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An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Exploring the Experience of Marital Tension for Jordanians Residing in the United Kingdom

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Abstract

Marital tension is a covert and insidious form of conflict, that often occurs in almost all marriages. Its subtle occurrence may often result in it being overlooked, however its repercussions can have a long-term impact on marital quality, stability and satisfaction, as well as the wellbeing of the spouses. Some of the negative emotions associated with marital tension may include resentment, irritation and frustration, which may vary in frequency and intensity. These may arise due to disagreements, disappointment, and irritations in the marriage. Similar to its insidious and overlooked nature, the literature depicting marital tension is scarce worldwide and more specifically, is almost non-existent within a Jordanian context. Therefore, this doctoral research, aims to address this gap through exploring the lived experience of marital tension for Jordanians residing in the UK.

For this research, a homogeneous sample of eight participants were recruited, and data from the semi-structured interviews were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Findings revealed three themes overarching ten subthemes. The emerging themes were as follows: '*Facing initial challenges of marital tension*', *Engaging with marital tension*' and '*Actively attempting to resolve the tension'*. The analysis revealed unique insights into the experience of marital tension, whilst highlighting cultural facets present within the experience. Participants described the transitional shifts experienced as part of marital tension, and the new dynamics introduced within the marital relationship. Participants also shared a sense of feeling stuck in enduring various challenges, whilst experiencing ongoing marital tension. In spite of that, all participants seemed to have a shared motivation to resolve martial tension.

This study contributes to enriching the knowledge base and practice within the field of Counselling Psychology, by offering novel insights into the lived experience of marital tension, as well as addressing cultural sensitivity and autonomy to an ethnic minority group.

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List of Abbreviations

APA	**American Psychological Association**
BPS	**British Psychological Association**
CoP	**Counselling Psychology**
HCPC	**Health and Care Professions Council**
IPA	**Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**
ONS	**Office for National Statistics**
UEL	**University of East London**
UK	**United Kingdom**

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Overview

This chapter provides an introduction to this thesis. Initially, it outlines the motivation for exploring the subject matter, as well as its significance within the field of Counselling Psychology (CoP). Subsequently, it includes an introduction to the personal and professional account of the researcher, addressing how interest was ignited in carrying out doctoral level research into the experience of marital tension for Jordanians residing in the United Kingdom (UK). Building on that, the following section simultaneously addresses the positioning of the researcher as well as the epistemological underpinnings for the chosen methodology. Following this, the relevance and contribution of this study to CoP is addressed, as well as the research aim and objectives being presented. Finally, the chapter concludes with a description of the overall structure of the thesis.

1.2 Research Impetus and Significance

Marital tension is a phenomenon that regularly occurs in almost all marriages (Birditt et al., 2017; Manalel et al., 2019; Timmons et al., 2017) and has been defined as a covert form of conflict, which appears insidiously and subtly (Birditt et al., 2017. Due to its understated nature, it may often be overlooked. However, it is not free of repercussions, as it may leave the spouses harbouring negative thoughts and emotions over time, particularly towards the relationship and one another (Manalel et al., 2019). Consequently, the role of marital tension, although subtle, may have a long-term impact on the quality of marital satisfaction, the mental and physical health of the couple and possibly, result in the dissolution of the marriage (Birditt et al., 2017; Manalel et al., 2019). Essentially, marital dissolution comes into effect, when marital tension and conflict reach an intolerable stage (Cochrane, 1993).

Some of the negative emotions associated with marital tension may include resentment, irritation and frustration, which arise due to disagreements, disappointment, and irritations in the marriage (Birditt et al., 2017). They may also be aggravated by financial and sexual struggles, bearing children, barriers to communication, and adapting to each other's differences (Barris, 2021). Those differences may include beliefs, values, desires, or interests, as well as incompatible goals or means of achieving those goals (Folger et al., 1984). Those differences might introduce power struggles, exacerbating marital tension and criticism (Hunt, 2014). Despite the subdued influence of marital tension, the means by which the couple manage it may counteract the negative impact of tension on the marriage and allow for it to be utilised to strengthen the marital connection (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2000).

Managing marital tension goes beyond the scope of immediate ratification or momentary resolution, as it carries a ripple effect on marital functioning and the development of intimate closeness, thus lowering the risk of divorce (Bodenmann, 1997, 2005) as well as influencing marital satisfaction (Gottman & Levenson, 1992). Hence, managing marital conflict, distress, and tension are the main pillars in maintaining a marriage (Gottman, 1994).

1.2.1 Gaps in the Literature

Despite the prominent role and frequent occurrence of marital tension, it remains an under researched phenomenon, with it appearing to be overshadowed by literature on overt forms of conflict. Seemingly, the extant literature offers an extensive and holistic understanding of overt forms of conflict and the various dyadic developments experienced by the spouses.

Marital tension, on the other hand, has not captured a similar level of attention from scholars, as the phenomenon has either been associated with other forms of covert conflict, such as distress and dissonance (Barris, 2021; Birditt et al., 2017; Choi & Marks, 2008; Manalel et al., 2019; Van Wijngaarden et al., 2004), or explored in relation to its impact on other phenomena, such as career, marital longevity, satisfaction or quality as well as parenting and physical and mental health (Barris, 2021; Birditt et al., 2017; DeLongis & Preece, 2002; Manalel et al., 2019; Martire et

al., 2018; McCoy et al., 2014; O'Brien et al., 2009; Piftman, 1994). Evidently, the literature was deemed scant in exploring the phenomenon qualitatively, more specifically from a phenomenological lens, as no other scholars have explored the subjective lived experience of marital tension, within the chosen demographic for this study. This is particularly prominent within the field of CoP, as it contributes to addressing this noticeable gap in the literature, as well as expand diversity and inclusion of an ethnic minority group, both within research and practice.

1.2.2 The Research Origins: A Personal Context

My personal interest in this topic originates from my experience as a trainee counselling psychologist, as well as my position within my family, originally from Jordan. Throughout my second and third years of training, I worked with couples where I was immersed in the process and observation of dyadic interactions. The most prevailing form of interaction, which was present in almost all of the couples that I worked with, was tension. However, this was not a foreign phenomenon for me, as I had witnessed it amongst married couples in my immediate and extended family, as well as friends, from a young age up until the present time. I have noticed the intricate, subversive and somewhat staggering influence that marital tension has, not only on a dyadic level, but also, on an individual level, for both spouses. I have also witnessed the lingering counterblast that it may have on future disagreements to come, somewhat acting as a frame of reference by which the couple interact with one another. Building on that, I have also become aware that culturally, everything has to happen behind closed doors and a façade needs to be maintained, which has further intrigued my curiosity as to how marital tension is experienced and managed by the spouses. With that in mind, I began considering how this form of covert conflict, can, in fact, shape the means of perceiving as well as relating to the partner. Holding that

curiosity in mind, I began to explore the literature covering marital tension, and found that similar to its understated and insidious nature (Manalel et al., 2019), it is actually a much overlooked phenomenon. Nevertheless, I was not entirely sailing in unchartered waters, for as illustrated in Chapter Two: Literature review, marital tension has to a certain extent been explored. However previous studies have not addressed the research question nor investigated the chosen demographic for this study.

1.2.3 The Positioning of the Researcher

Positionality holds a central value in reflexive practice, as it visualises any potential power imbalances in the relationship present between the participant and researcher. It also provides an understanding as to where the researcher is situated and the means by which they may impact on the co-construction of the knowledge (Day, 2012). My position is one of an "insider" as well as "outsider" researcher, in this study. On the one hand, I am Jordanian and have been residing in the UK for the past eight years of my life, whilst on the other, I am not married and therefore, have not experienced marital tension first-hand. Being an insider researcher facilitates the establishment of trust, acceptance and openness, thus alleviating suspicion or fear (Benstead et al., 2018). However, I was aware that this might lead participants to make assumptions about my knowledge, thus may not describe their experience in intricate detail. Yet, I was also aware that being an outsider researcher, may have led to them perceiving the need to elaborate further upon their experience. Hence, being in the space in between introduces a dialectical approach to the complexity of similarity and differences, which allowed for the exploration of multi-layered complexity of human experiences (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Specifically, this dual position has equipped me with unique knowledge about cultural practices and values present in a Jordanian household, as well as placed me in an unfamiliar territory when it comes to the

phenomenon itself. With that in mind, I was aware of the possibility of slipping into my own assumptions based on previous experiences and knowledge that I held. More specifically, this introduces a "role conflict" where subjective judgement and assumptions based on personal experience may intervene (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007, p. 70). Therefore, as most research is accompanied by a set of assumptions (Willig, 2013), I utilised a reflective diary in order to attempt to bracket some of those assumptions.

Throughout this study I embraced a constructivist position, according to which the meaning making of experiences, and the reality they participate in, is constructed by individuals (Charmaz, 2006). This in turn, embraces a relativist ontological position, which posits that multiple realities can be constructed subjectively according to individuals' experiences, perspectives and interactions with others (Ponterotto, 2005). With that in mind, constructivism encapsulates the idea that reality is not discovered, but rather created in one's mind (Schwandt, 1998). Hence, constructivism embraces a hermeneutical approach, where deeper reflection is necessary to bring hidden meaning to the surface, through an interactive dialogue between the researcher and participants (Ponterotto, 2005). Thus, considering the phenomenological, hermeneutic and ideographic nature of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith et al., 2009), it was deemed as an appropriate method of analysis. This is due to the fact that, I was able to make sense of my participants' meaning making of their reality, from a unique position of an insider as well as an outsider researcher. Upon reflection on my position as a CoP, I found that the above epistemological, ontological and methodological positions, align well with my own position in terms of research, practice and my own perception on the nature of reality.

1.3 The Jordanian Context

Jordan is considered as one of the Arab Middle Eastern countries that fall under the criteria of collectivist cultures, where individuals are tightly knit to the identity and values of their cultures (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2005). However, the notion of categorising societies as either collectivist or individualistic has been recently criticised by scholars when considering the multifaceted complexities that encompass cultural ideologies (Al-Hassan et al., 2021; Coon and Kemmelmeier, 2001). For example, the Taiwanese culture has been described as both individualistic as well as collectivist due to the adoption of practices from both sides of the coin (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2002), yet, there has been a general consensus that the Jordanian culture is considered as a collectivist one (Hofstede, 2021). Hence, whilst it is important to avoid generalisations, yet within the scope of this research the adopted presumption is that Jordan is to a large extent a collectivist society. With that in mind, it is important to highlight the values and perceptions held about the institution of marriage within this society. For instance, it holds an assumption of perpetuity (Waite & Gallagher, 2000), and is seen as a lifelong contract binding not only the couple (Fatima & Ajmal, 2012), but their families as well (Barakat, 2000). Consequently, divorce is considered a taboo in the Arab culture and hence, in order to ensure longevity in the marriage, a set of rituals, formal procedures are present (El-Saadani, 2006). This may contribut to exerting a heavier strain on the couple to sustain their marriage (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2005). Prioritising others is another common practice in the Jordanian culture, which may result in building strong and co-dependent relationships (Hofstede, 2021). Therefore, considering all the above factors, a unique perspective to the experience of marital tension is introduced within a collectivist context, as opposed to an individualistic one.

1.3.1 The Jordanian Population in the UK

According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the total number of Jordanians residing in the UK is approximately 6000 individuals (ONS, 2021). Moreover, the total percentage of Arabs, including Jordanians, comprises 3.7% of the UK population, and are commonly placed under the miscellaneous category of "other" (Statista, 2021). Despite the unique attributes introduced by each nation separately, the tendency to cluster Arabs into one category may be due to their geographic location (Ronen & Shenkar, 1985), or the commonalities found amongst their societal practices, values and norms (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2002). This in turn, further emphasises the importance of giving this ethnic minority recognition, which will be achieved in this study.

1.4 Relevance and Contribution of the Study to Counselling Psychology

This study is aimed at providing an original contribution to the field of CoP, both in terms of knowledge as well as practice. As aforementioned, there is a distinct gap in the literature when focusing solely on the experience of marital tension and the means by which it is managed, specifically by those of a Jordanian ethnicity. Therefore, this study will be the first to provide an in-depth understanding of this phenomenon, whilst addressing the cultural sensitivity and autonomy for this demographic.

This is particularly prominent, as the ethos of CoP, highlights a moral and ethical responsibility to focus on the expansion of diversity and inclusion of ethnic minorities, both in knowledge and practice (BPS, 2017b, 2019). It is encouraged within this field, to hold a pioneering position in exploring potential opportunities to contribute towards a more "inclusive society" (Tribe & Bell, 2018, p.117). Given the experiences of this particular demographic group are under-researched, this study will contribute to community empowerment for individuals from this ethnic minority group, by providing

space and opportunity for them to voice their experience of marital tension. It will maintain a balance between respecting the needs, autonomy and cultural values of participants, whilst succeeding in exploring the experience of marital tension.

Focusing on the role of culture in a therapeutic context is of primary importance (Eleftheriadou, 2010; Madathil & Benshoff, 2008), as there is a general sense of inhibition towards addressing cultural issues within therapeutic settings (Maxie et al., 2006). This is particularly important within the focal demographic, as culture is considered a part of their identity (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2005). Notably, unique cultural dynamics can be introduced into the therapy room, which might play a role in the development of the therapeutic relationship. Consequently, this research will enable practitioners to be aware of cultural and diverse knowledge in order to practice sensitively and mindfully with this population.

The contribution offered by this study is not only limited to cultural insights and giving a voice to an ethnic minority, for it will also offer psychological insights into the experience of marital tension and how it is managed. This is particularly prominent, considering the growing impact of marital tension on marital quality, satisfaction, dissonance and dissolution (Birditt et al., 2017; Cochrane, 1993; Manalel et al., 2019). Marital tension also influences family dynamics as well as parenting, thus carrying a ripple effect not only on a dyadic level, but also, on the family as a whole (McCoy et al., 2014), which further highlights the importance of focusing on this phenomenon. In sum, this study will contribute to knowledge regarding intricate dyadic dynamics around marital tension as well as the means of managing it, which in turn, will inform therapeutic interventions when working with married Jordanian individuals as well as couples, in the UK.

The richer the knowledge pertaining to complex insights into the lived experience of marital tension, the more informed the therapeutic interventions will be. This is particularly imperative, as the scientist-practitioner paradigm within the field of CoP, places both knowledge and practice at a central location (Blair, 2010; Strawbridge & Woolfe, 2010), through clinically applying research-based knowledge within therapeutic work (Jones & Mehr, 2007). Seemingly, this study has the potential to reveal new knowledge, which will contribute to the evidence based practice of counselling psychologists and other practitioners.

1.5 Research Aim and Objectives

It was evident following an extensive literature review that this study will precede in exploring the lived experience of marital tension, from the perspective of an ethnic minority in the UK. Its aim is to explore this phenomenon, from the perspective of eight Jordanian individuals, who have been married to spouses from the same nationality for up to five years, and are residing in the UK. Hence, a detailed and deeper understanding of the perceptions associated with the experience of marital tension will be achieved, whilst providing a clear overview of the prevalence of this phenomenon within this demographic. The study will be carried out from a phenomenological-hermeneutic stance, evoking a double-hermeneutic, whereby the participants make sense of their experience of this phenomenon within their world, and the researcher, in turn, makes sense of their sense making process. All of the above will be achieved through the analytic approach of IPA, which will be explained in depth in Chapter Three: Methodology. It should be mentioned that the experience of marital tension in this thesis is investigated within the context of heterosexual relationships.

To address the aim outlined above, a research plan consisting of a set of objectives was utilised as follows:

1. Conducting in-depth phenomenological qualitative research to allow for the complexity of the subjective experience of marital tension to emerge.

2. Uncovering means of management and patterns of communication and coping with tension.

3. Conducting the research using semi-structured interviews, in order to capture insights into the subjective experiences, feelings, meaning making and interpretation of the phenomenon in question.

4. Conducting the research within a Jordanian context, thus allowing for cultural values and practices to be uncovered.

Ultimately, the anticipated outcome from this qualitative study is to encourage awareness, and bring new insights into the experience of marital tension for UK based Jordanians. It will also address cultural complexities that may arise for this demographic, all of which would be deemed valuable to the field of CoP and other pertinent disciplines.

1.5.1 Research Question

This study is aimed at addressing the following research question and sub-question:

1. How do Jordanians experience marital tension?

    - How do Jordanians manage marital tension?

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

Each chapter in this thesis encompasses important details that help in shaping this research. **Chapter Two** contains a literature review, starting from a wider view on marriage in general and subsequently, focusing on differences between collectivist and individualistic cultures, paying particular attention to marital dynamics within a

Jordanian context. This is followed by an extensive review of the knowledge around marital tension and means of managing it. **Chapter Three** provides a detailed account of the methodology, introducing the reader to the research design, epistemological underpinnings, paradigms within CoP, ethical considerations as well as the method of IPA. **Chapter Four** presents the analysis of the collected data, and **Chapter Five** provides a discussion of the findings, as well as a final review of these in relation to the research questions, aims and objectives. Lastly, it concludes with addressing the limitations, implications and future directions.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

Marriage, as a leading human institution, plays a pivotal role in the emotional and physical wellbeing of individuals (Stutzer & Frey, 2006). It is seen as a gateway towards building familial relations and bearing children (Bano et al., 2013), especially in collectivist societies, such as Jordan (Abu Baker, 2003; Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2011). This is due to the fact that it holds with it cultural, religious and social weight, to provide and determine the rights and obligations of the couple as an entity (Olubenga, 2018). As part of marital dynamics, marital tension occurs almost inevitably (Birditt et al., 2017). It encompasses a wide array of covert forms of negative emotions, cognitions and perceptions within the marital relationship (Manalel et al., 2019), such as resentment, irritation and frustration (Birditt et al., 2017). Consequently, as it manifests in covert forms of negative emotions, it may be insidious and overlooked, thus resulting in both spouses harbouring negative affect and cognitions towards one another (Manalel et al., 2019). Therefore, managing marital tension holds a pivotal role in the maintenance of the marriage (Gottman, 1994), as it may carry a ripple effect onto marital quality, closeness, satisfaction and longevity (Gottman & Levenson, 1992).

This chapter presents a critical and comprehensive review of the current literature on marital tension and how it is managed, with the aim of ensuring that this study is grounded in the most relevant research. It provides a clear understanding of what is known about the phenomenon in question, through a descriptive and critical overview of previous research. Also, a critical appraisal is conducted regarding the methodological approaches of previous research.

A mind-map of relevant key words was constructed and used as guidelines throughout the search process, as recommended by Shaw (2012). These included: "marriage", "marital tension", "Arab marriage", "Jordanian marriage", "collectivist culture", "marital distress", "marital irritability", "marital satisfaction", "marital coping" and "marital communication".

In light of the value placed on understanding the unique lived experiences of individuals within the field of CoP, this topic introduces its psychological importance through its scarcity in prior research, as well as its relevance to theory and practice. This is pertinent considering the phenomenological and humanistic origins within CoP, as well as its relational stance when interacting with human distress in applied psychology (Jones & Nicholas, 2016). Accordingly, papers rooted in the broader setting of marital tension, particularly within collectivist cultures were explored using various search engines, including: PsychINFO, EBSCO and Google Scholar. However, as electronic databases are not considered the only sources to retrieve information (Griffiths & Norman, 2005), further relevant sources and publications were considered for review from the library services at the University of East London (UEL). Consequently, the search revealed a few book chapters and articles focused on marital tension and its impact on marital functioning, as well as the physical and emotional wellbeing of the spouses. After reviewing a wide array of literature, a few studies were chosen within a microscopic view of the area of research interest. Further details on the search strategy and criteria utilised within this study can be found under Appendix A.

