meaning of their lives together. External pressures and amenability to social stigma did not emerge as a key theme in the data.

All of the subjects based their expectations of marriage on the relationships they had observed while growing up. In addition, all twelve couples shared traditional expectations of marriage. "Traditional" was defined to include a sharing of the role of breadwinner by husband and wife and the couples experienced an increase in sharing over time. Each individual shared similar values with his or her spouse and the couples expressed a sense of mutuality in their interactions. Selective understanding was used as strategy in every couple for making meaning out of self, spouse, and situations. The strategy of selective understanding was found to be the core category, the one which related to the greatest number of categories. Each of the four elements, expectations, values, mutuality, and selective understanding, has implications for marital counseling and will be discussed below. Communication did not emerge as a key determinant and will be discussed first.

Communication. Contrary to the expectations of both the literature and the subjectivity of this investigator, communication did not emerge as a key determinant of successful marriages. The results did, however, support a broad definition of communication to include trust, respect, and understanding as suggested by White et al. (1986). In addition, improved communication was seen as one way in which the relationship had improved over time for seventeen individuals. Birchler (in Yahraes, 1980) had suggested that good communication was open, effective and rewarding. Slightly more than half of the couples (n=7) had worked out their own

definition of good communication, indicating the need for an individualized approach to assessing communication.

The differences found between definitions of good communication varied among the couples in the study rather than between males and females. No consistent pattern of male female differences in communication emerged. This finding of no differences may be viewed from two perspectives. Either no consistent differences between the genders exist, as suggested by Block (1984) and Miller and Mothner (1984). Or the qualitative method was not sensitive to gender differences in communication. This broad, semi-structured interview was not designed to investigate specific communicative behaviors. It did allow for the participants' full expression of what they deemed most important to their marital success. While communication per se was not highlighted, it may be that communication is subsumed under the broader themes of mutuality and understanding. Once again, the fundamental problem of the definition of communication is underscored and we are reminded of Henley's (1973) position that dividing communication into operational bits for the purpose of research may be artificial. More broadly, Yelsma and Brown's (1985) suggestion that sex-role identity is more predictive of differences than is biological sex bears further investigation.

Expectations of marriage. Lewis and Spanier (1979) stressed the influence of parental role models on the developmental process of marriage which begins early in life. The hunch articulated in the statement of subjectivity was that people would learn from observing the couples around them as they grew up. These results confirm the role of premarital

observations of marriage. The marriages in the extended families of origin influenced all of the subjects' expectations of marriage. Positive role models were seen as caring, supportive, and committed. Participants sought to emulate the relationships they had viewed as positive. They sought to avoid falling into what they perceived as the pitfalls of the negative examples they had seen in childhood. Negative relationships were perceived as unfair to one member, unhappy, and lacking in communication.

All subjects expected traditional role distributions with the husband as the breadwinner and the wife as the homemaker. These expectations were also based on the couples they had observed during their childhoods. It was seen, however, that the way participants and many of their parents defined "traditional" distribution of roles was not in terms of a simple male-female dichotomy. Nearly half of the respondents (eleven) expected to share the roles of breadwinner and homemaker when they entered the marriage. Of those who did not expect to share roles, twelve individuals reported that this attitude shifted during the life of the couple towards a more shared view. This shared view of roles included the notions of both husband and wife as breadwinners, as care-givers for children and spouses, and as responsible for household chores. In sum, the majority of couples had or evolved into a shared view of roles in the marital dyad. These findings raise two questions. Is the dichotomous view of traditional marriage a myth propagated in the popular culture by television shows such as "Leave It to Beaver", but not practiced by real families? Or could it be that the shared view of roles existed and evolved only in this white, middle class sample? Future studies

providing comparison with samples of different socioeconomic status will help answer these questions.

Values. The importance of an agreed upon set of values between spouses was seen in all twelve couples. The specific values were not as relevant as was the accord between husband and wife. Nevertheless, there was an overall tone of traditional values such as trust, honesty, integrity, hard work, and fidelity. Some couples attributed these values to a religious upbringing, while others stated that their values were based more on a set of philosophical beliefs. Commitment to the marriage and the attitude that divorce was not an option factored into the values most subjects brought to their marriage. These values reflect the premarital factors highlighted by Lewis and Spanier (1979) which were similarity of social, economic, educational and religious backgrounds. The importance of values is useful in future studies of marital satisfaction, as a focus in pre-marital counseling as well as in trouble-shooting with couples in distress.