This literature search was deemed challenging due to the scarcity of resources focusing on this particular phenomenon, more specifically within the demographic of the Jordanian community in the UK. This highlights the current gap in the knowledge,

particularly within CoP. As a result, the focus of research was expanded towards existing literature surrounding this topic, as well as relevant fields and terms of research. Also, whilst there was a focus on resources published following the year 2000 in an attempt to remain up to date with the current knowledge, the literature review did not adhere strictly to this timeline, as it was found that further essential and relevant studies were published prior to this millennium.

The following sections of the literature review will address the various perspectives and values held about the institution of marriage, particularly within individualistic and collectivist cultures, and more specifically within Jordan. This is followed by an in-depth critical review of the literature addressing marital tension and the means of managing it.

2.1 Marriage

Marriage is one of the leading institutions that play a pivotal role in the emotional and physical wellbeing of individuals (Stutzer & Frey, 2006). Its definition has seen many shifts and debates throughout the past century, due to it portraying different faces in various cultures and societies (Coontz, 2005). Regarding cross-cultural and historic views on marriage, it has been rendered challenging to allocate a one-size-fits all definition for marriage as a social construct (Monsma, 2014). For example, the Royal Anthropological Institute of Britain described marriage as a union between man and woman, so long as their children are seen as the legitimate offspring of both spouses (Coontz, 2005). Failing to encompass the diverse phenomenon of marriage, debates continued to ensue by professionals, such as Professor Nock (1998), who introduced various dimensions to marriage, including portraying it as a voluntary, heterosexual and monogamous act. Moreover, traditional gender roles of men being the breadwinners and women as housewives were highlighted at the core of marriage.

However, these notions received lower social consensus, as modernism is challenging hetero-normative practices, gender inequality and considerations of divorce (Hall, 2006). This is reflected in the work of Noller and Fitzpatrick (1990), who pointed out that the conceptions of traditional gender roles are slowly fading away, since the expectation of a supportive spouse now extends to being psychologically present and attentive to each other's worries and anxieties.

In essence, marriage within western societies has shifted from normative definitions with a reduced focus on economic affiliation and more towards sentimental and romantic value, highlighting the importance of gender and sexuality in defining marriage (Monsma, 2014). Hence more recently marriage has been defined as a long-term relationship between two individuals, bound together by the romantic sentiments they hold for one another (Coontz, 2005; Røsand et al., 2012). Additionally, other scholars, such as Olubenga (2018), have highlighted the institution of marriage as a vital form of relationship within societies, as it holds cultural, religious and social validation for the relationship.

2.2 Individualistic Versus Collectivistic Cultures

Culture can be defined as a collection of assumptions, values, beliefs, perceptions about life and others, as well as behavioural principles, shared amongst a group of individuals (Spencer-Oatey, 2012). Moreover, it provides individuals with a sense of identity, the opportunity to develop relationships (Obeidat et al., 2012) and presents insights on how individuals function in their world (Brake et al., 1995). Consequently, this may play a role in one's interpretation of their social and behavioural interactions for themselves and others (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004), as well as the means by which they relate to one another (Triandis, 1995).

A collectivist culture encompasses a society through which individuals are integrated into cohesive in-groups from birth, who are tightly knit through a strong sense of loyalty (Hofstede, 2001). An individualistic culture, depicts a society that values autonomy and independence, over adhering to in-group norms (Triandis, 2001). Thus, culture can hold a fundamental role in orchestrating marital dynamics (Dion & Dion, 1996; Wong & Goodwin, 2009), as those from individualistic and collectivistic cultures may have opposing views on experiences, that at face value, may appear similar to one another. Ultimately, culture can play a pivotal role in the nuptial experience, in that the level of satisfaction of the spouses, may potentially depend on whether cultural obligations and expectations are met (Lucas et al., 2008). Therefore, identifying with an individualistic or collectivistic culture, might shape how marriage is perceived as well as the level of satisfaction (Aniciete & Soloski, 2011). For example, when taking a closer look at individualistic cultures, it would appear that maintaining a level of individuality within a relationship is imperative (Byrd, 2009), that is, individual expression and personal autonomy are encouraged (Hagger et al., 2014). Hence, there might be instances where one spouse engages in self-indulgent activities, prioritising themselves over the other (Lucas et al., 2008).

Collectivist societies, on the other hand, depend on their in-groups (e.g. families and communities), whilst prioritising their goals and actions of their according to the norms of these in-groups (Mills & Clark, 1982). Thus, the needs of one's spouse or other family members are prioritised over one's own personal needs (Umana-Taylor & Fine, 2003), as interdependence and group belonging are encouraged (Buunk et al., 2010; Imada & Yussen, 2012). Hence, engaging interdependently with the customs set out by the group as a collective is highly encouraged within such cultures (Lykes & Kemmelmeier, 2014).

With the occurrence of marital dissonance, collectivists favour mediation strategies for resolving disagreements (Leung, 1997). For example, in Arab cultures, individuals cannot be fully independent from their family of birth, thus they tend to intervene and suggest solutions for the marital tension to desist (Myers et al., 2005). This is reinforced by the notion that family continues to hold a pivotal role within Arab societies, amongst all generations and both genders (Rashad et al., 2005). In fact, cultural values impact on the management of relationships. Cross-cultural research on individualism versus collectivism, proposes that there are cultural differences in the patterns of mating (Triandis et al., 1995). For instance, intimate relationships and marriages in individualistic societies are considered as avenues for self-development and expression (Dion & Dion, 1993). However, collectivist societies value interdependence as a reflection of the self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). For instance, the relationships with parents, in-laws and siblings are given more weight than connecting with the partner (Dion & Dion, 1993).

Identifying cultural values may allow for a deeper understanding of marital interpersonal dynamics, and whilst it is imperative, it is also important to highlight the limitations of dichotomously clustering a complex interpersonal relationship such as marriage, into two cultural groups. This is essential considering the fact that cultural, marital and familial dynamics are continuously evolving on a societal as well as individual level, leading perhaps to the integration of both individualist and collectivist orientations, within the same society (Bornstein, 2019; Lansford et al., 2021). A progressive view on cultural orientation is the acknowledgement of the ever-changing social transformations, considering the complex intricacies that exist within cultural groups (Fung et al., 2017; Wong et al., 2018). Moreover, individualistic and collectivist cultures have been historically viewed as polar opposites, when in fact they are

considered as orthogonal dimensions, whereby increased levels of one dimension does not necessarily result in decreased levels of the other and vice versa (Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2001). However, it is noteworthy to mention, that patterns within cultures can persevere for centuries and sometimes can transform within decades (Hamamura, 2012; Nisbett et al., 2001), yet the integration of globalisation, technological uprising, shift in gender roles and urbanisation, can contribute to altering social and cultural orientations (Bornstein 2019; Lansford et al., 2021). With that in mind, observing societal and social constructs through one common cultural lens (i.e individualistic vs collectivistic), can create discrepancies when attempting to encapsulate the uniqueness of interpersonal and societal dimensions (Oyserman et al., 2002). This is particularly prominent within cultures consisting of cross-cultural subgroups, such as Jordan for example, which consists of Bedouins, Circassians, Armenians, Palestinians, Syrians, Iraqis, Yemenis, Sudanese, Somalians as well as both Islamic and Christian religions (minority rights, 2020). Ultimately, focusing on ethnic groups as a whole, introduces the risk of overgeneralisation when paying attention to the similarities and neglecting the variability amongst subgroups (Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2001).

There is a rising shift in the development of modernisation in collectivist societies (Giddens, 1992), which can occur more frequently for individuals who interact with different cultural orientations and social pressures. This is otherwise known as acculturation (Gibson, 2001), which involves individuals who have migrated from their country of origin and settled indefinitely in a new country (Schwartz et al., 2010). This may present challenges to the cultural and personal identity of the individual (Anand & Cochrane, 2005). However, despite these developments in day-to-day life, this cannot be generalised, as some attributes may not be impacted upon by

modernisation, yet can coexist with modern-day characteristics (Wong & Goodwin, 2009). This notion was supported by Kagitcibasi (2005), who asserted that not all collectivist values will be altered by modernisation, as close ties, bonds, and connections within the family can remain unchanged. This is particularly the case with Arab societies, including Jordan in that the composition of their culture steers towards ensuring that societal values and practices remain at the forefront (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2005; Faragallah et al., 1997), regardless of the physical distance that one may travel from, as they tend to generally rebuild the cultural framework that they are familiar with (Abu Baker, 2003). Moreover, culture holds a key role in the identity of an individual from a minority group (Alcock et al., 1979). For example, acculturation through the English language for Arab immigrants in the UK, has no influence over the primary Arabic cultural identity, as they are adamant on maintaining their cultural roots (Alawfi, 2019). This is particularly the case for first generation immigrants, whereby a more uniform set of values, traditions and norms are reflected in their identities (Nagel, 2002). Moreover, multicultural integration is encouraged in the UK and was legislated as part of the Equality Act (2010), which protects from discriminatory behaviour in the wider society, specifically in the workplace (GOV.UK, 2015). Despite the fact that Arabs maintain loyalty towards their cultural roots, they also engage in attempting to learn cultural values present in the UK as well as learn the English language, to ensure better quality of life (Alawfi, 2019).

2.3 Marriage within Arab Collectivist Cultures

Arab Middle Eastern cultures, including Jordan (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2011), fall under the criteria of collectivist societies, as they are tightly knit to the identity and underpinnings of collectivist cultural values (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2005). Within these cultures, marriage differs from other romantic relationships in that it holds an

assumption of perpetuity (Waite & Gallagher, 2000), where it is seen as a lifelong economic and social contract binding the couple together (Fatima & Ajmal, 2012), not only as individuals, but their families as well (Barakat, 2000). It is also considered as a holy custom with set norms (Marshall, 2003), which includes rituals and formal procedures, in order to ensure longevity and protection against the termination of the marriage (El-Saadani, 2006). This is highly emphasised, with divorce being considered a taboo in Arab cultures, particularly for women, as the success of their marriage reflects directly on their own success as individuals (El-Saadani, 2006). This, in turn, may introduce unique and challenging dynamics for Arabs, putting a heavier strain on the couple to sustain their marriage (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2005).

Also, cohabitating before marriage is greatly disapproved of in the traditional sense (Abu Baker, 2003) hence, being married is the only socially acceptable means for sex and parenting (Dejong et al., 2005; Onsy & Amer, 2014). It is, thus, seen as a cultural and prestigious rite of passage into adulthood, in order to gain recognition and acceptance as a couple engaging in a sexual relationship and bearing children (Rashad et al., 2005). This is particularly prevalent in the Jordanian society, as honour-based crimes and ideologies are perpetuated within its society (Eisner & Ghuneim, 2013). To further elaborate on this, honour comes in two forms: the male honour and female's. The former is maintained through asserting control over family matters particularly when it comes to the females in the family, how they conduct themselves and engage with males, so as to have the ability to defend his family and clan. Female honour is reflected through the woman maintaining her chastity until marriage (Warrick, 2005). Thus, both forms of honour are interconnected in the sense that if the female compromises her sexual purity by engaging in any form of physical act with another male, then both the male and female honour are lost (Sen, 2005). This in turn

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leads to shaming the entire family which can only be rectified through an honour crime whereby ending the life of the member who presumably brought shame over the family (Shalhoub- Kevorkian, 2003; Venema & Bakker, 2004). In other words, the obligation and control of female behaviour, particularly sexually, is given to the dominating male figures in the female's life, usually the father and then the husband later in life (Bates & Rassam, 2001). This view is dominated by collectivist and patriarchal views present in the Jordanian society, whereby an obligation to protect female chastity dictates the social norms (Eisner & Ghuneim, 2013).

Although honour-based ideologies have dominated and shaped norms, beliefs and traditions within the Jordanian society (Eisner & Ghuneim, 2013), there has been an emergence of modernised views in recent years, whereby the patriarchal system is gradually weakening with a claim for women's liberation (Al-Badayneh, 2012). This gradual shift in modernisation is taking place with an increase in women's educational levels, thus providing them with financial independence (Miles, 2002). This is particularly imperative, considering the fact that the women's source of income is traditionally from their father or husband (Kelly & Breslin, 2010).

2.3.1 The Jordanian Culture

As a collectivist society, loyalty and commitment goes beyond the immediate family into extended family and relationships. Accordingly, in the Jordanian culture loyalty is paramount beyond any other societal rules or practices, and prioritising others is a common practice, resulting in the development of strong and co-dependent relationships (Hofstede, 2021). Also, as with the rest of the Arab cultures, the Jordanian one maintains a strong standing with its traditional beliefs and behaviour, leaving limited room for unconventional ideologies (Barakat, 1993). Thus, individuals within this society hold great respect for cultural values and traditions, orienting their

perception and behaviour around social norms (Hofstede, 2021). Also, family reputation and honour are given a pivotal role (Ratrout & Attar, 2002).

2.3.2 Marriage in Jordan

Essentially, the topic of marital tension within a Jordanian context has never been examined previously, however, there have been a few studies oriented around marital dynamics. For example, Adely (2016) conducted a study with the aim of investigating the beliefs of men and women about compatibility and love within a Jordanian marital context. A key focus within this study was attempting to understand the perspective of participants about the uprising phenomenon of delayed marriages, views about mating rituals, cultural expectations within gender roles, interfamilial involvement and socioeconomic status. Seemingly, a lot of emphasis was placed on compatibility rather than romantic love, as well as an aversion towards having an arranged marriage as opposed to a love marriage. Moreover, it was noticeable that practical issues, such as financial stability, familial compatibility and shared expectations, were at the forefront of what qualified as essential for achieving compatibility.

In a study conducted by El-Dine (2018), the financial dynamics within marriage and the limitations that accompany it in Jordan, were explored. The study described marriage as a 'financial investment for men and a livelihood for women', where financial stability exerted direct impact on the masculinity of the husband (p. 439). Another study explored the relationship between psychological stress and marital adjustment among Jordanian working mothers, as well as its impact on raising children (AlZyoud, 2020). Marital adjustment was identified as constructive interactions between the spouses, based on romantic love, affection and satisfaction. In a study conducted by Smadi (2017), the levels of marital satisfaction in relation to the number of years of marriage, number of children, employment, level of education and family

income were explored. It was found that only the educational level as well as family income were the determining factors for levels of marital satisfaction.

Studies have also explored sexual functioning for Jordanian couples, such as Abu Ali et al. (2008), who investigated sexual dysfunction of married Jordanian women, revealing its commonality amongst diabetic women. Further studies explored communication patterns between couples. For example, Alkhazaleh and Younes (2015) conducted a study to explore the relationship between self-disclosure and management of marital conflict amongst a sample of teachers in Zarqa Governate in Jordan. The self-disclosure and conflict management scales were used on 102 male participants and 151 female participants. The purpose of this study gained significant attention considering the fact that self-disclosure plays a key role in shaping interactions between couples. It was postulated that self-disclosure as a means of connecting with their spouse was a good predictor of conflict management, where the utilisation of conflict resolution and problem-solving skills lead to marital compatibility.

Given the magnitude of the impact that marriage poses on the lives of individuals, it has grabbed the attention of the fields of psychology, sociology and psychiatry (Dicks, 1967), as it holds a pivotal role in the physical and mental health of those involved (Manalel et al., 2019). Therefore, it is imperative to take a closer look at everyday spousal experiences, particularly covert forms of conflict such as tension, due to its frequent presence in the nuptial day to day experiences. In other words, no relationship regardless of closeness or compatibility is free from its stress and difficulties (Dildar et al., 2013; Rusbult, 1987), with marital tension, in particular, being a persistent feature of married life (DeLongis & Lehman, 1989; Timmons et al., 2017).

2.4 Marital Tension

Tension has been defined as a psychological and physical strain manifesting itself in the form of uneasiness, discomfort and pressure to seek relief through communication (APA, 2021a). The presence of tension within marriage is manifested covertly, insidiously and subtly (Manalel et al., 2019), and occurs in almost all marriages (Birditt et al., 2017; Timmons et al., 2017). It encapsulates a wide range of covert forms of negative feelings, cognitions and perceptions about the marital relationship (Manalel et al., 2019). Those may include resentment, irritation and frustration (Birditt et al., 2017), which can vary in frequency and intensity. However, as it is a covert form of conflict it is often more subtle, resulting in it becoming overlooked and understated. Consequently, the resulting negative affect and cognition may be harboured long term by both spouses towards one another, regardless of its frequency or occurrence (Manalel et al., 2019). This, in turn, may impact on the quality and satisfaction of the couple, heighten conflict, introduce issues with intimacy and communication and may even result in divorce (Birditt et al., 2017).

In some of the literature, stress and tension have been used interchangeably (Ledermann et al., 2010; Manalel et al., 2019; Timmons, 2017), and may arise due to disagreements, disappointment and irritations in the marriage (Birditt et al., 2017), which can be ignited for various reasons, such as: financial and sexual struggles, bearing children, barriers to communication and adapting to each other's differences (Barris, 2021). Those differences may ne embedded in beliefs, values, desires or interests, as well as goals or means of achieving those goals (Folger et al., 1984). Also, discussions and negotiations may exacerbate marital tension, particularly for dissatisfied couples (Bornstein, 2002). All in all, various stressors in the relationship result in dissatisfaction and perhaps even introduce a threat to mental health and

wellbeing (Manalel et al., 2019), as marital tension is exacerbated when stress is spread onto both spouses (Barris, 2021).

Marital tension distinctly differs from marital conflict as it is encompasses a wider construct (Manalel et al., 2019), that is, a sense of tension can be experienced amidst marital conflict, yet not the other way around (Tasew & Getahun, 2021; Ting-Toomey, 1985). To make the distinction clearer, conflict can be defined as the presence of opposing forces, particularly when disagreements or friction occur, where an individual's actions or beliefs may be considered unacceptable to the other (APA, 2021b). Specifically, marital conflict is a form of overt self-expression, which includes various negative and positive comments, clashes, disagreements and quarrels (Cummings & Davies, 2010), yet does not resemble hostility (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2006). Similar to marital tension, it primarily takes place when one spouse opposes the values, beliefs, needs and ideologies of the other (Olugbenga, 2018). It can also occur due to incompatible and contradicting goals, desires, orientations, scarcity of resources, interdependence and expressed struggles (Putnam & Poole, 1987; Putnam, 2006; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). This is prominent, as interdependence can be treated as a means to achieve goals (Putnam, 1985). Evidently, marital conflict also appears in almost all marital relationships (Batool & Khalid, 2012).

There are other forms of marital dissonance, which unlike tension, manifest in a violent form. For example, physical violence occurs when one spouse inflicts physical harm onto the other, either through bodily attacks or by using objects (Haj-Yahia, M, 2000). This form of marital violence is common within a Middle Eastern context, particularly in Jordan, as it is a justified and normalised form of violence in that region (Al-Nsour et al., 2009; Clark et al. 2009). Whilst it is mostly accepted as a form of discipline within the male dominated social and cultural norms in Jordan, it is not accepted within the

religion of Islam, which is the dominating religion in Jordan (Al-Badayneh, 2012). Moving further away from marital tension, another form of violence is domestic violence, which encapsulates broader forms of violence. Those include but are not limited to physical, emotional, sexual and financial abuse (Al-Hawari & El-Banna, 2017; Becknell, 2005), mainly targeted towards women in the Jordanian society (Al-Badayneh 2012; Gharaibeh & Al–Ma'aitah 2002). Honour-based violence is another form of violence targeted towards women in the Jordanian society. Within a marital context, it is believed that in order to protect the male honour, it is imperative to exert dominance and maintain control over the female (Warrick, 2005), in order to preserve the man's standing within society (Sen, 2005). Consequently, the male's honour is reflected through the female's modesty, compliance and obedience towards the dominating male figure in her life, who in a marital context would be considered the husband (Bates & Rassam, 2001).

All of the above forms of abuse that occur within a marital context, differ from marital tension which is manifested in an insidious, subtle and covert manner (Manalel et al., 2019), occurring in almost all marriages (Birditt et al., 2017; Timmons et al., 2017). However, other forms of abuse manifest in an overt manner, causing harm within the marital relationship particularly to the recipient spouse, and at times placing them at risk of life-threatening danger (Al-Hawari & El-Banna, 2017; Haj-Yahia, 2000; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2003; Venema & Bakker, 2004).

As previously explained, the literature depicting marital tension is scarce worldwide and almost non-existent within a Jordanian context, yet there is an abundance of literature focused on covert forms of conflict, marital stability, satisfaction and happiness. Moreover, the greater volume of literature on marital tension was produced prior to the year 2000. This was also concluded by Manalel et al. (2019) whilst carrying

out their own longitudinal research spanning 16 years of data on the subject matter, which will be elaborated on in further details in this section. For example, Dicks (1967) started the conversation by publishing his book on marital tension, in which case studies were explored through the lens of the psychological theory of interaction. It was highlighted that the drive to explore the subject arose from the lack of interest by other professionals in investigating it in Britain (Dicks, 1967, 2015). To date, research remains scant with regard to investigating the lived experience of marital tension in general, and more specifically, within a Jordanian context.

The marital relationship holds great importance in the spouses' lives, as it has been associated with their health and wellbeing (Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001). In light of this, some studies explored the relationship between marital tension and physical health and wellbeing. For example, a study conducted by Martire et al. (2018), explored whether older adults with chronic illness would experience higher severity of symptoms when marital tension is intensified. It was concluded that marital tension aggravates physical symptom severity, which may introduce long term inferences on their physical health (Martire et al., 2018). This was also reflected in a meta-analysis conducted by Robles et al. (2014), based on data collected from 126 studies, where there was a clear association between marital quality and physical health. This was also supported by the findings conducted by Kiecolt-Glaser et al. (2005), where they found that negative marital processes impacted on physical immunologic and inflammatory responses.

The influence of marital tension also impacts on psychological health and wellbeing (O'Brien et al., 2009). This was found in a study conducted by Overbeek et al. (2006), which postulated that marital discord may foresee the development of mental health difficulties in terms of substance misuse, mood fluctuations and anxiety. This was

supported by Choi and Marks (2008), which found that marital distress played a role in introducing mental health difficulties through functional impairment. Moreover, when exploring the experience of the reciprocate spouse, it emerged that living with a spouse struggling with poor mental health also contributes to high marital distress (Van Wijngaarden et al., 2004).

Marital tension has been associated with marital distress and level of satisfaction (Birditt et al., 2017; Manalel et al., 2019). A number of studies investigated these two phenomena in light of changes in everyday life events, such as pregnancies, or other life transitions that may influence the quality of the relationship (Røsand et al., 2012). A similar notion was examined in a meta-analysis conducted on collectivist cultures to investigate the impact of the presence of children on marital satisfaction, with negative links being found between both phenomena (Dillon & Beechler, 2010). Moreover, a study that was carried out on Kuwaitis to examine the psychological distress of women with infertility issues, elicited that these can be a major contributor to marital issues (Fido & Zahid, 2004). Further, a study investigating the day-to-day dynamics of conflict and stress among couples from multicultural backgrounds, found that finances, making challenging decisions, having several tasks to do, and lack of money are factors that may exude conflict within the marriage (Timmons et al., 2017). Another study conducted on Egyptian couples to understand marital conflict and satisfaction, revealed that poor communication, religious rituals and time spent together were factors that impact on marital relationships (Onsy and Amer, 2014). The notion of work/family fit as a mediator between work factors and marital tension was explored (Piftman, 1994), and it was found that the higher the balance between family and work the less marital tension experienced.

A longitudinal study by Birditt et al. (2017) investigated the development of marital tension and its implications for divorce amongst married couples. A sample of 355 couples was extracted from the 'Early Years of Marriage' project, which began in 1986, where data was collected along the duration of 16 years of marriage, specifically in the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 7th and 16th years. Surveys were used to measure marital tension, marital happiness, divorce and marital longevity. The results revealed that tension increased with time for both husbands and wives. Husbands reported lower levels of tension at the onset of marriage than wives and they continued to do so as the years went by. Wives, on the other hand, revealed high levels of tension throughout their marital journey, but report lower levels in the 16th year, thus resulting in no significant difference by gender. The findings also showed that it was not the presence of tension in the first year or the average level that predicts divorce, but rather, the recent higher or accumulated tension amongst wives. This was supported by a study conducted by Amato and Previti (2003), which found that the tension experienced by wives was continuously linked to divorce, whilst husbands reported a substantial increase in tension across time. The study found that it may be more likely for wives to undergo tension, possibly leading to them seeking divorce as they may feel discouraged from their continuous efforts to work on their marriage.

Another longitudinal study conducted by Manalel et al. (2019) expanded on this literature by examining the implications of marital tension on marital well-being amongst married couples. Their sample also consisted of participants from the 'Early Years of Marriage' project, where data from a total of 373 newlywed couples were extracted. Quantitative instruments were used to measure marital tension, wellbeing, and destructive conflict behaviour. All in all, the results indicated that marital tension is connected to marital well-being above and beyond destructive conflict. Specifically,

marital tension occurring at the onset of marriage impacts upon marital wellbeing over time. It was also evident that marital tension continues to increase over time, resulting in lower levels of marital well-being. Manalel et al. (2019) also highlighted the critical role that marital tension has in the early years of marriage, as well as the implications it holds for marital wellbeing as a whole. These findings are similar to those of Birditt et al. (2017) as well as Huston et al. (2001), which have also revealed that when negativity between the partners occur, the quality of the marriage declines.

Both studies conducted by Birditt et al. (2017) and Manalel et al. (2019) were carried out longitudinally, including a sufficient number of participants and tracking couples over a sixteen-year period in the early and middle stages of their marital life. This design provides insights for the process of marriage development over time (Gorvine et al., 2017). However, the data included did not involve sequential years of marriage, as there were gaps between the years 4 and 16, thus excluding the possibility of revealing more patterns or dynamics of marital tension consecutively throughout the years. Further, these studies comprised a diverse range of participants in Michigan, including white and black ethnic backgrounds, both males and females, with different educational levels, duration of cohabitation and marital age. This shows that the sample was representative for the local population in the U.S., which may impact on the findings in terms of their applicability to couples from different countries and cultural contexts.

The data presented in these articles was obtained starting from the year 1986 and hence, the findings may be dated given the substantial changes that have been taking place within the marital dynamics in the 21st century (e.g. getting married at an older age) (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007). Moreover, the length of the scale used in the survey to measure marital tension was short and comprised only two items. Researchers tend

to avoid using lengthy measures due to time constraints (Eisinga et al., 2013), in order to minimise the demands on respondents (Bowling, 2005). Nonetheless, short questionnaires are known for their large measurement errors and thus, incorporating more items to the scale could be more beneficial (Emons et al., 2007). This will improve the validity and the chances of 'adequately identifying the construct of interest' (Eisinga et al., 2013, p. 1). Using a short scale may have compromised providing a comprehensive understanding of marital tension. However, these studies have contributed valuable knowledge to the literature of marital relationships, as they have identified marital tension as a form of negativity differing from conflict, thus having departed from the literature that focuses mostly on overt conflict. Despite this novel contribution, these studies did not include other prominent attributes for marital tension, such as culture, which has been found to play a leading role in the marital relationship (Dion & Dion, 1996). Lastly, whilst these studies demonstrated the importance of studying marital tension with regard to well-being and divorce, the quality and personal element of the experience were not explored. This results in a lack of depth in understanding the underlying factors that lead to marital tension, wellbeing and divorce.

All of the abovementioned studies were conducted from a quantitative positivist position, which embraced the notion that a researcher could gain understanding through experimentation (Aliyu et al., 2014). However, this inhibits the in-depth understanding of the experiences of individuals undergoing marital tension. Considering that the influence of marital tension extends beyond marital quality and satisfaction, onto health and wellbeing, it is imperative to explore the perceived lived experience of this phenomenon.

Moving away from the positivist paradigm, a study conducted by Dildar et al. (2013) explored marital conflict and conflict handling styles of couples that were dissatisfied in the culture of Pakistan. The study interviewed five dissatisfied couples, who had been married between two and twenty years, to capture the experiences of both husbands and wives. It was elicited that financial problems, problems with in-laws and dissatisfaction between the couple can create marital dissonance (Dildar et al., 2013). The objectives and research questions were clearly stated, however, more homogeneity in the sample needed to be considered, for this would have allowed for specific subgroups to be described in depth, whilst minimising variation (Patton, 2002; Palinkas et al., 2015). In this study, semi-structured interviews were carried out and thematic analysis was used. Evidently, this method focuses on taking a descriptive approach (Langdridge, 2007) and illustrates meaning through identifying data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Langdridge (2007), the need to interpret data further is imperative. The authors conveyed the premise that their study was a phenomenological enquiry held within a constructivist position, aimed at exploring the lived experience of dissatisfied married couples. However, a more complementary method to further understand the phenomenon would be IPA, as it would offer in-depth interpretations of the meaning making of the lived experiences of the couples (Smith et al., 2009).

Taken together, the above studies have identified various dynamics, such as: marital conflict, conflict handling styles and the impact of marital tension on marital functioning. These studies adopted different methodological and epistemological positions, none of which held a phenomenological stance, where an in-depth view of the subjective experience of participants was taken into account. Accordingly, an exploration of the subjective experiences of adults facing marital tension within the

context of the Jordanian society is yet to be undertaken. Further, the continuing rise in intercultural interactions between therapists and clients, present an array of challenges owing to the multitude of differences and the various meanings associated with both the therapist and their clients (Canfield, 2015). Therefore, exploring the lived experience of marital tension for Jordanians residing in the UK, remains an essential area to explore, in scientific research. It will provide a subjective phenomenological view on this experience, which is a fundamental aspect that is in accord with the values and underpinnings of CoP (BPS, 2005). This study will also contribute to the growing body of knowledge on marital tension within a Jordanian cultural context.

Cultural, ethnic and racial constructs constitute a key role in therapeutic work (Glick et al., 2000). Hence, exploring marital tension within a Jordanian context, will help to unpack culture-specific dynamics that may not be known to those from a western cultural background. This is particularly crucial as Jordanians tend to seek support from their inner circle and distrust those outside of it. Therefore, expanding the knowledge and awareness of cultural dynamics for non-Arab practitioners may contribute to developing a strong therapeutic alliance (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2005). This study will contribute to this knowledge by uncovering the underlying processes and dynamics of Jordanians facing marital tension, which will inform therapeutic interventions and help with developing a strong therapeutic alliance. This is imperative to maintaining evidence based as well as ethical practice (HCPC, 2009; Strawbridge & Woolfe, 2010). This research will be of particular use to counselling psychologists and other practitioners in the field, who work with married Jordanian couples, and individuals.

2.5 Managing Marital Tension

The means of managing or coping with marital tension goes beyond the scope of immediate ratification or temporary resolution, as it carries a ripple effect on marital functioning, longevity and the development of intimate closeness (Bodenmann, 1997, 2005). Hence, managing marital conflict, distress and tension is one of the main pillars in maintaining a marriage (Gottman, 1994), as dissonance directly influences marital satisfaction (Gottman & Levenson, 1992). It is noteworthy to mention that successful coping is not limited to processing negative emotions and solving the issue at hand, but also, maintaining the marital relationship when stress levels are high (O'Brien & DeLongis, 1997). This is imperative, as sustaining close relationships in the face of adversity helps to protect from the consequences that may follow (Badr et al., 2007). Thus, the means by which spouses resolve marital distress is directly related to the utilisation of constructive strategies, such as compromising, agreeableness and having a sense of humour. It can equally be negatively impacted upon by destructive approaches, such as engaging in conflict, withdrawal, and defensiveness (DeLongis & Holtzman, 2005).

Managing tension involves unconscious efforts and strategies to cope with negative adversities that may pose a threat to wellbeing (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978), whereby spouses engage with one another cognitively, emotionally and behaviourally to manage taxing internal and external demands on their relationship (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Within a marital context, it is almost inevitable to engage in destructive or constructive responses to irritation or dissatisfaction within everyday life, which might exacerbate or smooth the problem over (Rusbult et al., 1991). Consequently, there is a general emphasis on coping skills, where constructive management of tension or distress is seen to have a direct role on marital quality and

sustainability (Bodenmann, 2005). For instance, marital tension may be exacerbated when one partner employs active coping and self-expression, while the other does not (Figley, 2012). This is a common pattern of conflict or dissonance otherwise known as demand-withdraw, where one spouse adamantly approaches the other, seeking resolution, whilst the other responds by attempting to avoid the issue (Sagrestano et al., 1998). This, in turn, introduces marital dissatisfaction and power imbalance (Heavey et al., 1995; Hendrick & Hendrick, 2000; Noller et al., 1994; Sagrestano et al., 1998).

Dynamics within the marital relationship usually involves intricate interactions, accompanied by various forms of stress and tensions, as well as means of coping with these (Bodenmann et al., 2007; Neff & Karney, 2004). Dyadic coping strategies adopted by couples are important to consider in order to maintain a sense of security and satisfaction in the relationship (Bodenmann, 2005). Hence, the spouses' responses to these challenges within the relationship, shape the outcomes reflected on them individually as well as dyadically in terms of adapting and coping with stress (O'Brien & DeLongis, 1996; O'Brien et al., 2009). When paying closer attention to dyadic coping, it was found that the response of one spouse to tension can have a direct influence on the other spouse's coping (DeLongis & Holtzman, 2005). This was also highlighted by Lyons et al. (1998), who contended that stress within a marital context should not be considered as an individual problem, but rather, as a dyadic issue needing to be addressed.

There are several coping strategies that may be considered through a dyadic lens. For example, the systemic-transactional model postulates that one spouse's experience of daily stressors and the means through which they cope with them, can directly or indirectly impact their partner in a mutual way. In other words, albeit a situation

concerns only one spouse, their stress reactions may spill over to the partner which then becomes a dyadic issue (Bodenmann, 2005). This model stipulates that dyadic coping strategies can be further distinguished as either positive or negative forms of coping. The former emotion focused, problem focused and delegated coping, whilst the latter includes: hostile dyadic coping, ambivalent dyadic coping and superficial dyadic coping (Bodenmann, 2005; Falconier et al., 2016; Falconier & Kuhn, 2019).

Emotion focused dyadic coping focuses on one spouse's efforts to support their partner in regulating their emotions and reduce stress arousal, whilst the problem focused dyadic coping relies on active efforts to resolve the stressor in a practical manner (Falconier et al., 2016). Moreover, emotion focused support includes regulative efforts to minimise emotionally taxing consequences, through affectionate behaviour with the intent to ease stress arousal, through engaging in a relaxing and intimate manner with one another. On the other hand, problem focused support includes practical appraisal efforts to evaluate the situation and come up with a solution (Bodenmann, 2005; Falconier & Kuhn, 2019). Delegated dyadic coping includes taking over some of the partners tasks which may be exacerbating their stress, in order to support them in minimising stress levels. Negative forms of dyadic coping can occur in situations where the supporting partner is also stressed, unable to provide support or lacks motivation to do so. This may occur due to low levels of commitment, holding negative views about the partner, lack of emotional resources, low mood, or challenging personality traits. Consequently, negative dyadic coping occurs in situations where support is provided as a necessity rather than voluntarily (Falconier et al., 2016). For example, hostile dyadic coping exhibits the partner's reluctance to provide support, holding negative attributions about the partner, and actively distancing, criticising and disparaging their spouse. Ambivalent dyadic coping

focuses on the lack of motivation to support their partner so much so that it elicits a sense of feeling burdened by them. Finally, superficial dyadic coping is described as an insincere form of support whereby the spouse does not exhibit authentic empathy not understanding of their partner's emotions (Falconier et al., 2016).

Another form of dyadic coping strategy is the rumination and withdrawal responses. Rumination is described as a state of continuous and repetitive thinking, often leading to negative psychological consequences, due to negative thoughts about oneself (Mor & Winquist, 2002; Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 2008). Within a relational context, it is seen as a cognitive response, by which one seeks engagement (DeLongis et al., 2010), however, may lead to psychological impairment as well as depressive symptoms for the couple (Puterman, 2010). On the other hand, withdrawal is deemed as a malfunctioning behavioural response (DeLongis et al., 2010), particularly linked to lacking psychological adjustment in couples (Badr & Carmack Taylor, 2008; Piotrkowski,1979), leading to decreased marital quality and satisfaction (Heavey et al., 1995). In the presence of both rumination by one spouse and withdrawal by the other, a detrimental pattern of engagement may exhibit itself, leaving them with a vicious cycle of maladaptive responses. This is due to the fact that rumination exacerbates withdrawal and vice versa (DeLongis et al., 2010). Evidently, these responses exacerbate levels of marital tension (King & DeLongis, 2014).

Coping strategies are not linear in nature, as they differ according to the context that the couples are situated in (Schoenmakers et al., 2015). For example, cultural context, beliefs, values and norms play a major role in shaping the coping process (Berg & Upchurch, 2007; Bodenmann, 1995; Falconier, 2013; Revenson, 2003). Thus, cultural groups, means of communication, gender norms and family structure, also contribute to shaping dyadic coping strategies (Falconier et al., 2016; Kuo, 2014). With that in

mind, couples from collectivist and individualist cultures, adopt differing communication styles and resolution strategies (Hayashi, 2010). For example, couples from an individualistic cultural context are seen to be explicit in their communication (Shibusawa, 2005), as opposed to those from a collectivist cultural context, whereby communication is indirect with a focus on contextual body language and cues (Gao &Ting-Toomey, 1998). Essentially, individuals from a collectivist cultural background prioritise harmonious interpersonal relationships, thus opt for indirect means of communication as well as compromise to avoid exacerbation of conflict (Hofstede, 1980). Yet, those who identify with individualistic cultures, believe that open communication is the most beneficial in dyadic coping strategies (TingToomey & Korzenny, 1991). Moreover, the family structure, i.e neuclear versus extended families, also plays a role in dyadic problem-solving strategies. It is more common to have a nuclear family structure amongst individualistic cultures, whereby the partner acts for the most part as the primary source of support during stressful situations (Bodenmann, 2000). On the other hand, dyadic coping strategies amongst couples within extended families may differ in the sense that the family network can act as a support system for the couple (Hilpert & Kimamo, 2016). Accordingly, based on these differences, it may be extrapolated that dyadic coping strategies may differ according to cultural contexts.

At the onset of the relationship, partners tend to seek empathic consensus by achieving a true understanding of their partner's thoughts and feelings. However, after a while of knowing each other's idiosyncratic thoughts, feelings and behaviour they may either choose to ignore or accommodate them (Ickes & Simpson, 2001).

In a study conducted by Delongis and Preece (2002), the emotional and relational consequences of coping within stepfamilies was explored, whereby 154 remarried

couples were interviewed at two-time intervals that were 20 months apart. The purpose of this study was to further understand interpersonal interactions within stepfamilies, considering the remarkable advantages that remarriage may introduce to the family as a whole. It was found that the couple's means of coping with tension or stress, can have a direct emotional impact on familial relationships. Also, withdrawal as a means of coping proved to be effective in lowering tension the next day, yet this was deemed ineffective after the two-year follow-up study of the same couples revealing higher levels of tension and lower levels of marital quality (Preece & DeLongis, 2005). Moreover, a multilevel analysis study depicting interrelational dynamics between couples was conducted by DeLongis et al. (2004). This study focused on exploring the impact of spousal, support and strain on wellbeing, through a process of interviewing 83 couples who completed a structured diary twice a day for the duration of one week. It was found that spousal strain had a significantly stronger association with negative affect whilst spousal support had a negative association. In other words, extending support within a marital relationship as a form of coping, aids in reducing negative affect for both spouses.