Mutuality. The balance between interdependence and independence which emerged from these data was seen by the subjects as essential to the success of their marriage. Mutuality relates to the concepts found in the literature such as intimacy maturity (White et al., 1986), maturity of interdependence (Gilligan, 1982), and Rubin's (1983) broad definition of communication as intimacy, a reciprocal sharing of one another's inner life. The growth towards this balance found in nine of the couples in this sample, supports the theory that couples derive satisfaction from an increase in sharing, in equality, and in activities done together as a couple (Zube, 1982). The commitment to growth seen in this sample supports the emphasis placed

on the relationship of growth to marital satisfaction in the work of Gottman (1979), Mace and Mace (1981), and Noller (1984).

Another component of mutuality expressed in this sample was the importance placed on the spouse. Twenty-three subjects viewed their spouse as the most important person in their life. It may be that this feeling is communicated to the spouse as the positive regard which Barnes et al. (1984) viewed as essential for satisfaction. The attitude that the spouse was the most important person and the growth toward mutuality which evolved over time confirm the need for a developmental approach to a theory of marital therapy noted in the literature (Hare-Mustin, 1981; Moore, 1980; Nadelson et al., 1984; White et al., 1986). Couples appear to develop an increasing sense of both dependence on one another, and independence within the relationship, approaching the stage of development known as individuation-connection (Orlofsky, in White et al., 1986). The "opposite directions" which the pathways of men's and women's development take, rather than creating tension as suggested by Zube (1982), seem to have led these couples toward a balance of separateness and connectedness. Wills et al. (1974) had suggested that marital satisfaction would be greater if men were more affectional and women were more instrumental in their marital interactions. The current study does not support the distinction along gender lines. It does support the basic notion that a balance of instrumental and affectional behaviors in both male and female individuals is related to satisfaction in marriage.

Selective Understanding. "Researchers who use [the qualitative] approach are interested in the ways different people make sense out of their lives" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 29). In this sample, the strategy of making

meaning through a selective understanding of self, spouse, and situations emerged as the core category. It was seen to traverse the themes of expectations, values, communication, sex, and problem-solving. When an individual could give an explanation of a situation which made sense to him or her in terms of background, experience, or the times, the situation was acceptable. This core strategy highlights the need, when intervening with couples, to assess the meaning of events and circumstances for the individuals involved and to assist individuals in understanding themselves and their spouses in terms of their individual histories.

Implications for Marital Counseling

Wilcoxon (1985) stressed the need for research focusing on the healthy aspects of family functioning and for a shift away from the tendency of mental health professionals to pathologize their clients. The diversity of the role of communication, sex, money, and problem-solving styles among the couples in this study attests to the need to broaden our view of what is seen as "healthy." Some of the results challenge commonly held beliefs regarding healthy marital functioning and have implications for both preventive measures as suggested by Markman (1981) and for interventions with couples in distress.

Over half of the couples in this study expressed their own definition of "good communication." For some people, agreeing to disagree, to bicker often was defined as good. Other couples preferred to avoid conflict and found this coping strategy to be most functional as Noller (1984) had suggested some couples might. Similarly, in the areas of both sexual relations and the role of money, couples varied in their view of the importance of

these elements for the success of their marriage. While some couples stressed the importance of a satisfying sexual relationship or financial security, other couples denied that sexual fulfillment or monetary success were necessary components of a successful marriage. In marital therapy with couples comparable to this sample, the psychologist needs to assess with each couple their definition of good communication, satisfying sexual relations, and the importance of financial success. Mace and Mace (1981) stated that conflict avoidant marriages were shallow. Rather than attempting to apply one value to all couples, the therapist needs to respect individual differences, extending to clinicians Lofland and Lofland's (1984) suggestion that researchers respect the culture into which they enter. The marital relationship of each couple may be seen as a culture which has evolved from the shared expectations and values of two individuals, which is mediated by selective understanding and develops toward a balance of interdependence and independence. Beyond those generalizations, more individualized assessment is needed for each couple to determine their priorities regarding communication, sex, and money.

The importance of the influence of the family of origin on the marital relationship has implications for counseling interventions. In treating a couple in marital distress, it is important to examine individuals' experiences in their families of origin as these relate to expectations of marriage and the implicit contract (Sager, 1976) they each bring to the relationship. The examples of marriage which subjects observed in childhood were seen to be either positive, negative, or a mixture of the two. Individuals were seen to strive to avoid or emulate particular individuals they had known. An

awareness of this implicit contract and its influences on expectations and behaviors will assist therapists in helping individuals to clarify the dynamics of their marital relationships.

Another influence on the dynamics of the couples' relationships is the children in the family. Nine couples felt that conflict increased and the greatest difficulties of the marriage were experienced during their children's adolescent years. Preventive measures should be established to provide support and education for parents of adolescents. Some conflicts may be avoided if parents are trained to expect them as a function of raising adolescent children. Enhancing parenting skills may be another way to defuse tension before it begins. For couples experiencing distress, treatment needs to include an assessment of the entire family constellation to determine the possible contribution of adolescent children to the stress between the spouses. Conversely, the possibility that the child is expressing the unspoken conflict of the couple (such as in the couple who tried to maintain "an even keel" but ended up in "screaming fights" when their daughter was in her teens) needs to be explored.