Coping styles and resolution efforts, vary according to the stressors that individuals are faced with (Compas et al., 1988; Coyne & Racioppo, 2000). However, marital distress can be prevented when the coping skills of spouses is enhanced (Bodenmann et al., 2001). This was explored in a study conducted by Birditt et al. (2010), where the impact of marital coping on the implications for divorce was examined. Constructive behaviour was defined as an expression of positive responses, such as verbal reinforcement, calmly addressing issues and actively listening. This was as opposed to destructive behaviour, which includes negative responses, such as shouting, criticism, showing contempt and being insulting. This, in turn, may impact negatively

on marital stability and satisfaction (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Kelly et al., 2003). It was found that spouses that revert to destructive behaviour can result in divorce (Birditt et al., 2010). This supported findings by Gottman et al. (1998), which elicited that destructive behaviours predict divorce up to seven years into the marriage.

Further studies, such as the one conducted by Kurdek (1995), revealed similar findings, where the link between conflict resolution styles, specifically engagement in conflict, withdrawal and compliance, as well as the levels of marital satisfaction of spouses, were examined. It was found that gendered responses to disagreements were associated with marital satisfaction in the sense that when wives revert to conflict engagement and husbands respond in withdrawal, this leads to lower marital satisfaction. This is referred to as the 'wife demand-husband withdraw' dynamic. This was also supported by findings by Heavey et al. (1993) as well as Noller et al. (1994), where the focus was on withdrawal as a response and how it differs for spouses. It was postulated that the negative effect of withdrawal for husbands depends on their wives responses in terms of engagement in conflict, but not the other way around. In other words, whilst the level of marital satisfaction for husbands was directly related to the means in which wives responded to marital distress, the same did not apply to the wives. That is, their use of withdrawal to resolve conflict was negatively associated with their own level of satisfaction within the relationship, regardless of how their husbands preferred to manage disagreements (Kurdek, 1995). Interestingly, the demand-withdraw pattern may also result in the termination of the marriage (Birditt et al., 2010; Heavey et al.,1995).

The need for belongingness and strong bonds with significant others is an essential factor in shaping emotional and cognitive development (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Moreover, emotional relatedness and empathic responses amongst spouses play a

significant role in managing interpersonal tension and stress (O'Brien et al., 2009). This was evident in a study conducted by Gottman (1998), which revealed that marital tension is reduced when spouses convey empathic responses. Moreover, high levels of tension or stress, as well as malfunctioning coping mechanisms, may lead to communication deficits (Bodenmann et al., 1996). This is due to the fact that, the means of communication during tense interactions seems to reflect the quality of marriage, as those who communicate in a constructive manner, convey frequent expression of understanding and empathy (Fincham & Beach, 1999). Therefore, paying particular attention to the means of coping with stress and tension is imperative, as it may contribute to influencing the relationship on an unconscious level (Bodenmann et al., 2001). Moreover, helpful coping mechanisms would strengthen communication skills, thus increasing marital quality and satisfaction (Bodenmann et al., 2001).

Despite the various means and styles of coping, it is difficult to identify a set of specific coping strategies, as these present themselves in various forms depending on the situation at hand and the stressors that individuals are faced with (Compas et al., 1988; Coyne & Racioppo, 2000). Nevertheless, marital distress can be prevented when the coping skills of spouses are enhanced (Bodenmann et al., 2001)

2.6 Chapter Two Summary

In conclusion, this chapter has provided a review of the literature around marriage and how cultural norms may shape the subjective experiences within this institution. Moreover, a comprehensive view of marital tension has been described, including the definition of the experience as well as the various marital dynamics involved. Finally, the means of managing tension as well as the importance of constructive coping in

terms of its impact on marital quality and the well-being of the spouses have been

discussed.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This research aims to explore the lived experience of marital tension for Jordanians residing in the UK. This chapter presents the methodological philosophical underpinnings chosen to fulfil this aim. In light of my philosophical position of relativist constructivism, I provide a rationale for my selected methodology. A detailed description of the research design is provided, including: participant selection process, inclusion and exclusion criteria, recruitment strategy, a detailed account of the eight participants that took part, data collection, interview process and a comprehensive account of the data collection. The chapter concludes with a quality assessment of the study.

3.1 Research Purpose: Enriching Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is described as a broad set of experiential procedures, aiming to interpret, describe and explain participants' experiences, psychological events or a phenomenon within a given setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). It offers a gateway to in-depth understanding of the complexity of a phenomenon through encapsulating the richness of the data, particularly when there is scarcity of knowledge around the subject matter (Howitt & Cramer, 2020). Hence, one of the primary motives for adopting qualitative research is recognising that experience and knowledge of the world cannot be objectively evaluated, but is rather shaped by subjective, cultural and experiential perspectives (Yardley, 2013). This extends a humanistic stance to the complexity of human perceptions and understanding of interactions and experiences (Howitt & Cramer, 2020), which is consistent with the values of CoP (Morrow, 2007). Moreover, it offers participants space to make meaning of their experiences, thus

provide them with a sense of empowerment (Cohen et al., 2000; Tuli, 2010). Despite the rich offerings of qualitative research to the development of in-depth knowledge and understanding, the popular preference of quantitative research remains in a central position within various fields of psychology (Howitt & Cramer, 2020). However, the field of CoP has taken a leading role in encouraging a shift towards the utilisation of qualitative research to ensure adequate exploration of the multifaceted complexities and depth of human experience (Morrow & Smith, 2000; Ponterotto, 2005). This is particularly pertinent as it contributes to the values of multicultural diversity and inclusion held in the field, informing narrative perspectives within therapeutic interventions (Morrow, 2007).

This research focuses on the lived experience of marital tension, aiming to enrich knowledge and promote a deeper and empathic understanding of this insidious yet overwhelming form of conflict, for Jordanians. It will contribute towards uncovering complex and in-depth knowledge of a phenomenon, as well as give a voice to a marginalised demographic, which Willig (2013) emphasises as being one of the purposes of qualitative research.

3.2 Philosophy of Science

The philosophy of science includes the conceptual basis for seeking knowledge, including assumptions or beliefs regarding ontology, epistemology and methodology (Ponterotto, 2005). Ontology is concerned with what there is to be known about the world and the 'nature of reality and being' (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 127; Willig, 2013). Epistemology is the philosophy of knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), concerned with how it is studied and gathered, whilst considering the relationship between the researcher and participants (Ponterotto, 2005; Tulli, 2010).

Ontological positions identify "the worldviews and assumptions in which researchers operate in their search for new knowledge" (Schwandt, 2007, p.190). These fundamental ontological concerns hold assumptions about the world. For example, realism depicts that the world constitutes a causal relationship between structures and objects (Willig, 2013). Herein, it is believed that one true reality solely exists in an identifiable and measurable manner (Ponterotto, 2005). Meaning, it is contended that the data reflects true representations about the reality of the world (Willig, 2013). Objectivist epistemology fits with this ontological position; it suggests that reality exists externally and separately from consciousness and experience (Feast & Melles, 2010). This epistemological position assumes, that the researcher is an independent entity from the phenomenon of interest, and does not influence the study at hand (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Contrarily, a relativist ontological position, assumes that multiple realities are constructed and seen as subjective depending on the individual's experiences, perspective, interactions with others and the researchers (Ponterotto, 2005). It suggests that multiple realities can exist (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013), which are constructed through the perceptions of individuals (Saunders et al., 2015). Ultimately, this position stresses that the research aim should focus on the means of constructing various versions of the reality of the experience. Thus, the notion of a 'pure experience' is disapproved, and instead, the diversity of interpretations of the world is placed at the forefront, rather than viewing it as an orderly place (Willig, 2013). Subjectivist epistemology ascribes to this ontological position, it rejects the notion of an objective truth, and posits that reality is imposed by individuals' minds, so that the perceived reality is the true reality (Feast & Melles, 2010). The role of the researcher hence is an

interactive one, where they create the findings throughout the investigation of the phenomenon with participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Alongside the continuum placing the relativist and realist positions at the end points, is the critical realist approach. This approach introduces the notion that, whilst the data introduces insights about the world, it does not do so in an abstract and straight forward fashion. It requires further in-depth analysis to gain understanding of the underlying structures that unearth the studied phenomena (Willig, 2015).

Methodology refers to the general approach of studying a research topic, including the process and procedure, which are directly informed by the ontological and epistemological position of the researcher (O'Leary, 2004; Ponterotto, 2005; Willig, 2013). It is the starting point for the philosophical framework through which the research is grounded (Brown, 2006); hence, identifying the positioning of the researcher within philosophical paradigms is crucial to guide the research process (Harper, 2011). Notably, the following section will elaborate further on the various paradigms adopted within CoP.

3.2.1 Research Paradigms within CoP

A paradigm can be defined as a basic set of beliefs and assumptions that guide specific actions (Guba, 1990). In research, paradigms encompass views about the world, which are explored within a conceptual and philosophical framework (Filstead, 1979), based on the researcher's ontological and epistemological positions as well as chosen methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Morrow, 2007). Those include positivist, post-positivist, phenomenological, social constructionist and constructivist paradigms.

A positivist paradigm undertakes systemic observation of a phenomenon, embedded within ontological realism, adhering closely to the hypothetico-deductive method, where the aim is to verify a hypothesis or an explanation that leads to controlling and predicting the phenomenon (Guba and Lincoln, 2000; Ponterotto, 2005). It assumes that there is one absolute and objective view of phenomena, determined by a direct relationship between the world and an individual's perspective (Bassey, 1995; Willig, 2013). It is generally measured through examining a hypothesis by contextualising it within a theoretical model, utilising controlled experimental studies and conducting statistical analysis (Cacioppo et al., 2004). Moreover, the role of the researcher, is considered a detached one, as it is believed the knowledge is present in the world and their role is to discover it (Tuli, 2010). This paradigm "has been a dominant force in science", including, the field of psychology, for over 150 years (Ponterotto, 2005, p.129). The paradigm's objectivist epistemological position, considers the researcher an independent entity from the participant and data, without exerting any influence on either (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The post-positivist paradigm, acknowledges that objective reality is imperfectly apprehensible and cannot be fully captured (Lincoln & Guba, 2000), adhering to the ontological position of critical realism (Lincoln et al., 2011; Ponterotto, 2005). It was introduced in opposition towards the positivist paradigm and its apprehension towards reality; the main distinction being that positivism aims towards verifying a theory and post-positivism aims towards falsifying it (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Ponterotto, 2005). However, both paradigms aim towards controlling and predicting phenomena, whilst highlighting identifiable and generalisable cause and effect relations, all of which serve as the "primary foundation and anchor for quantitative research" (Ponterotto, 2005, p.

129). The epistemological position within this paradigm is modified objectivist, where maintaining objectivity remains crucial (Guba & Lincoln, 1994)

A phenomenological approach focuses on producing knowledge about the subjective experiences of participants, without identifying claims or causations regarding said experience (Willig, 2013). Reality is explored from a phenomenological lens (Eatough & Smith, 2017), where the emphasis is on the study of human experience (Smith, 2017). This approach assumes that there is more than 'one world', thus the ultimate focus being on what the world is 'like for this participant' (Willig, 2013, p. 16). The aim here, is to clarify and explore the individual lived experiences and situations occurring throughout daily life (Giorgi, 2009). It can be grounded in a relativist position, asserting that the subjective interpretations and meanings associated with participants' lived experiences describe the phenomenon. Herein, the role of the researcher "resembles that of a person-centred counsellor", where an empathic position is maintained whilst remaining attentively focused and extending unconditional positive regard, without questioning the validity of the shared experiences (Willig, 2013, p.16).

Social constructionism is grounded within ontological relativism, indicating that there are various realities developed through experiential and social constructs experienced by the individuals (Lincoln & Guba, 1990; Ponterotto, 2015). It is presumed, that perception of individuals cannot be real in a pure sense, but rather, is shaped by linguistic and cultural constructs defined intersubjectively and personally by individuals interacting in a social network (Patton, 2015). In essence, reality is constructed through the lived experience of the individual as well as social interactions with others (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Neuman, 2003). Crucially, language is given particular emphasis within this paradigm, as the means by which individuals describe experiences, reflect their version of reality (Willig, 2013). Thus, a group of individuals

may assign meaning to a phenomenon, however, the meaning is not assigned to the phenomenon, but rather, to the group that designated the meaning of the phenomenon. Therefore, the notion of truth is assigned to a group of individuals who share this truth, as multiple realities can exist by multiple groups of individuals. This paradigm is epistemologically subjectivist, as the researcher is engaged in social construction within the research process (Patton, 2015).

The constructivist paradigm ontologically adopts relativism (Ponterotto, 2005), as reality is not discovered but created in individuals' minds (Schwandt, 1998). The aim is to understand the 'complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it', and grasp the constructed reality of the phenomena (Schwandt, 1998, p. 221). Unlike social constructionism, which focuses on the collective meaning making of reality, constructivists focus exclusively on the unique constructed reality within each individual's mind, which is considered valid and worthy on its own (Lee, 2012; Patton, 2015). Constructivism thus has an individual focus, whereas social constructionism has a group one (Young & Colin, 2004).

Constructivism hence embraces a hermeneutic methodology (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), wherein deep reflections are required to bring the hidden meaning of knowledge or reality to the surface (Schwandt, 2000), ascertained through interactive dialogue between the researcher and participants (Ponterotto, 2005). Since researcher-participant interaction is essential, the epistemological position within this paradigm is subjectivist (Lincoln & Guba, 1994), as interpretations are co-created throughout their interactions (Ponterotto, 2005).

3.2.2 Position of the Researcher

I carefully considered my position as a Counselling Psychologist in terms of practice, research and my own perception as to what construes the nature of reality. While undergoing my doctoral training, I found myself naturally drawn towards a subjectivist epistemological position and a relativist ontological position. Upon further reflection and understanding of paradigms, I realised that therapeutically I adopt the constructivist paradigm, which coincided with my thought process as I was developing my research focus and interests. From my perspective, when thinking about clients or participants, I am mostly interested in the uniqueness of how the meaning of their lived experience is perceived. Essentially, identifying my philosophical position aids in clarifying the values and assumptions that shape my research. When aiming to understand the experience of marital tension and the means in which it is managed, it was apparent that a detailed understanding of the lived experience of this phenomenon is the focus at hand. Ultimately, as constructivism embraces a hermeneutic methodology (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), the chosen method of analysis for this research is IPA.

3.3 Methodology: Rationale and Underlying Perspective

It is imperative to identify the philosophical underpinnings of a research endeavour (Ponterotto, 2005) and its paradigm to guide the researcher in selecting the appropriate methodology, study design and analysis methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The following subsections provide the rationale behind my chosen method of IPA.

3.3.1 Scientist-Practitioner Model for CoP

The domain of CoP encompasses research and practice-based approaches (Strawbridge & Woolfe, 2010). It has maintained the scientist-practitioner model for most of its history (Meyers, 2007), with the premise that psychologists are both practitioners and researchers, who can integrate theoretical knowledge with practice (Peterson, 2000). Psychological knowledge attributed from research and theory is then applied clinically through therapeutic work (Jones & Mehr, 2007). As both hold equal importance in the field of CoP, the scientist-practitioner model is central within this profession (Blair, 2010). In fact, CoP is one of the leading fields in psychology to steer towards a wider view on the diversity of methods and methodologies, focusing on adequately exploring the human experience, which is in line with the ethos of CoP (Morrow, 2007).

3.3.2 Chosen Method: IPA

IPA explores individuals' lived experiences of psychological processes, life events and sense of identity (Smith,1999). The primary focus is on understanding how individuals make sense of their lived experience in their own terms (Smith et al., 2022), within their social and personal world (Smith et al., 2009), by gaining insight into their subjective experience. This is achieved through rich descriptions of their perceptions, how they make sense of it and their own understanding of it (Smith & Nizza, 2022). IPA draws on phenomenological enquiry highlighting the importance of the subjects' own perception and context when interpreting their understanding of the world (Langdridge, 2007). Accordingly, the researcher aims to analyse in depth the means by which individuals perceive and communicate their lived experience (Smith, 1996). Essentially, it is an approach to psychological, experiential and qualitative research

informed by three theoretical underpinnings: phenomenology, hermeneutics and ideography (Smith et al., 2009).

Phenomenology is concerned with exploring human experience on its own terms, away from any predefined conceptions or theories (Ashworth, 2015). Husserl, who introduced the school of phenomenology, asserted the need to retrieve to the core consciousness to gain accurate understanding of the essence of the phenomenon (Smith & Nizza, 2022). To do so, Husserl emphasised the importance of bringing to the awareness the assumptions associated with the phenomenon by the act of bracketing or separating the knowledge that is taken for granted about it (Husserl, 1927). This is maintained through reflexive practice, which is fundamental when engaging with the research process, as the role of the researcher is paramount in IPA (Willig, 2013), and there might be an underlying sense of reliance on their own subjective assumptions and preconceptions of the studied phenomenon (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). Later, Heidegger highlighted the intersubjectivity of human experience when engaging relationally in daily life activities (Smith et al., 2009). He introduced the notion of hermeneutics, known as "the theory of interpretation" (Smith & Nizza, 2022, p. 7), which depicts the individual's understanding from their own point of view (Howitt & Cramer, 2011). Within IPA, a double hermeneutic is evoked, whereby the participants make sense of their experiences, and the researcher makes sense of their participants' sense making (Smith & Osborn, 2015). Ideography, which is the third philosophical root of IPA, is primarily concerned with a detailed understanding of the phenomenon from the perspective of particular individuals within a specific context (Smith & Nizza, 2022). This approach is valuable as it offers unique insight into the meaning-making process of participants (Smith, 1995).

The hermeneutic nature embedded within IPA, and the in-depth engagement with the participants and the data, aligns it with a constructivist epistemological position. Moreover, it should be noted that no previous research has explored the lived experience of marital tension from this epistemological and methodological position.

3.3.3 Overview of Qualitative Methods Considered

To evaluate a piece of research meaningfully, it is imperative to assess various methods of analysis and the extent to which a study can meet its research objectives (Willig, 2013). Prior to elaborating on my chosen method of IPA, I will state my reasons for steering away from other possible approaches, particularly discourse analysis, narrative analysis, and thematic analysis.

Discourse analysis focuses on the use of language in managing and negotiating social interactions and achieving interpersonal objectives, through utilising the participants' sense of identity and memories (Willig, 2013). It focuses on the analysis of communicative action through language (Johnstone, 2018). Essentially, the emphasis is not on the nature of the phenomenon, but on how it is enacted in language. Thus, the orientation of discourse analysis is social constructionist (Willig, 2013). Given the lack of concern with affective and non-verbal components associated with lived experiences, it was deemed unsuitable for addressing the focus of this thesis.

Narrative analysis involves careful evaluation of the shared story and how participants 'impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives' (Reissman, 1993, p.2). It focuses on how individuals construct their narratives and bring order to their experience, by developing connections and interpreting events (Murray, 2003), as well as make sense of their past and present experiences in a story telling form (Riessman, 1993). The focus on social and psychological outcomes of

these experiences, allocates this methodological approach within a social constructionist perspective (Willig, 2013). This method was also deemed unsuitable as the focus of this study is uncovering the constructed meaning of the lived experience of marital tension, rather than its social outcome.

Thematic analysis involves the emergence of themes that are considered fundamental when describing the phenomenon (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This method of analysis is independent from any particular theoretical or epistemological position (Braun & Clark, 2006), as it can be focused towards answering social constructionist, phenomenological or realist research questions (Willig, 2013).

The above methods were taken into consideration when evaluating the most appropriate method of analysis that would answer the research question at hand. More specifically, thematic analysis was closely considered as a potential method for this study considering its adopted interpretative and descriptive direction (Langdridge, 2007). However, upon deeper consideration and evaluation, the three theoretical underpinnings: phenomenology, hermeneutics and ideography offered within IPA (Smith et al., 2009), allows for a deeper and subjective focus on the individuality of the lived experience of marital tension, therefore was deemed appropriate in answering the research question at hand.

3.4 Research Design

The research design adopted to explore the phenomenon in this thesis, is presented in this section. Rich and detailed insights were gathered from participants, to ensure successful and sufficient phenomenological and interpretative accounts of their experiences.

3.4.1 Participant Selection: Purposeful Sampling

Homogeneous sampling holds a pivotal role in IPA, as it is considered an idiographic approach (Smith et al., 2009). Accordingly, purposeful sampling is adopted in this study, which allows the researcher to purposefully select participants who can provide insight into a given experience (Smith & Nizza, 2022), to ensure optimal understanding of the researched phenomena (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). This is pertinent, as qualitative research seeks to achieve in-depth insight, which is provided by this method of sampling (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Identifying inclusion and exclusion criteria aids in increasing sample homogeneity; the more specific the criteria the higher the homogeneity of the sample (Robinson, 2014). Accordingly, participants were selected based on retaining access to the phenomenon of Jordanians experiencing marital tension.

3.4.2 Inclusion Criteria

Jordanians who have been married for up to five years

The rationale behind choosing this time frame is due to the significance of the initial years of marriage; these are considered the base for the dynamics and functioning of the marital relationship (Gottman & Levenson, 2002; Risch et al., 2003). This marital stage introduces a myriad of marital issues for the couple (Risch et al., 2003), as they undergo several changes (Benjamin et al., 1995), thus possibly experiencing marital tension (Pawlowski, 1998) and distress (Kurdek, 1991). Those changes may be associated with work-life balance, financial burdens (Risch et al., 2003), life transitions (Hall & Adams, 2011; Moen, 2011) and adjustments, which lead the couple to co-define their reality as a married entity (Hall & Adams, 2011).

Occasionally, the initial marital stage may lead to the couple re-evaluating their marriage (Bochner, 1984). As highlighted by Ruvolo (1998) when stating: "early years of marriage are a critical period for couples, both because the early years may be volatile and some relationships dissolve, and because they may set the stage for future distress or healthy couple functioning" (p. 470). Hence, the initial stage of marriage could provide a foundation for understanding marital functioning (Amato & Rogers, 1997; Gottman & Levenson, 2002), marital quality (Bodenmann & Shantinath, 2004), or marital dissolution (Williamson et al., 2016).

Both spouses are of Jordanian ethnicity

Intercultural and interracial marriages refer to the intermix of two or more races and cultures through marriage (Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013). These introduce unique dynamics to marital relationships, which may include cultural, social, ethnic or religious challenges, that are not necessarily present in an ethnically and culturally homogeneous marriage (Mcfadden & Moore, 2001). Also, behavioural differences may be depicted, such as awareness and curiosity about possible differences, and the means by which spouses navigate and communicate these differences with one another (Ham, 2003; Llerena-Quinn & Bacigalupe, 2009). Moreover, interracial and intercultural marriage may receive external societal and familial resistance, which the couple would need to navigate as part of their marital interactions (Mcfadden & Moore, 2001; Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013). Therefore, cultural or ethnic differences may introduce unique elements to the experience of marital tension, that may influence the homogeneity of the sample.

Residing in the UK from the onset of their marriage

This supports maintaining homogeneity of the sample in terms of acculturation, which can be defined as the process of integration between an individual's cultural and social values with those of the majority group (Sam, 2006). Although it is more difficult for acculturation to occur for Arabs as opposed to other cultures, the occurrence of it is viable (Faragllah et al., 1997). Also, the duration in which the individual is present in the country is one of the factors influencing the process of acculturation. Hence, specifying that participants were in the UK from the onset of their marriage provides contextual consistency.

English language fluency

This is imperative as the study is conducted in the English language as translating data may result in the subjective lived experience being altered or lost in translation (Van Nes et al., 2010).

3.4.3 Exclusion Criteria

Experiencing intense conflict or physical aggression

This raised ethical concerns, as it could hold risk and safety issues for the participants and the researcher. It might introduce a different layer to marital tension, that may not remain homogeneous with other participants' experiences. For instance, marital tension might be associated with physical violence. Marital tension can also become associated with fear from the response of the spouse inflicting the violence (Al-Natour et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2016).

Previously married

Those who have been previously married may have more complex experiences with marital tension, considering the multifaceted set of conditions associated with pre-divorce tensions leading up to separation (Walsh, 2012). Moreover, remarriage is a process of integrating two families together, which may be influenced by experiences within the previous marriage and varying personal maturity (Swenson, 1997). Also, previously married individuals can display a high level of versatility, tolerance and resilience against adversities and challenges they may face in their everyday life, post divorce (Meena, 2019; Brown & Robinson, 2012). These revelations indicate that previous experiences of marital tension can shape the perception of this phenomenon upon remarriage.

Experiencing mental health difficulties influencing thinking, mood or behaviour

There are ethical considerations related to the inclusion of individuals with mental health difficulties (McCall et al., 2021). Exploring the experience of marital tension, can cause distress for the participants, thus raising risk and safety concerns. Although marital tension may result in mental and physical health difficulties (Henry et al., 2015; Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001; O'Brien et al., 2009), mental health difficulties may also lead to reduced marital quality (Najam et al., 2013). This can introduce a unique attribute to the phenomenon, which may alter the dynamic of the experience of marital tension, thus decreasing the homogeneity of the sample.

3.4.4 Recruitment Strategy

IPA is considered an idiographic approach, with a small purposive sample (Langdridge, 2007). The recommended sample size for a professional doctorate thesis

ranges between four and eight participants (Smith et al., 2009). Accordingly, eight participants were recruited for this study.

This study was advertised through a display leaflet (see Appendix B) on social media platforms including Facebook and Instagram. Considering my position as a partially insider researcher, I was able to connect with several online based Jordanian communities across the UK and yield my sample using the snowballing method. This recruitment method is seen as one of the most efficient approaches to recruit individuals who share similar attributes and are difficult to reach within the population (Frost, 2011; Valdez & Kaplan, 1999). This applies to this study's participants, as the social norms steer individuals towards maintaining a façade for those outside the privacy of their home, by refraining from disclosing personal issues to strangers (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000). Furthermore, vulnerability, self-exploration or disclosure are often seen as signs of weakness (Al-Issa, 1990). Consequently, the expression of negative emotions is not easily accepted in the Arab culture, as they are associated with fear of embarrassment or shame (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000). Subsequently, the dynamics of the culture of shame is predominated in Jordan (Al-Mahadin, 2020), thus, individuals would feel the need to positively present themselves to others (Benstead, 2018). Since marital tension is considered a sensitive topic, couples tend to conceal their trajectory over time (Greene et al., 2006). Thus, Jordanians may choose to behave in a similar manner (Al-Darmaki, 2015), as they may choose a restrained form of communication, rather than a personal and expressive one with individuals outside their community (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000). Therefore, my role as an insider researcher equipped me in gaining community access, through the establishment of trust, acceptance, openness and the alleviation of suspicion or fear (Benstead et al., 2018). I was able to approach participants in a mindful and culturally

sensitive manner. This was achieved by providing a detailed account of my doctorate programme, the ethical procedures, and responsibility I adhere to, particularly confidentiality and anonymity. Clarifying my professional boundaries, provided the foundation for trust and encouraged the participants to participate.

3.4.5 The Eight Participants

Initially twelve individuals showed interest in taking part in this study, four of whom did not meet the criteria as they were in interracial marriages. It should be noted that all the participants had married for the purpose of love, none had arranged marriages, which is a common customary practice in the Jordanian culture (Mrayan & Cornish, 2015). The relevant demographic details of the participants are presented in Table 1 below, using pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality and anonymity.

Table 1. List of participants

	Gender	Duration of Marriage
Amir	Male	1 year
Waleed	Male	1.5 years
Dalia	Female	2 years
Karam	Male	3 years
Saif	Male	3 years
Farah	Female	3.5 years
Laila	Female	4 years
Maryanna	Female	5 years

3.4.6 Data Collection

The aim of adopting an IPA approach is to reflect a developmental process of interpretation and navigation (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, semi-structured interviews were conducted, to allow for in-depth and detailed descriptions of the lived experience (Smith et al., 2009). Non-directive and open-ended questions were used, to provide leeway for participants to freely express and describe their lived experiences (Willig, 2013). Due to Covid-19 restrictions in the UK, the interviews were conducted remotely via Microsoft Teams, were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

3.4.7 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are considered the most suitable approach for data collection in IPA, acting as a gateway to access in-depth, reflective and valuable first-person accounts of the lived experience (Smith & Nizza, 2022). It is imperative in IPA to capture rich data, in order to achieve high quality analysis (Smith et al., 2022). A carefully constructed interview schedule (see Appendix C) was developed to explore the research questions.

Prior to data collection, I conducted a pilot interview with one participant, to identify any potential issues that I might come across in the interview schedule and process (Smith et al., 2009). Prior to the pilot interview, I provided the participant with an information sheet (see Appendix D) about the nature and scope of the study, limits of confidentiality and their right to withdraw from the study as defined in the Data Protection Act 2018 in the UK (GDPR, 2018). At the onset of the interview, I allowed space for my participant to ask questions prior to acquiring a signed consent form (see Appendix E). Towards the end of the interview, I provided my participant with a debrief

sheet (see Appendix F), which included details about their right to withdraw from the study, how data is handled and contact information for services in case they needed support following the interview. This was essential due to the sensitive nature of the experience of marital tension and the potential emotional distress that it may cause, in line with a fundamental code of human ethics research; 'maximising benefit and minimising harm' (BPS, 2021, p.6). This procedure was adopted throughout all interviews.

I continued to utilise a few techniques and approaches, to overcome potential challenges from conducting online interviews. Firstly, I exposed the physical space in which I was conducting the interviews, by holding the laptop and scanning the space I was in, to provide a sense of the physical space and reassurance that the interview was conducted privately. Secondly, I ensured that the camera was turned on at all times, to convey empathy through minimal encouragers, and utilised open body language, to maintain participant engagement. These approaches were recommended by Joshi et al. (2020), to build rapport. Also, Kavanaugh and Ayres (1998) highlighted the benefits of pacing, by using occasional pauses and check-ins, which were also utilised to adapt to the needs of the participants.

This pilot interview provided an opportunity to find creative ways for tackling potential issues that might occur due to the interviews being conducted remotely or the cultural barriers mentioned above. These approaches were deemed helpful for both the participant and myself, as I noticed a general shift in their stance, from a guarded position to a more relaxed one. Additionally, these approaches worked as ice breakers, which set the scene and invited a sense of comfort into the virtual room, and allowed me to practice and explore my interviewing skills. Halfway through the interview, I noticed myself religiously adhering to the interview schedule, rather than

allowing a natural conversational flow to take place. Thus, I gave myself the opportunity to utilise the prompts more frequently and noticed a substantial difference in the depth of reflections provided by the participant. Notably, I adopted these approaches and learnings throughout data collection stage.

3.4.8 Data Analysis

The data were analysed using IPA, and adhered to the six analytic steps and guidelines by Smith and Nizza (2022). The following presents a detailed account of the steps taken throughout the analysis.

Step one: Reading and Initial Noting

I re-acquainted myself with the data, by reading and re-reading the transcripts in an in-depth and thorough manner, while simultaneously listening to the audio recording. I maintained the research questions in mind whilst noticing the structure of the participants' narrative and how various elements of their shared experience fitted with one another. This process allowed me to place myself within the context of the interview, thereby engaging fully with the data and recalling my initial responses to the participants' shared experiences. I found this practice worthwhile to remain with the participants process in later stages in the analysis.

A recording of the initial responses was kept in a non-prescriptive manner, as I paid attention to any patterns, emphasis and contradictions, whilst reflecting on my own responses to any specific words or sentences. I engaged with the data with open mindedness, whilst steering away from jumping to conclusions. However, I noticed myself shifting between my assumptions about the lived experiences of my participants, and their own constructed reality of the phenomenon. During those instances, I reverted to my reflexive journal (see Appendix G), to bracket any

assumptions and biases that might influence me remaining within the process. I also reflected on this with my supervisor and peer researchers, as I shared my anxiety around steering the direction of the meaning making process according to my own set of beliefs around the phenomenon. I found this to be a fruitful process, as I was able to build on my reflections either within research supervision meetings or personal therapy.

Following the initial noting I produced a set of exploratory notes, on the right-hand margin of the transcript (see Appendix H). Three different types of exploratory notes were utilised, providing an in-depth perspective about the data (Smith et al., 2009). Firstly, descriptive notes capture the explicit meaning of the shared experience (Smith & Nizza, 2022). Secondly, linguistic notes, focus on the use of language, such as: pauses, verb tenses, laughter, pronouns used, hesitations and repetitions (Smith et al., 2009). Thirdly, conceptual notes are constructed from a position of curiosity by questioning possible theories about the shared experience, particularly at the onset of analysis. This facilitated moving away from the explicit meaning to a more interpretative position (Smith & Nizza, 2022).

Step Two: Articulating Experiential Statements

At this stage, the experiential statements were formulated and noted on the left-hand margin of the transcript (see Appendix H). The aim herein is to encapsulate succinctly the learning about the participant's meaning making of their experience and acquire a sense of the transcript in its entirety (Smith et al., 2009). Thus, analytic effort is utilised, as a decision-making process ensues regarding which aspects need to be brought to the fore (Smith & Nizza, 2022). I utilised exploratory notes to identify important elements that emerged from the meaning making process, ensuring that it was contextually grounded in the data, whilst also capturing the psychological process and

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substance of it. I was aware of the level of engagement that I was partaking in, and was faced with the challenge of utilising sufficient statements to encapsulate the complexity of the shared experience. I noticed my conscientious efforts to ground my statements in the data, and remain interpretive and true to my participants' meaning making processes.

Step Three: Finding Connections and Clustering Experiential Statements

Upon identifying the experiential statements, the aim was to review and refine them by finding similarities, differences, patterns and structures (Smith and Nizza, 2022). My focus was to highlight key features of the participants' meaning making processes. I undertook this manually, by printing out the experiential statements, cutting them individually and placing them collectively on a flat surface for ease of repositioning. This equipped me with a general overview of the statements prior to clustering those that were connected according to a certain feature or similarity.

Step Four: Culminating the Table of Personal Experiential Themes

I constructed a table of personal experiential themes, where each cluster of experiential statements was placed under a personal experiential theme. Quotes from the transcript were written alongside each experiential statement, reflecting the general theme connecting them. Each personal experiential theme represents the convergence of the statements collectively (Smith & Nizza, 2022). It was crucial at this stage to refer back to the research questions as a frame of reference in prioritising certain aspects of the experiential statements. I also looked for connections through various methods, such as divergence, abstraction and subsumption, as suggested by Smith et al. (2009).

Step Five: Repeat Stages One to Four for the Remaining Transcripts

Once stages one to four were completed for the first interview, the same analytic process was applied to the remaining seven. This allowed for an individual presentation of the nuance and variability of each participant's presentation of their experience, whilst also looking for patterns across the whole sample. This is pertinent in IPA, as the aim, in keeping with an idiographic commitment, is exploring each case on its own (Smith & Nizza, 2022).

This highlighted the importance of bracketing the knowledge that I gained from previous analysis to the best of my ability. I found this to be increasingly challenging the further along I moved in the analysis, as I was noticing myself mentally referring back to experiential themes from previous participants. Consequently, I attempted to bracket my knowledge by deeply engaging with the data, particularly in step one of the analysis, whilst listening to the audio recording of the interview. I found this practice helpful as it brought me back to the virtual interview room and allowed me to re-connect with the uniqueness of my participant's shared experience.

Step six: Cross-case Analysis

This final stage involved identifying and comparing patterns and themes across all cases. As IPA involves an inductive and idiographic approach, each table of personal experiential themes will hold a unique structure and wording. The connections need to be in relation to the concepts presented in each table (Smith & Nizza, 2022). I achieved this by reviewing all tables of experiential themes simultaneously, and identifying idiosyncratic differences, similarities, connections and familiar patterns within them, resulting in the final table of group experiential themes (see Appendix K).

3.4.9 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is concerned with an authentic assessment of the researcher's assumptions, values, beliefs and judgements in relation to the study, and how these may have impacted on the co-construction of meaning during the research process (Finlay, 1998; Primeau, 2003; Willig, 2019). It is considered an important practice in qualitative research (Morrow, 2005), as it introduces deeper awareness of the researcher's internal processes, in terms of preconceptions and motivations, that may potentially guide the research and analysis processes (Langdridge, 2007). This, in turn, will aid in reducing the researcher's influence through the process of bracketing (Ahern, 1999). Consequently, reflexive practice holds its own pillar in IPA, given that it follows a double hermeneutic cycle, whereby the researcher makes sense of the participants' sense making of their experience (Smith & Osborn, 2015). Therefore, the researcher's role is placed at the forefront seeing that their subjectivity is involved in the co-construction of the interpretations of the analysis (Willig, 2013), through intersubjectivity and interconnectedness with the participants (Finaly, 2009). Reflexive practice is also particularly valuable for researchers who hold a dual role of an insider as well as outsider, such as myself, who may experience conflict within their role due to the assumptions and judgements held in light of their own subjective experience (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007).

In hindsight, considering this duality in my position as a researcher, I noticed myself holding a curious position when listening to my participants' experiences of marital tension, however I may have overlooked cultural aspects that are engrained within the day-to-day life of Jordanians. For example, some participants alluded to the culture of shame and honour within their day-to-day marital experiences. Considering my insider position as a Jordanian, the assumptions and knowledge I held regarding this tradition

in my culture, hindered my consistency in holding a position of curiosity and remaining within my participants' subjective experience of it. On the other hand, being an insider researcher has also allowed space for my participants to explore deeper elements of their subjective experience, as they have taken my preconceived knowledge into consideration when sharing their experiences. However, being an outsider has created somewhat of a balance in terms of the assumptions held within by participants about my own knowledge, as they explained thoroughly and in depth the marital dynamics and patterns experienced within their marital relationship.

3.4.10 Ethics

Ethical approval to undergo this study was obtained from UEL's Ethics Committee (see Appendix I). In accordance with the core principles of ethical research, depicted by both UEL's "Code of Practice for Research Ethics" (UEL, 2015) and BPS's "Code of Human Ethics Research" (BPS, 2021). Social responsibility is key in ethical psychological research, which involves an exploration of how the findings of the proposed research may impact the wellbeing of participants (BPS, 2021). This study involved exploring the experience of marital tension for Jordanians in the UK, aiming to give them a voice and raise awareness from the perspective and experiences of a minority ethnic group. The introduction of this new perspective contributes to the advancement and efficiency of therapeutic interventions for this client group.