Suggestions for Future Research

The themes which emerged from these data underscore the need for continued qualitative research of marital satisfaction. Several studies could be conducted using the present set of data. Corroboration of these findings could be sought from offspring, family members, and friends of the subjects as suggested by Orden and Bradburn (1968). Analysis of the data from this study could be conducted to compare the responses of males and females in the

twelve themes reported here. Further gender analysis could be conducted of all of the categories which emerged.

The question of the definition of communication is far from resolved. Future studies taking into account the broad definition of communication suggested by the literature and these results are needed to continue the effort to clarify the nature of communication in the marital dyad. Differences both within and between genders and couples need to be investigated.

Equally unanswered is the question of how these particular couples have managed to avoid Rubin's (1983) approach-avoidance dance. These couples seem to have overcome the problem cited by Moffitt et al. (1986) in which males have difficulties maintaining a sense of unity while females find it difficult to find a sense of separation. Research into the basis for establishing and maintaining the mutuality found in this sample is needed to contribute to new definitions of gender as suggested by Miller and Mothner (1984). This sample was limited to white, middle class subjects in the greater Boston area. It would be interesting to replicate the study with a similar population to see if the same or a different configuration of themes would emerge. In addition, comparison of the present findings should be made with samples from different socioeconomic, ethnic, racial and geographic origins. Some of these studies are in progress at Boston College at this time under Mackey and O'Brien. Further comparisons could be made with homosexual couples of long duration. Studies of couples who have been married for a shorter period of time would be useful to explore whether similar themes would emerge in couples married five, ten or fifteen years or if these themes only evolve over time. Additional comparisons could be made with couples

married much longer than the twenty year minimum used for selection in this sample.

Summary

Marital satisfaction for white, middle class professionals is a developmental process based on a set of shared values, and expectations. Couples bring to the marriage a set of expectations based on their experiences in their families of origin. The family of origin influences an individual's sense of what is good or bad about a relationship, how gender roles are distributed, and what a person seeks to avoid or attain in his or her own marriage. People come to understand themselves and their spouses in terms of early experiences and negotiate meaning in their lives through this understanding. This strategy of selective understanding transcends the majority of issues important to a couple's life together. The marital relationship grows toward a balance of interdependence and independence, maintaining a sense of the spouse as the most important person in one's life.

In contrast to these generalizations, an individualized view is needed to assess the importance of sex, money, and communication for each couple. Differences in attitudes toward the role of sex, money and communication emerged between couples rather than along gender lines.

Interventions with couples should include a focus on the common variables of expectations, values, mutuality and understanding. Clinicians should be open to the diverse possibilities for defining success and to assist couples in clarifying success in their own terms. Premarital family history is needed for an increased understanding of the influences of each individual's

family of origin on their expectations of marriage. The contribution of adolescent children to marital conflict cannot be overlooked.

Future research is indicated to corroborate the current findings with similar populations and to compare results with samples of different socioeconomic, racial and ethnic origins. Studies with couples who have been married shorter or longer periods of time than the present sample would explore different stages of marital relationships in the interest of enriching a developmental theory of marital satisfaction.

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Appendix A

Marital Satisfaction: A Qualitative Psychological Analysis

Interview Guide

INTRODUCTION:

Thank you for being in the study. Brief explanation of the project. Read and sign consent form.

Explain structure of the interview:

1. Background information.
2. Your marriage as it was when you were first married and how it has stayed the same as well as how it has changed in terms of roles, expectations, and needs.
3. A look at your own family background and values and how these influenced your marriage.
4. The influence of your parent's marriage on your own marriage in terms of roles, expectations and relating.
5. Your assessment of the important factors in your marriage over time.