3.4.10.1 Confidentiality, Anonymity and Data Security

The anonymity of participants was upheld throughout the research process. As the entire procedure was conducted online, hardcopy data did not exist, and computer data files were encrypted, password protected (GDPR, 2018), and stored on OneDrive at UEL. Audio recordings were destroyed following the transcription process, and any

identifying features and personal information from the transcribed data were excluded and pseudonymised. Participants were informed that supervisors and examiners have access to parts of the anonymised transcripts, and that the analysis section includes excerpts of the transcripts. This is in line with the code of human ethics, highlighting the importance of 'respecting the autonomy, privacy and dignity of individuals and communities' (BPS, 2017a, p.6).

3.5 Research Validity and Quality

Research validity refers to the credibility and meaningfulness of qualitative research, pertaining to the fitness of the design and methodological approach of the study with its purpose (Smith et al., 2022). Assessment and evaluation criteria for qualitative research have been introduced by various scholars, such as Elliott et al. (1999), Nizza et al. (2021), Smith (2011a; 2011b) and Yardley (2000; 2007; 2017), to ensure that the study represents the phenomenon. This was deemed challenging as qualitative methods are not reliant on objective, general or replicable outcomes, but rather on theoretical or purposeful sampling, where knowledge is not seen as objective but shaped by those experiencing the phenomenon (Seidel & Kelle, 1995). Yardley (2000) introduced evaluation criteria that can be applied to qualitative research: sensitivity to content, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance. Due to the vastness of the world of qualitative research, Smith (2011a) challenged the validity of applying a one-size-fits all checklist for evaluation criteria, and instead, introduced the notion of various levels of specificity. The first level speaks to all forms of research, the second focuses on qualitative research as a whole and the third is specific to a particular qualitative approach. Smith (2011a) further introduced specific evaluation criteria for IPA, to aid in efficiently developing and

assessing the quality of IPA studies. It is essential to identify the objectives and knowledge that the study aims to produce, to evaluate research (Willig, 2013). For this study, I have evaluated its quality by utilising an overarching approach to include criteria introduced by Yardley (2000), Smith (2011a) and Nizza et al. (2021).

3.5.1 Sensitivity to Context

Sensitivity to context in qualitative research is demonstrated by exhibiting awareness of previous and current substantive or theoretical knowledge surrounding the phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009; Yardley, 2000). From the onset of the research process, I was able to orient my study and identify gaps in the literature by conducting a thorough review of the literature surrounding the experience of marital tension. However, no previous research has explored this phenomenon, particularly within a Jordanian context. Additionally, an element of sensitivity to context entails paying attention to the participants' perspectives, socio-cultural and linguistic context (Yardley, 2000). Alongside the review of socio-cultural literature, I used my own unique and personal knowledge as an insider researcher, to foresee potential sensitivities that might occur for my participants within their socio-cultural context. Therefore, I utilised various approaches stipulated in section 3.4.7 Interviews.

Part of considering the sensitivity to context, is paying attention to the role of the researcher, and potential power imbalances within their relationship with the participants (Yardley, 2000). Therefore, to address these considerations, I highlighted the participants' right to withdraw from the study, and utilised non-verbal communication to convey an empathic and attentive position, as stipulated in section 3.4.7 Interviews. I was also aware of the intersubjective nature of my interactions with participants, therefore, I maintained a reflexive journal and employed my supervisory

meetings and personal therapy sessions to reflect on my assumptions. These enabled me to practice disciplined bracketing, maintain an unbiased position, maintain awareness and elucidate my own belief systems and subjectivities.

3.5.2 Commitment and Rigour

Commitment can be exhibited through ongoing comprehensive engagement with the research, particularly during data collection, development of competence in the use of methods and knowledge of relevant data (Yardley, 2000). Within IPA, commitment can be demonstrated through the level of attentiveness to participants during interviews and diligently engaging with data analysis, both of which require a personal level of commitment from the researcher (Smith et al., 2009). Thus, I was able to utilise the skills I acquired as a trainee Counselling Psychologist to pay close attention to my participants non-verbal cues, to ensure that they were feeling comfortable and safe enough to continue undertaking the interview. I was also able to use my listening skills to notice what my participants brought to the virtual interview room, whilst developing good rapport with them. Furthermore, the use of reflexivity throughout the research process, particularly during analysis, ensured a high level of personal commitment and investment, which helped me remain grounded in the data.

Rigour is reflected through the appropriateness of the chosen purposive sample and its homogeneity with the research question and chosen methodology (Smith et al., 2009). It is also displayed through addressing all the complexities and variations throughout and upon completion of the analysis (Yardley, 2000). From the outset of the research process, I have engaged in peer group consultation sessions and IPA workshops and lectures, to develop and fine tune my research focus and methodology. The detailed account of my analytic and methodological process illustrate the actions

taken to remain attentive and perform this research in a rigorous manner, in line with Yardley's (2008) guidelines. Furthermore, rigour involves the illustration of thorough analysis and idiographic engagement (Smith et al., 2009), whilst illustrating analytic depth and substantial insight into the lived experience (Smith et al.,2022). This is in line with Nizza et al.'s (2021) recommendations to provide a 'close analytic reading of participants' words', by engaging in thorough interpretation of data and providing quoted material to aid in providing meaning to the experiences illustrated in the data (p. 371).

It is also recommended to focus on pivotal experiential meanings within the data and engaging in in-depth analysis (Nizza et al., 2021). As illustrated in Chapter Four: Analysis, data was interpreted beyond a simple descriptive measure, whilst providing proportionate key information regarding the participants and the emergent themes. It also involved interpreting the data individually as well as at a group level, which illustrates 'attending to convergence and divergence'. This allowed for idiographic depth and comparison, illustrating intertwined similarities and differences amongst the participants individually and as a whole (Nizza et al., 2021, p.371).

3.5.3 Transparency and Coherence

Transparency in research refers to the clarity in exhibiting the means by which the interpretation was derived from the data (Yardley, 2000), through describing the stages of the research process (Smith et al., 2009). It is beneficial to develop a binding narrative across the whole study (Smith et al., 2022). Coherence speaks to the hermeneutic sensibility, whether the themes interrelate with one another and the degree to which the research fits with philosophical perspective of the chosen approach (Smith et al., 2009). Transparency and coherence were achieved throughout

the process of writing-up, by providing a clear description of all research stages. The quality of the narrative in this thesis extends throughout its chapters, including a detailed description of the data sampling procedures and stages of data analysis, ending with the discussion chapter, which draws upon the relevant literature and key phenomenological concepts. Moreover, the analysis section of this thesis identified patterns using excerpts from transcripts. This is in line with the recommendations by Nizza et al. (2021), who identified one of the quality indicators as 'constructing a compelling, unfolding narrative' (p. 371). This stresses that the analysis should lead a persuasive and coherent narrative, by curating a dialogue between selected excerpts from participants.

3.5.4 Impact and Importance

Impact and importance of the research is paramount when evaluating its validity and quality, particularly when considering how it may shape practical implications and perceptions around the phenomenon (Yardley, 2000). Smith et al. (2009) remarked that this may be a key principle in evaluating an IPA study; regardless of how well it is conducted, its validity lies in the influence it has on the reader. This study was aimed at broadening the understanding of the reader by providing rich knowledge about the experience of marital tension within a Jordanian context. The aim was also to contribute to the scientist-practitioner model, by introducing new knowledge, informing therapeutic interventions for Counselling Psychologists and other practitioners in the field of psychology and psychotherapy.

3.6 Chapter Three Summary

This chapter has provided a detailed account of the philosophical underpinnings and rationale for my chosen methodology. It has presented an overview of the research

design and process of IPA analysis, which contributes to enriching qualitative research. Quality criteria and ethical considerations were addressed in this chapter. The following chapter will present the analysis conducted considering the research methodology and design.

Chapter Four: Analysis Chapter

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of this study according to the identified emergent themes and subthemes, following the IPA of the eight semi-structured interviews. As stated in Chapter One: Introduction, the research question guiding this study is: How do Jordanians experience marital tension? With a sub question: How do Jordanians manage marital tension? The process of analysis was supported, developed and illuminated by extracts from the participants' accounts. With the research questions in mind, three overarching themes and ten subthemes emerged as follows.

Table 2. **Summary of themes**

Themes	*Subthemes*
Theme 1: Facing initial challenges of marital tension	• *Subtheme 1*: Sensing the elephant in the room • *Subtheme 2*: Facing differences in life perspectives • *Subtheme 3*: End of the honeymoon phase: facing an unpleasant reality
Theme 2: Engaging with marital tension	• *Subtheme 1*: Feeling stuck in an unpleasant place • *Subtheme 2*: Varying dynamics of handling tension • *Subtheme 3*: Enduring negative emotions • *Subtheme 4*: Underlying worry about walking in their parents' footsteps
Theme 3: Actively attempting to resolve the tension	• *Subtheme 1*: Taking a breather to regulate emotions • *Subtheme 2*: Maintaining effective communication • *Subtheme 3*: Taking proactive steps to manage future tension

It should be noted that the three themes were supported by accounts voiced by all eight participants, while the subthemes were supported by the majority of them. It is recommended that each subtheme includes data from at least half the number of participants (Smith et al., 2009). This was applied to this analysis, whereby for each subtheme, data from four to eight participants was captured (see Appendix J).

It is imperative to highlight one of the key features of IPA, pertaining to the double hermeneutic circle. This analytic process is concerned with the researcher's effort to make sense of the participants' accounts, as they make sense of their own experiences. However, whilst the researcher attempts to remain with the participants' lived experience through reflexive practice and attentive analysis, this double hermeneutic circle may become subjectively coloured through their own position, preconceptions and life experiences (Smith, 2007). With that in mind, I acknowledge that the resulting emergent themes from this analysis, are just one interpretation of the data presented. Whilst research validity and quality standards were met (Nizza et al, 2021; Smith, 2011a; Yardley, 2000), as explained in Chapter Three: Methodology, it is important to point out that a different researcher may have identified alternative emergent themes and subthemes depending on their subjective interpretation and understanding of the data.

4.2 Summary of Analysis

The order of the emergent themes from this analysis has been set out in a narrative style, to ensure that it can be coherently followed as a process. It begins with how the initial onset of marital tension is experienced, which is depicted in the theme 'Facing initial challenges of marital tension'. The following theme then introduces personal and relational processes experienced within ongoing marital tension, as covered in 'Engaging with marital tension'. The final theme 'Actively attempting to resolve the

tension', explores the various approaches depicted by participants to manage and resolve marital tension. However, it should be noted that the order of the themes does not necessarily reflect the order by which the participants shared their experiences. The next section will present the themes and subthemes in further detail.

4.3 Theme 1: Facing initial challenges of marital tension

This first theme clusters together subthemes that identify how the participants experienced the onset of marital tension. The first subtheme, 'Sensing the elephant in the room', depicts how the initial moments of tension are experienced as an invisible entity, with a strongly felt overshadowing presence in the room. The second subtheme, 'Facing differences in life perspectives', illustrates the participants' experience of how tension is sparked when facing differences in life experiences, which in turn, introduces a difference in perspectives. The final subtheme, 'End of the honeymoon phase: facing an unpleasant reality', focuses on how tension begins to crystalise for the participants leading to the initial 'honeymoon phase' coming to an end and then being faced with unpleasant realities about their marital relationship.

4.3.1 Subtheme 1: Sensing the elephant in the room

This subtheme explores how the presence of marital tension is experienced by the participants. Most described it as a subtle, yet uncomfortably heavy presence. Some highlighted the fact that, despite it not being manifested in a tangible form, its felt presence was all consuming in the relationship. The title of this subtheme was inspired by Saif, who used the phrase 'elephant in the room' to describe the tension. With that in mind, the phrase elephant in the room is defined as 'an obvious truth deliberately ignored by all parties in a situation' (Collins, 2022a), which was seen as fitting to describe the shared experience by the participants.

Saif's depiction of the phrase was used to indicate the avoided invisible, yet noticeable, presence of tension in the room:

> *"I think of it as this uhh, like this ghost in the house, like an elephant in the room that nobody talks about, they both feel the tension and its kind of not okay". (Saif, L:17-19)*

The simultaneous use of the words 'ghost' and 'elephant' symbolically reflects the parallel forms in which tension is experienced and whilst it is manifested in an invisible form, it is, simultaneously, heavily present. This parallel form introduces an unsettling environment, which Saif described as being 'not okay', thus indicating a disturbance of normality in the relationship. Furthermore, he explained how the response to this tension was avoidance, something that was also shared by Karam, who highlighted the ripple effect that this has on expanding the tension further:

> *"Its something that we feel uhh… that's caused by… unspoken aggression like [nervous laughs] unspoken… unsolved problems, or unresolved issues in the relationship, that would carry the, the tension and would, put some tension in the relationship". (Karam, L:7-10)*

The response of passive silence and avoidance towards marital tension, seems to have a ripple effect on the relationship as a whole. His nervous laughter may indicate the unsettling state of disturbance when sitting with the tension. Moreover, his continuous use of the words 'unspoken' and 'unresolved' may reflect feeling stuck in a position of being faced with the tension, yet avoiding it through lack of communication.

Both Lailah and Marianna also emphasised the subtle nature of marital tension, and the ripple effect it exerts on their relationships. Lailah depicted its presence as an aloof state of 'coldness' leading to a loss of 'harmony':

"There is a lot of… just, coldness I guess, that would in my mind you know… fall under the umbrella of marital tension, it, it might not be tense in the sense of, you know, there, there isn't any drama, let's say, but it's, it's still… there's no harmony. So that would count as marital tension in my mind". (Lailah, L:40-44)

Whilst Marianna described it as both 'subtle' and 'disturbing':

"It doesn't have to be like, uh, aggressive, because of the word tension, it is actually quite subtle and also disturbing at the same time". (Marianna, L:236-238)

Both excerpts revealed various forms in which tension is represented in its understated form, with Lailah describing it as 'coldness' and Marianna as 'subtle and also disturbing'. Seemingly, they both pointed out the manifestation of tension in an intangible form, as there is no 'drama' nor is it 'aggressive' in its nature. Furthermore, they both described the lingering influence of tension on the relationship; Lailah framing it as lack of 'harmony' and Marianna as 'disturbing'. In some sense, it appears that marital tension is indicative of a sort of silent commotion that leads to disrupting the status quo of the relationship. The ripple effect of tension seems to create a simultaneous absence of coherence and harmony in the relationship. This subtheme provided a felt sense of how the presence of marital tension is experienced. Despite each experience varying with its own uniqueness, there is a keen awareness of tension as the elephant in the room.

4.3.2 Subtheme 2: Facing differences in life perspectives

Most participants identified that divergent perspectives brought by themselves and their spouses into the marital relationship, can be a leading influence for the onset of tension. Seemingly, these differences in perspectives were shaped by their life experiences prior to marriage. This was articulated in two ways: some highlighted that these differences were carried through upbringing and background, whilst others

attributed them to varying perspectives about gender norms. Prior to exploring both views, the below excerpt by Marianna portrays her experience of facing differences in perspectives, particularly around views on marriage, and how the onset of marital tension was fuelled within an intersection of differences between two worlds:

> *"The tension comes when uhh, both of them like, clash in the middle… when they each have a different vision or understanding of what marriage is and they come from two different worlds, yet they, they need to be in harmony within one world together… but, but these two different worlds are weighing in on them".* *(Marianna, L:20-24)*

Marianna depicted an image of the journey of marital tension, starting from a point of 'clashing in the middle', and ending with a desired goal to find 'harmony' amidst the challenges accompanying varying perspectives. Her choice of words may indicate a struggle of working through the differences, particularly around views of what constitutes marriage. She continued to describe that those differences originated from 'two different worlds'. This choice of wording reflects the vastness of the felt difference, to an extent that it resembles foreign territory, so much so that it was termed as coming from an entirely separate universe. She continued to describe how the ultimate goal was to live 'in harmony' within a unified world, yet the differences of the separate worlds were 'weighing in' on them. The repetitive use of 'worlds' and the analogy of the weight of said worlds, may indicate an immense sense of being burdened by the difficulties in navigating this perturbing situation, in order to live in a unified and harmonious world together. It seems that marital tension is manifested within this process of encountering the differences that separate them, whilst they attempt to find their way back to one another.

Farah remarked how differences in upbringing, also contributed to the onset of marital tension. Similar to Marianna, she was also astounded by the difficulty of living with the differences that each spouse introduces:

> *"Imagine two people, from two different families, who are raised differently and living together… its extremely, extremely difficult". (Farah, L:243-245)*

Her use of 'imagine' may be indicative of the difficulty to grasp the idea of co-existing amongst all the differences that upbringing and familial life have introduced to her marriage. Her repetition and emphasis on 'extremely' may be reflective of the extent of the difficulty she experienced. This is also evident in her distancing herself from the experience by speaking in third person. Seemingly, the tension brought in by the challenges of being faced with different life experiences, has proven to be an intense experience. This notion was also experienced by Lailah, who identified that tension is initiated by '*different backgrounds, uhh different upbringing*' (L:6-7).

Marital tension was also sparked when facing difference in perspectives around gender norms. Whilst Dalia also highlighted her experience of tension being ignited by differences in perspectives due to having led different lives, '*a different umm background, from a different family… from a different… everything really*' (L:5-6), she also emphasised the role of having different perspectives on gender norms:

> *"This is the point of view of almost all men [pause]. I don't know why but… I think they just uhh, [pause] uhh see themselves as, like they're better than us (…) for me this is a very big problem, because I am very independent. I hate taking orders… I really hate taking orders, so when… because he's a man he feels the need to give orders, and you already… like I'm already dealing with our life and our problems, so uhh… I hate the way that he speaks to me when he makes an order". (Dalia, L:18-20; 25-29)*

Initially, there was a generalised notion that men view themselves as superior, and later on, she associated it with her own experience of 'taking orders'. Seemingly, there

is a general sense of anger and frustration by the inequality that she faced with her spouse, which is reflected by her use of words 'very big problem' and a strong and repetitive expression of the emotion of 'hate'. Also, as she described other life stressors, she switched from speaking in first person to second person and then back to first. The distancing in that moment may be indicative of the intensity of the tension experienced in this situation. It appears that the power imbalance and unequal treatment she was receiving, was igniting emotions of anger and frustration. Moreover, highlighting the fact that she is an 'independent' woman, might be indicative of the fact that gender norms might be taking away that element of her identity and perhaps, freedom. Karam on the other hand, introduced the flipside to Dalia's experience of difference in perspectives about gender norms. He described his experience of compromising his culturally granted privilege as a male, by engaging with his wife as his equal:

> *"I see that giving her what she deserves in the relationship by, uhh, explaining and not being… like doing everything on a mutual level, I see that as me compromising things, which are by cultural law and values, they are actually mine, yet I'm compromising them and I feel like I need to be appreciated for that (…) its like its uhh… it's suddenly like, I mean her argument is that this is how it is for everyone, and I think this… this comes from the mixture of cultures that we're surrounded by". (Karam, L:152-156; 158-160)*

The general consensus from both excerpts is that the difference in perspective lies in the fact that men are given a superior position to women, and whilst Dalia experiences this as anger provoking, Karam is faced with an unmet expectation of appreciation. His view is that sharing and involving his spouse as an equal, equates to him giving up his cultural right of superiority. Seemingly, the onset of the tension, is fuelled by not receiving an acknowledgement of him sacrificing his position of power. It may be speculated, that his reference to 'cultural law and values' perhaps provides him with a

sense of validation, that he is in fact compromising when treating his spouse as an equal. With that in mind, his use of 'deserves', may indicate an internal sense of conflict between his view of her deserving equality, and his own view of being in a superior position. Moreover, the frequent hesitance prior to describing his spouse's responses is perhaps indicative of an underlying sense of frustration at his efforts going unseen. Seemingly, an association was made between his wife expecting equality and their frequent encounters with various other cultures in the UK. Perhaps there is a sense that the differences in perspective caused by merging with other cultures, is contributing to creating further differences in perspectives, and eventually towards experiencing marital tension.

These excerpts highlight how the patriarchal nature of the Jordanian culture, which is led by ideologies of honour and shame, can manifest in the experience of marital tension and the day-to-day interactions amongst spouses. Both Dalia and Karam explained how these interwoven norms are experienced from the perspectives of both genders. The dominating and immense pressure placed on women to abide by certain rules and expectations focused around maintaining male dominated ideologies, help protect the honour of the male figure in their life. Dalia has expressed her deep frustrations around being placed in that unwanted position of being controlled and overlooked by her spouse. Karam on the other hand, revealed how challenging it can be for a Jordanian male to steer away from these ideologies, which highlights the strong impact and deep presence of the culture of honour and shame within a Jordanian context, as it seems to introduce a position of power for males and a subdued position for females.

This subtheme introduced various ways in which participants experience difference in life perspectives, and the means by which it contributed to crystalising marital tension.

Evidently, the cohabitation of two individuals who lead differing life experiences, may lead to their finding themselves in a challenging position of disagreements and clashes, as part of their process of adapting to their differences. Another challenge described by participants, was differences in perspectives about gender norms, and the presence of the culture of shame and honour within marital interactions. It was apparent that differing understandings and manifestations of culturally rooted gender roles for participants, also contributed to the offset of marital tension.

4.3.3 Subtheme 3: End of the honeymoon phase: facing an unpleasant reality

The metaphor 'honeymoon phase' indicates the blissful initial marital stage, where the couple experience a blissful period of excitement and fascination as they get to know one another. The title of this subtheme draws upon this metaphor, indicating how the experience of marital tension, resulted in the loss of a blissful fantasy. This, in turn, resulted in participants facing an unpleasant reality within their marital relationship. Several were bewildered by this sudden shift, as they came to this realisation after knowing their spouses on a deeper level. For example, Waleed portrayed this dynamic by making a clear distinction between 'the honeymoon phase' and the reality of 'marriage', as various parts of his partner were revealed:

"Disagreements, I think that's something that happens and I think it's the, uhh [pause]… it's the new side of your partner that you find out after you marry them… I mean there's, there's you know the, the honeymoon phase, then there's the… the marriage but, uhh, there's definitely that tension that builds by, you know, living with someone, getting to know them, you know, on that closer level". (Waleed, L:4-8)

Waleed depicted disagreements as a form of tension, which were initiated after different 'sides' of his partner were revealed. Through his use of the phrases 'new side'

and 'closer level', he is highlighting a deeper layer of knowledge and acquaintance of his spouse that he was not familiar with prior to marriage. As he shared his experience, he spoke about this in second person, and this tendency to distance himself from his experience may be indicative of the difficulty in facing a different reality, one which he was not anticipating. It seems that the change in how he experienced and viewed his wife, led to a 'build up' of tension, which marked an end for the 'honeymoon phase'. Marianna shared a similar notion when asked about her experience of marital tension, as she made a clear distinction between the end of 'the rosy period' and facing 'differences':

> *"When stress comes into the marital relationship, for example, when the partners start to clash, like uhh… after the rosy period of love and all that comes the period of uhh… facing their differences, or let's say the difficulties in the relationship begins I think". (Marianna, L:3-6)*

She identified tension as 'stress' that 'comes' into the relationship, perhaps symbolically marking how the arrival of marital tension resulted in the ending of a blissful state of being, that is, the 'rosy period'. Similar to Waleed, Marianna seems to attribute the end of her honeymoon phase to her experience of facing 'differences' and 'difficulties' triggered by marital tension. Moreover, the frequent hesitancy when sharing her experience might be indicative of an underlying challenge in portraying this shift in her marital reality. There seems to be a shared difficulty for both Waleed and Marianna, when sharing their experiences of the honeymoon phase coming to an end. Perhaps this difficulty stems from a sense of loss, which is accompanied with an inevitable situation of facing a more challenging matrimonial reality. Dalia expressed a similar sense of distress, as she questioned her choice to get married:

> *"I think to myself why did I get married? Why did I get married? Why? Why? Why? [nervous laughs]… like I was living happily alone going to work [nervous laughs] going out with my friends and family and that is [sharp inhale]… I would*

just hate the idea of marriage and hate him too unfortunately [nervous laughs]".
(Dalia, L:250-253)

Dalia's repetition of 'why' perhaps indicates a deep sense of regret and confusion, when facing the unpleasant reality associated with marital tension. Moreover, her frequency of nervous laughter may suggest a sense of discomfort in sharing her strong emotion of 'hate' towards marriage and her spouse. Also, her use of the word 'unfortunately', in a way, indicates a sense of dismay at the reality of her situation, which is also reflected in her comparison between her life prior to marriage and her present situation. Seemingly, her premarital life appears to be more favourable for her, than experiencing the new and unpleasant marital reality, shaped by marital tension. This may be indicative in her deep inhaling of breath after remembering her premarital lifestyle; reflecting a sense of nostalgia for what seemed to be a more desirable reality than the one she is experiencing. This highlights the deep impact exerted on her by the tension, perhaps giving rise to a sense of disappointment in the unmet expectations and leading her, regrettably, to question her decision to wed. Farah seemed to share a similar sense of disappointment, due to the unmet expectation of a 'perfect' relationship:

> *"You know when you get married you think… you know, he's the perfect person, perfect… yeah? You love each other and stuff but… now, I believe there is no perfect relationship or no perfect person. So, if you are searching for that, I don't think you will find it". (Farah, L:30-33)*

It seems that Farah was holding on to the fantasy of perfection that resides within the honeymoon phase of the relationship. There seems to be a clear depiction of the transition between the mental state she was in at the onset of her marriage, and the shift that occurred after experiencing marital tension. Seemingly, the point of transition may be indicative of her loss of the 'perfect' fantasy present within the honeymoon

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phase and being faced with the unpleasant reality introduced by marital tension. Similar to Waleed, she seemed to be distancing herself by speaking in second person, which may be indicative of a shared sense of the difficulty in facing a disappointment in the absence of perfection. Also, the false start prior to her questioning my understanding, may be indicative of her avoidance to process this difficult reality and perhaps, she was seeking a sense of validation of her realisation. This shift in her reality urged her to give a cautionary note, 'I don't think you will find it', thus indicating her active adaptation to the new reality.

This subtheme has introduced a unique understanding of the various forms by which the 'honeymoon phase' may come to end. It has also uncovered the various experiential layers involved in the transition from bliss to a more taxing reality.

4.4 Theme 2: Engaging with marital tension

This second theme explores the various personal and relational processes that occur for the participants as they are facing ongoing marital tension. It clusters together subthemes that focus on various experiential aspects, such as thought processes, emotional responses and the consequences occurring due to the presence of marital tension. The first subtheme, 'Feeling stuck in an unpleasant place', depicts how participants experience a sense of stuckness accompanied by the experience of marital tension. The second subtheme, 'Varying dynamics of handling tension', explores the differing ways by which participants handle tension, and how they are faced with differences in their spouses' ways of doing so. The third subtheme, 'Enduring negative emotions', looks at the various negative emotions that participants endure during their lived experience of marital tension. The final subtheme, 'Underlying worry about walking in their parents' footsteps', depicts how the

participants' early life experiences introduced an inherent worry around repeating their parents' histories.

4.4.1 Subtheme 1: Feeling stuck in an unpleasant place

One key facet experienced through ongoing marital tension is the perception of being stuck in an unpleasant place. Several of the participants expressed this notion in their own unique way. Some reported being unpleasantly surprised by the position they found themselves in due to tension. Others felt trapped with no resources to escape the situation, giving rise to a sense of helplessness. The latter resonates with Marianna, who described a sense of oblivion in the face of marital tension:

> *"Marital tension, by the way, to us also is uhh… uhh like uhh, being awkward, not knowing what to say, not knowing how to express things to each other, not knowing what to do next, not knowing… you know?". (Marianna, L:234-236)*

It seems that for Marianna, the experience of marital tension is accompanied with a sense of confusion and feeling at loss as to how to respond or actively react towards such tension. This is indicative through the frequent hesitancy and repetition of 'not knowing', almost as though the sense of awkwardness introduced by the tension is overshadowing and somewhat dominating her mind. Seemingly, the sense of confusion and loss might be attributing to the felt sense of stuckness. A similar experience was shared by Waleed, where he described how marital tension was contributing to limiting his freedom of expression:

> *"I think you're [pause], you know, you're in between like a rock and a hard place really, where you know you don't, you know you've got to know your limits … you can't, you know, [nervous laugh] you can't take back certain things if you say them". (Waleed, L:115-118)*

He seems to be drawing an image of being stuck between unpleasant alternatives through his metaphor 'a rock and hard place', leaving him in a state of confusion and

awareness about his limitations. This heightened sense of awareness may be due to wanting to avoid any irreversible repercussions. Also, his tendency to speak in the second person when describing this situation may be indicative of his need to distance himself from the difficulty of his position. This is also apparent in his nervous laughter and repetition of 'you know', indicating these underlying concerns. In contrast, Karam expressed a strong urge to escape the feeling of being stuck:

> *"That stuckness makes me feel angry, and at some moments you just feel like you want to escape and just… you want to just end it and run away". (Karam, L:192-194)*

The situation of 'stuckness' for Karam seems to be accompanied by an emotion of anger. Seemingly, his anger may be fuelling an active need to escape the unpleasant situation he has found himself in. This wishful thinking was conveyed through his use of 'end it and run away'. His response to this experience is dissimilar to Waleed and Marianna, who seemed to remain timid when faced with marital tension.

Amir also conveyed a similar sense of frustration, as he described his dismay in the situation that he has found himself in:

> *"You kind of feel suffocated in your… in your own home, even though it's the person you love and uhh, want to be with, but you just feel like… this is **not** what I signed up for, I would rather just be doing something else, you know, blah blah blah". (Amir, L:18-20)*

In this excerpt, Amir is drawing a clear image of being stuck in an unpleasant position through his use of 'suffocated', despite the love he holds for his spouse. Here again, the overshadowing impact of tension is revealed, where he would rather remove himself from the situation. His emphasis on 'not', communicated a strong position of irritation and dismay, as marital tension was not something he 'signed up for'. It seems that through his experience of facing marital tension, he is also facing a disappointing

reality of a challenging situation. This is also evident in his distancing through speaking in second person, as well as his use of 'blah blah blah', as a means for him to avoid the overwhelming emotion of seeking an escape. This may be particularly confusing for him considering his need to escape from the situation, which also involves leaving his spouse who he 'loves'.

This subtheme conveyed an overarching situation of stuckness in an unpleasant place, that seemed to be shared in various ways by the participants. It also reflected differing ways by which participants responded to this situation.

4.4.2 Subtheme 2: Varying dynamics of handling tension

All participants shared various means of handling tension, as well as the differences they face with their spouses within their marital relationships. This subtheme pertains to how this is experienced within marital tension. Farah demonstrated this dynamic through her shared experience of not being met with the same level of emotional engagement by her spouse:

> *"My husband is really, you know, calm and relaxed. I'm more emotional, like I have to discuss things straight away… I, I would like the other person to be emotional with me and just you know show me what he's thinking, what he's feeling (…) in that moment I would feel like he doesn't care about my feelings, he doesn't care about building the relationship". (Farah, L:127-130; 138-139)*

She described her desire for further engagement from her spouse. Her statement of wanting to know his thoughts and emotions may indicate a sense of exclusion or isolation, as part of the dynamics within the experience of tension. The repetition of 'he doesn't care' perhaps also indicates a sense of feeling rejected by him, at a time when she is seeking proximity, companionship and support. This dynamic by which Farah had found herself disappointed by the lack of communication, was also shared by Saif:

"Maryam is very non-confrontational, so she doesn't address these issues, whereas I'm quite the opposite, like, I want to, you know, like if I'm screaming and like super angry, five minutes later I wanna sit down and like, have like, okay, what, like explain your view point I'm gonna explain my viewpoint". (Saif, L:93-96)

There is a sense of clarity and assertiveness in Saif's tone, as he expresses his communication preferences. It seems that being met with his wife's tendency to be non-confrontational is not easily accepted by him. Also, his frequent hesitancy and false starts, such as 'and like, have like, okay, what' may be indicative of an underlying sense of discomfort with the presence of unresolved tension. A contrasting reaction to Saif, is introduced by Lailah, whose preference in handling tension is to avoid it altogether:

*"My, my **default** reaction is to, be alone, process and that's it, I, I, I don't do… there's no follow-up to that, whereas Salem's default is 'okay there's a problem I need to address it', and he will take action, to fix that, and it's, so it's… it's, it's a bit like going to different extremes it's not that uhh… so it's kind of hard to meet in the middle". (Lailah, L:68-71)*

Lailah showed elements of distress when sharing her experience of having different preferences to handling martial tension to her husband. This was evident through the frequent hesitancy and repetitions throughout her response. This may insinuate a sense of isolation in her individual process, especially after expressing their difficulty to meet in the middle, rather than remaining at extreme ends, away from each other. This position of avoidance was also shared by Marianna, who prioritised having peace over experiencing tension:

"I want to protect my peace, peace of mind in order to feel in control and safe and vice versa, in order to protect this peace… and it so happens that he also has this... he also likes to have his peace as well, he does not like to confront, so in order to have this fake peace, let's say, because it is… it's fake, umm… I would suppress everything (…) it makes me feel safe, of course its not real, but its temporary and sometimes I need this temporary feeling until another trigger comes along the way". (Marianna, L:263-266; 270-272)

Unlike the previous excerpts, Marianna seems to be sharing similar means of handling tension as her spouse. Her top priority is to maintain peace, and she does so by controlling the tension through suppressing and avoiding confrontation. Her use of 'fake peace', and then again, confirming that 'it is… its fake', may indicate that there are underlying elements of the tension that is felt at times, or perhaps that this approach acts as a temporary solution to silence the tension, in order to feel safe. This may highlight that within Marianna's experience of tension, her sense of peace and safety is at stake. This importance of peace was a notion also shared by Waleed, when he described how he lost his sense of individuality after marriage, saying: '*sometimes feels like you have to sacrifice certain things to keep the peace*' (L:26).

This subtheme has highlighted a parallel dynamic of differences in handling marital tension. Initially, an overview of the differences amongst participants was perceived. Secondly, a noticeable difference was revealed when participants shared their own experience of facing differences in handling marital tension within their relationship.

4.4.3 Subtheme 3: Enduring negative emotions

This subtheme captures the participants' endured negative emotions when experiencing marital tension. All of the participants seemed to have a collective experience of enduring a multitude of emotions, with some expressing feelings of anger, frustration, and resentment, whilst others reported experiencing rejection, sadness, worry and helplessness. A clear depiction of this was reflected in Saif's experience of marital tension, where he grouped his feelings into two themes:

> *"There's a **multitude** of feelings… okay uhhh… (…), I think there's a **general** theme… to when I'm feeling tension, there's a general theme. It can either be **sad**, it can be **angry**, and it can be hurt I guess, like hurt kind of falls under sad. It's **either** sad or angry, like I would say these are the feelings and **that** theme*

> *changes depending on the circumstances, the situation and what I **perceive** happened". (Saif, L:182-183; 184-189)*

Saif clustered a 'multitude of feelings' into two main emotions of anger and sadness. He introduces a pragmatic understanding to his emotions, and how they are guided by his perception of the reasoning behind how the tension unfolded.

The emotion of anger seemed to be shared by Waleed, when he depicted his own emotions: '*probably anger and frustration really*' (L:115), as well as Karam, with him expressing his anger by following up with the notion that, '*sometimes marriage is against human rights*' (L:188). His strong worded statement reflects the intensity of the impact of tension on activating powerful emotions that he endured in a position of entrapment in the tension.

Resentment also surfaced as a key emotion endured during the experience of marital tension. For example, Amir took us on a journey of how he would feel resentful towards his spouse, yet finds it difficult to sit with this emotion:

> *"It just starts usually, well not usually, but could start with resentment and that's… that's been the most difficult part, realising that you're being resentful… you don't always see that". (Amir, L:48-50)*

It seems that his realisation of feeling resentful has caught him by surprise, which has evidently been difficult for him to grasp. This is reflected in his hesitancy of 'that's', and his distancing through speaking in the second person. Perhaps there is an underlying sense of difficulty with his view of himself, and his emotional responses during the experience of marital tension. Dalia, on the other hand, showed clear awareness of her emotion of resentment: '*I would feel resentful towards him and my life with him* (L:249), which extends beyond her marital relationship and onto the life she shares with him. It seems that the emotion of resentment, whilst being strongly present for

Dalia, is submissively so for Amir. In both situations, the intensity of the emotion is highlighted: in Dalia's case, it seems to overshadow her matrimonial life, whilst in Amir's case its presence seems to be too overpowering to process on a conscious level.

Another strongly felt emotion is sadness, which was accompanied by loss of the feeling of safety. This was a shared emotion by both Farah, '*you feel sad about it uhh [pauses] sometimes scared, scared from the future*' (L:85-86), and Marianna:

> "*It causes me to feel a lot of anger, sadness, helplessness. I would feel… I would feel helpless. I would say I would feel helpless, and uhh, out of control… I don't feel like I'm in control". (Marianna, L:257-260)*

Similar to Saif, Marianna shared a multitude of emotions that are triggered by tension. Her hesitant repetition of 'I would feel' and the heavy emotions shared, may be indicative of a deep sense of being overwhelmed. She continued to describe her feeling helpless and losing control, perhaps indicating an equal sense of loss of safety. Similarly, Farah shared her fear for the future, indicating her concern and perhaps also feeling unsafe within this uncertainty introduced by tension.

A further layer of emotion introduced by Lailah, is rejection:

> "*So, one thing I was sort of surprised by when we first got married was, if Salem is upset… I can't touch him, and that… I know its not supposed to, but that **does** feel like a rejection". (Lailah, L:286-288)*

It seems that amidst the tension experienced by Lailah, her spouse's response to it is an aversion towards physical contact, which manifests itself into a sense of rejection for her. Her use of 'not supposed to' and emphasis on '**does**', may indicate a sense of internal conflict for her. On the one hand, she feels rejected by her spouse and on the other, she seems to be having a further internal process of dismissing her triggered

emotion of rejection. Seemingly, the words 'not supposed to' indicate that there is exerted pressure on her to not feel rejected.

This subtheme depicts the wide array of negative emotions that all participants seemed to experience when facing marital tension. It would appear that marital tension triggered various emotional responses for the participants, that were deemed as being challenging to experience or process.

4.4.4 Subtheme 4: Underlying worry about following in their parents' footsteps

This subtheme looks at how the early life experiences of being exposed to parental marital tension prior to getting married, has introduced various concerns around repeating similar dynamics within their own marriage. There seems to have been a shared experience amongst several participants, of an underlying worry about 'following in their parents' footsteps'. This metaphor is used when describing an act of resembling an example of a predecessor (Collins, 2022b), which is fitting here considering their concern around re-enacting what they had witnessed as children.

Some of the participants associated their worry with reliving their parents' marital relationship, whilst others focused their concern in not wanting to expose their children to what they had experienced. The former was clearly illustrated by Marianna, when she explained her tendency to avoid tension, in fear of repeating her parents' history:

> *"Defence mechanism has always been first and foremost avoidance, because we would go to it directly, right away, both of us don't want to repeat our parents' histories and we… and we actually consciously said that to each other we both don't want to repeat our parents' relationships". (Marianna, L:173-177)*

She named her defence mechanism as avoidance, which is guided by her fear of re-enacting her parents' marital dynamics. Her use of 'always been first and foremost' may be indicative of a consistent response of avoidance, which could also be revealing

how deeply rooted and persistently present her worry is. Moreover, her use of 'directly, right away', illustrates immediate action taken, perhaps indicating her presence in a state of alertness. This is also indicative in her pointing out that this is a 'conscious' effort to avoid repeating her parents' marital history, thus revealing a need to keep the tension under control, so as to prevent these undesirable repercussions. Seemingly, her worry about repeating her parents' history may be persistently present during her experience of marital tension, leaving her in a heightened state of awareness.