BACKGROUND DATA

NAME: _____ DOB: _____

EMPLOYMENT: _____ EDUCATIONAL LEVEL: _____

CHILDREN: NAMES BIRTHDATES

ETHNICITY/RACE: _____ GEOG. ORIGINS: _____

RELIGION: _____

DATE OF MARRIAGE: _____

SPOUSE'S NAME AND BIRTHDATE: _____

INTERVIEW

I. THE RELATIONSHIP

- A. Initial attraction, life circumstances, family reactions.
1. As you look back to the time when you met (spouse), what first attracted you to him/her? What do you think attracted him/her to you?
 - a. What interests did you share?
 - b. How long did you date before deciding to get married?
If short time how were you sure?
 2. How did your family feel and react to (spouse)?
 - a. Tell us about your family's reaction to your marriage.
(feelings of approval or disapproval).
 3. How did (spouse's) family react to the marriage?
 4. What was going on in your life around the time of your marriage - educationally, vocationally, family, etc.?
 5. What kind of role did you see yourself playing in the relationship?
 - a. What about (spouse)'s role? (Expected, actual, changes).
 - b. Did you expect to have to work at the relationship? Why?
- B. Roles, expectations, problem-solving. Issues of relatedness and equity in the beginning, during child-rearing and post child-rearing.
1. Can you tell us how you and (spouse) got along?
 - a. In general?
 - b. How would you describe the communication between you?
 - c. How have you gotten along sexually? in terms of nonsexual intimacy, like touching, hugging?
 - d. What has been important to getting along? Sense of humor?
 2. How did you go about making decisions and solving problems? (Re: work, friends, recreation, etc.)?
 - a. How did you handle differences (values, career, sex, etc.)?

- b. How would you describe your problem-solving style as compared to your spouse's?
 - c. Is there one particular area of conflict which stood out during each of the three phases of your marriage?
 - d. Can you give me some examples of how you faced and dealt with crises (health, financial, etc.)?
3. How did you handle child-rearing responsibilities? (Early, adolescent, now.)
4. How did you feel about your relationship?
- a. What was good, not so good and/or bad about the relationship?
 - b. How much understanding did you feel (spouse) had of you? (differentiation, separateness, etc.)
 - c. How much understanding did you have of (spouse)?
 - d. How sensitive was (spouse) to you? And you to him/her?
 - e. How much respect did you feel (spouse) had for you? And you for him/her?
 - f. How much trust did you feel towards (spouse)?
 - g. How much trust did you think (spouse) felt towards you?
5. Overall, did you feel a sense of fairness in the marriage?
- a. Despite differences did things balance out?
 - b. Do you feel that your ways of solving problems as a couple were generally fair to each partner?
 - c. Were there situations where one of you had more influence than the other (money, friends, recreation, work, etc)?

II. Socioeconomic Influences

How have the following played a part in your life together and how have they affected your marital relationship?

- A. Religion.
- B. Extended families.
- C. Cultural factors including ethnicity and race.
- D. Economic factors, including income.
- E. Other values, beliefs, moral standards, or a motto that fits for you.

III. Parent's Marriage

- A. What were family attitudes toward/experience with divorce?
- B. What do you think you learned about marriage from observing your parents?
 - 1. How did you view your parents' relationship in terms of roles, relatedness and equity?
 - 2. Can you tell me how your parents got along?
 - 3. How did they go about making decisions and solving problems? (Ask for some examples of how a disagreement was solved.)
 - 4. Overall, was there a sense of fairness in their marriage?
 - a. Despite differences did things balance out in their marriage?
 - b. Did you feel that their ways of solving problems were generally fair to each partner? Were there situations where one of them had more influence than the other (money, friends, recreation, work, etc.)?
- C. What are some important similarities in your marriage compared to your parents' marriage?
 - 1. What are some important differences?

IV. Participants' Views of the Marriage Over Time and Wrap Up

- A. As you look back what were the personal qualities of (spouse) that kept you together?
 - 1. What other factors in the relationship kept you together?
- B. Do you think that your marriage has changed or has the relationship remained pretty much the same from the beginning?
 - 1. How have your expectations changed or remained the same?
 - a. How does what you are currently looking for in the relationship differ from your earlier expectations? (needs, roles, relatedness, communication)
- C. What words best describe what (spouse) means to you now?
 - 1. In the past?
- D. Are there any other things that you wish to add that were critical issues/factors that kept you in the relationship? significant events, periods of assessment &/or renewal?
- E. Is there anything else that you think would be important for us to understand about your marriage, yourself or your spouse?

THANK YOU!

Appendix BInformation and Consent Form

I understand that the interview sessions with Christine Carney Demment are part of the research for her doctoral dissertation under the direction of Dr. Bernard O'Brien of Boston College. The purpose of the research project is to better understand how some people keep their marriages together for at least twenty years. The purpose of the session(s) is to share my personal ideas, feelings, and life experiences concerning my marriage.

I understand that the interview will be tape recorded. I realize that I may choose not to respond to any particular questions and that I may request to listen to the tape. The information obtained from this tape will become part of the research material for this study. My identity will be kept confidential and will not be revealed in any reports generated by this study.

I recognize that these interviews are not designed or intended to be psychotherapy or treatment of any sort. I realize that I may ask about various aspects of the study, and that further information on the project will be provided at my request.

I have read this Information and Consent Form and agree to be a part of this research study.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Witness: _____ (Interviewer)