A similar notion was shared by Amir, when he described his learning from witnessing parental marital tension: "*once love goes out the window, then you have a huge problem*" (L:189). There is a shared sense of alertness guided by an underlying worry about reliving their parents' marriages. Dalia illustrated similar conceptions; however, she added a further layer of concern about her children being exposed to experiences that resonated with her own:

> *"This is one of the things that I'm trying to do, to not to shout or raise my voice. I just need to become quiet, because I just hated when my parents used to shout at each other (…) I don't want to raise my children in an environment like that. I am trying to avoid every single mistake that I thought my parents did, every huge mistake that affected my feelings and my personality". (Dalia, L:302-304; 305-307)*

Dalia's description of her response to tension, illustrates a preference to suppress outward self-expression, a behaviour she witnessed during parental marital tension, so as to avoid creating a similar environment for her children. The repetition of the word 'every' may be indicative of how persistent and influential her early life experiences have been on her. It may be speculated that this might be a driving force for the underlying sense of worry, leaving her in a state of awareness of any and every potential behaviour that may contribute to impacting on her children's 'feelings' and 'personalities'. Waleed shared a similar position, where he expressed his preference

to work on building a strong foundation for his marriage, in order to avoid exposing his children to marital tension, as it '*causes a lot of damage*' (L:210). He also shared the learning he took away from witnessing parental marital tension that he is currently implementing in his own marriage:

> *"It's that male Arab pride that doesn't allow you to apologise, which is… like I said, having witnessed it so many times, even from my own dad (…) I just think that's the biggest problem and that's taught me not to do that". (Waleed, L:261-263; 264-265)*

Waleed named one of the core issues contributing to marital tension as 'male Arab pride', which he learned about through observing parental marital tension. His use of the word 'biggest problem', highlights the magnitude of the impact exerted by having this form of pride on the escalation of tension. Being a male himself, he has taken it upon himself to never shy away from the act of apologising. Seemingly, his father's influence has shaped his means of relating to his wife during periods of tension, with his main aim being to avoid repeating his parents' marital dynamics. That is, he has taken away his learning of certain attributes and behaviours, in order to avoid them happening in his own marriage. A similar yet contrasting experience was shared by Saif, who was likewise influenced by his father. However, instead of adopting altered behaviour, he has crystalised the learnt behaviour by relating to his wife in a similar manner:

> *"My father was, was a, very, very, **very harsh** man (…) yeah so, I, uh it definitely has shaped, who I am and.. and umm the way I was treated, **has** manifested in the way I treat Maryam sometimes, like, very **harsh**… … and it comes from a place where I want her to be better. I want us to do better". (Saif, L:564-565; 584-587)*

His hesitant repetition and emphasis at the beginning of the excerpt perhaps illuminates the intensity of the harshness of his past experiences with his father. The

subsequent hesitant repetition of 'and' perhaps reflects an underlying worry about whether his spouse is experiencing his way of relating to her, the way he did with his father. This is also indicative in his emphasis of the word 'harsh', where he describes his own behaviour with the same intensity as his father's. He continues to explain how his behaviour is driven by his need for their relationship to be 'better'. Perhaps there is a sense of underlying concern about whether his father's influence on him is seeping through into his own marriage, with the fear that he is repeating his behaviour.

All in all, this subtheme has provided an overview of the various means by which the participants' early life experiences may be present in their own experience of marital tension. This underlying worry about walking in their parents' footsteps, seems to be subliminally present as the tension is ongoing, as its influence seems to be overbearing.

4.5 Theme 3: Actively attempting to resolve the tension

This final theme represents the third stage of the experience of marital tension, which clusters three subthemes that depict the participants' various approaches to resolving tension. It reveals how they engage with the process of resolving tension, both personally as well as with their spouses. The first subtheme that emerged is: 'Taking a breather to regulate emotions', which explores the participants' preference to remove themselves from the situation of marital tension and regulate their emotions before attempting to resolve it. The second subtheme, 'Maintaining effective communication', depicts the participants' experiences in adopting various means of engaging with their spouses through maintaining effective communication. The final subtheme, 'Taking proactive steps to manage future tension', considers the participants' tendencies to explore the means of prohibiting or minimising the occurrence of marital tension in the future.

4.5.1 Subtheme 1: Taking a breather to regulate emotions

This subtheme as well as the subtheme: 'varying dynamics of handling tension', both address the manifestation and utilisation of coping mechanisms within marital tension. The latter highlights how differences in coping mechanisms amongst spouses result in exacerbating the tension. However, this subtheme elucidates the benefits of one specific form of coping with tension, and that is taking time and space to regulate emotions, prior to attempting to resolve the tension. The name of this subtheme was inspired by Dalia's rendition of her process, when attempting to emotionally regulate: *'I keep taking deep breaths and just counting down'* (L:81-82). This title was fitting considering the fact that this metaphor signifies putting a stop to engaging with a situation, in order to recharge oneself (Collins, 2022c).

This approach was deemed as a key element in the participants' experiences of managing tension, with some describing how unhelpful it could be to communicate when experiencing a state of heightened emotions, whilst others made the distinct association between regulating emotions in order to maintain a safe space for communication. The former was insinuated by Karam, who described the power that heightened emotions can have on communication:

> *"When we are in the moment, the emotions would do the talking, so, postponing it to another time would make, would make, make things better". (Karam, L:61-63)*

Karam provided a glimpse of the emotional state that he shared with his spouse during marital tension. Seemingly, the heightened sense of emotions has a domineering effect on his communication. His hesitant repetition of 'would make', may be indicative of an underlying sense of discomfort during moments of heightened emotions. There would appear to be a clear preference to postponing the communication, in order to

allow for space and time to regulate emotions, so as to come up with a 'better' outcome. Likewise, Lailah shared a similar position when she described how heightened emotions can dominate and perhaps threaten her ability to convey kindness in her communication:

> *"If I am not in a place where I will be kind in my communication, I will just be alone for a little bit until I can". (Lailah, L:282-284)*

It appears that taking time 'alone' to regulate her emotions, contributes to ensuring that she expresses herself in a manner that best represents her intentions to be kind. The similarity between Karam and Lailah is the felt sense of dominance exerted by emotional arousal, and how regulating emotions leads to a favourable outcome. This also resonated with Waleed, whereby his desired end goal was to resolve the tension by the end of the day, which, as he described, is achieved "*after a while, taking a bit of time to ourselves*" (L:153).

Amir introduced a further insight into utilising this approach. According to his personal experience of marital tension, taking a breather to regulate emotions is a necessity to maintain a sense of safety in the relationship:

> *"If I don't resort to escapism, then we might sacrifice this feeling of security and being around each other and doing the things together where its safer… it's just a mature way of taking time off to cool down and go back to it later". (Amir, L:151-154)*

Amir's use of 'escapism' is his way of referring to removing himself from the situation to 'cool down' through regulating his emotions. It seems that not doing so would threaten the safety of engaging with his spouse. His use of 'sacrificing' perhaps shows the position of making a choice between removing himself from the situation in order to protect the safety, or continue engaging in the tension, thus leading to an unsafe

and threatening situation. There is an underlying connection between communicating from a less emotionally charged position, in order to maintain a sense of safety in the presence of one another. Evidently, whilst the manifestation of resolving the tension varies for each participant, there is an unanimous agreement that taking a breather to regulate emotions is a helpful approach.

4.5.2 Subtheme 2: Maintaining effective communication

Effective communication was deemed valuable by all of the participants, with there being a general consensus on the benefits of it for resolving marital tension when experiencing it. Some of them highlighted the importance of engaging in open communication, whilst others provided an explanation of the means by which they actively communicate with their spouse. Farah, for example, shared her adaptation of a couple's exercise, where she discusses issues with her spouse in the third person as a means to not taking things 'personally':

> *"We decided to not talk about things in a personal way. We do this exercise where we even change our names (…) as these two people that we know, and would begin discussing our own problems, but we don't take it personally, because we are talking about different people". (Farah, L:219-221; 222-224)*

Her experience of discussing issues in the third person by changing their names, seems to be effective in the sense that direct confrontation is avoided. This would appear to allow them space to distance themselves from the issues, whilst discussing them, thus leading to a favourable outcome. It can be argued that this form of communication can feel safe due to the challenging issues being projected onto an external entity, in the form of imaginary characters representing them. Seemingly, this exercise was deemed helpful as a safe medium for communication. Whilst other participants did not engage in an exercise, there seems to be an overarching theme

about having a safe space to communicate with one another. This was depicted by Saif, who shared his preference to maintain open communication within a safe space:

> *"My approach is open communication. I, we, talk, talk, talk, this is a safe space, you can tell me **anything** and I can tell you **anything"**. (Saif, L:596-597)

He seems to have a strong sense of advocacy for effective communication. His switch between 'I' then 'we' may indicate a strong sense of determination from his side proactively to connect with his spouse. Also, the repetition of 'talk' could be indicative of the frequency and persistence to maintain open lines of communication. This seems to hold optimal significance for him, as reflected in his emphasis of '**anything'**, which may reveal prioritising free self-expression, within a safe space. The proactive move of holding a safe communicative space was also shared by Karam, who described utilising effective communication skills when engaging with his spouse:

> *"By throwing the ball back and forth like… by listening sometimes and showing some empathy, validating what she's feeling, trying to make some changes (…) yeah, talking… talking about it". (Karam, L:223-224; 225-226)*

His use of the metaphor 'throwing the ball back and forth' describes collaborative and engaging behaviour, whereby the conversation is flowing between him and his spouse. He continued to describe his efforts to extend an empathic and attentive presence to his wife, following this up by explaining how his efforts are concluded with an attempt to apply 'some changes'. Evidently, maintaining effective communication for Karam appears to introduce some safe leeway for implementing changes within the relationship where necessary.

Whilst other participants seemed to have an active and personal experience in maintaining effective communication, Marianna introduced a contrasting view of how the lack of effective communication has had a negative influence, as it contributed to experiencing immense 'sadness':

"It carries a lot of sadness the marital tension, uhh… especially when there is no communication method, there's no technique, there's no practice of talking to each other… I mean I would only imagine that uhh… for example a healthy marital, not tension but like, like there has to be a, a… some rules of communication which go both ways, uhh of how to express to each other in a safe way". (Marianna, L:242-246)

She shared the extent to which effective communication is missing in her marital relationship. Her continuous description of different ways by which communication is absent in her life, is indicative of the lack of available space for safe self-expression. Moreover, her frequent hesitancy may be telling of how intense her emotion of sadness was. This could, in part, be occurring due to the state of wonder that she had found herself in, when thinking about what it might be like to have communication channels in her marriage. In the round, Marianna seems to have been searching for a 'healthy' and 'safe' way of communicating with her spouse, when experiencing tension and attempting to resolve it. Seemingly, what Marianna is looking for through her wishful thinking, accurately describes the experience of other participants, in terms of open and safe communication. Evidently, she does not appear to have had a personal experience of maintaining effective communication, yet a part of her is aware of the benefits that it would introduce into the marital relationship.

This subtheme has provided an overview of the various means and preferences, by which the participants would like to engage in effective communication. This was a notion shared by all the participants, which signifies its importance as part of the experience of resolving marital tension.

4.5.3 Subtheme 3: Taking proactive steps to manage future tension

All the participants maintained a position of looking at their marital future, and potential ways of taking proactive steps to avoid going through similar experiences that could evoke tension. Some described their fear of the anticipated impact that tension could

inflict on their marriage, whilst others focused on means of maintaining peace in the future. The former was reflected in Amir's shared experience, who explained that he is *'very aware that things, very easily can break apart'* (L:170-171). This may reflect the intensity of the foreseeable impact that tension may exert on the marital relationship, and the underlying concern held by the participants. This perception was also shared by Waleed, when he described how he considered his words carefully due to the possibility that he may cause damage to his marital relationship:

> *"You gotta think twice before you go and say something that's… you know, might ruin your marriage or ruin your relationship umm [pause] more so you wanna prove a point and you kind of almost calculate and think to yourself, if I can get my point across now, this will change this from happening again in the future… so you gotta balance it". (Waleed, L:119-123)*

In this excerpt, Waleed conveys a strong sense of hesitancy and restraint, when communicating with his spouse. This was reflected in his use of 'ruin', 'calculate' and 'balance'. Moreover, his tendency to speak in the second person may indicate a need to distance himself from his experience, which could signify the intensity of his worry about shaping his future through his present actions. This may, in turn, be leaving him in a constant state of awareness to find the right balance, by carefully considering how he could convey his message across, and avoid it happening in the future, without causing damage. The commonality between Amir and Waleed's experiences, seems to lie in the reflected state of awareness, and the felt sense of underlying worry and concern about how their current actions and behaviour could shape their future.

Whilst Amir and Waleed were conscious of a general future threat to their relationship, Marianna and Karam shared their considerations of precautionary measures, in order to maintain peace in the relationship. From his perspective, Karam explained how finding peace can be achieved through finding a middle ground between him and his

spouse: '*trying to… to find peace, to uhh, to find like a mutual place to meet*' (L:101).

Marianna, on the other hand, highlighted the importance of maintaining the peace through taking a step back and carefully considering the steps she was taking in the relationship:

> "*I would speak up, but then I would know that I have limits of that, but it gives me some peace of mind when I speak up (…) and then, I would retreat for the benefit of the relationship [pause] it's as if, like uhh… we are holding this relationship on a pedestal me and him, and we don't want anything to disrupt it*". (Marianna, L:371-372; 373-375)

She portrayed the stages that she went through when communicating with her spouse. Seemingly, Marianna appeared to be wary of her limits regarding the extent to which she could express herself without disrupting the relationship. Whilst self-expression seemed to give her peace of mind, her response to 'retreat', may be indicative to her tendency to suppress her own thoughts for the sake of maintaining the peace in the relationship. Also, her use of the metaphor 'holding the relationship on a pedestal', represents the level of idolisation of the relationship. Perhaps there is an underlying worry about it becoming an imperfect one or being seen as such. Hence, an immense effort was being placed into not 'disrupting' the relationship, through suppressing and limiting the communication.

Saif introduced a different experience in the sense that he had already adopted proactive steps to resolving tension from the onset of his marriage, and shared how he is experiencing the aftermath of his efforts:

> "*My approach is open communication (…) and we are **reaping** the fruits of [pause] doing that **from** the get go of the relationship, because we've seen **a lot** of relationships, around us, and when the tough… you know gets going, they crumble… **why**? Because **all** of a sudden **all** of this emotional baggage **comes** out of the closet, whereas **our** closet doesn't have doors*". (Saif, L:596; 598-602)

Saif conveyed a sense of pride in his decision to be proactive in maintaining open communication 'from the get go' of the relationship. This was reflected through his use of the metaphor 'reaping the fruits', which symbolically indicates that he is gaining the rewards from the efforts invested in maintaining openness in communication. Similar to Amir and Waleed, Saif too, seemed to have been driven by the fear of witnessing his relationship 'crumble'. His depiction of the closet door metaphor, reflects that his purpose was to be transparent and avoid any surprises in the future. This also helps to set the right expectation from one another. However, the difference between the experiences, is that Saif appeared to be in a different and more confident position, in that he felt that he was already reaping the fruits of his proactivity.

This subtheme introduced the various factors that have driven the participants to take proactive steps in managing future tension. All shared their preference to take proactive steps in ensuring a more desirable future, with the absence of marital tension. It was deemed fitting to conclude the order of subthemes with this one, as it conveys a future oriented outlook, present in the participants' experience of marital tension.

4.6 Chapter Four Summary

For this study, I sought to explore the lived experience of marital tension, and how it is managed by eight UK-based Jordanians. Three themes and ten subthemes emerged from the exploration of their shared experiences, giving rise to an in-depth understanding of this phenomenon. Essentially, the findings from this analysis depict several elements within the experience of marital tension, thus creating a comprehensively rich perspective of the lived experience and the meaning making process attributed to it.

Chapter Five: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This study was aimed at exploring the under-researched experience of marital tension for Jordanians residing in the UK. This chapter discusses key findings from the analysis, within three emergent themes: 'Facing initial challenges of marital tension', 'Engaging with marital tension' and 'Actively attempting to resolve the tension'. A summary of the findings as well as links to previous research is presented. Subsequently, the practical implications and contributions to the field of CoP are discussed, as well as the strengths, limitations and recommendations for future research.

5.2 Contextualising the Findings with the Literature

The experience of marital tension seemed to extend on a relational level, above and beyond its immediate occurrence. The findings reflected how the participants experience the overshadowing yet intangible presence of marital tension within their marital relationship, and the challenges they face along the way. The findings also illustrated the various means through which they attempt to resolve the tension they experience. The three emergent themes are discussed in turn.

5.2.1 Theme 1 – Facing initial challenges of marital tension

This theme pinpointed how the initial challenges at the onset of marital tension, were experienced by participants. The majority of participants described the manifestation of it in the form of a strongly felt invisible entity. For example, Saif described it as a *'ghost in the house, like an elephant in the room (L:17-18)'*. Marianna also commented on its parallel presence*: 'it is actually quite subtle and also disturbing at the same time (L:237-238)'.* Evidently, this parallel presence seemed to linger for the participants,

leaving them in a state of dissonance, as described by Lailah, '*there's no harmony (L:43)*'. A similar experiential description of marital tension was depicted in the extant literature, as one of an understated, covert, insidious and overlooked presence (Manalel et al., 2019).

Some participants described challenges, as differences began to unfold within their marital relationship. These differences were described in various ways, for example, Marianna portrayed it in a general sense as coming '*from two different worlds (L:22), whilst others, such as Lailah, pinpointed it as undergoing differing life experiences, more specifically, 'different backgrounds, uhh different upbringing' (L:6-7).* This was highlighted in the context of having different beliefs, views and perspectives, which was also addressed in previous literature through exploring the impact of differences on marital satisfaction (Fiese & Tomcho, 2001; Folger et al., 1984). It was also contended by Barris (2021), that the differences encountered by the couple contribute to marital stress, particularly when they overstep boundaries in an attempt to convince each other of their own perspectives and beliefs. A similar notion was identified by Birditt et al. (2017), who found that the difficulties around navigating differences can be a leading factor in exacerbating marital tension. This is in line with the finding in this study, which depicts how the experience of being faced with differences is considered as one of the initial challenges introduced by marital tension.

Another highlighted difference described by the participants was with regard to gender norms, such as where Dalia described the position of superiority her husband faced her with: '*I hate the way that he speaks to me when he makes an order' (L:28-29).* Likewise, Karam confirmed the position of superiority from a male perspective, by describing how he was: '*compromising things which are by cultural law and values, they are actually mine'* (L:154-155). It was elicited in a study by Sabbah et al. (2017),

that 'rigid gender roles' are part of the Jordanian macrosystem (p. 157). Accordingly in situations where Jordanian women act from an autonomous position, thus challenging gender norms, the possibility of conflict and threat to the marital relationship increases. Similarly, in a study by Liversage (2012), it was found that in situations where women are not compliant with gendered expectations, the marital quality of life begins to deteriorate. This was also highlighted by Morse et al. (2012), as it was found that wives who go against gender roles by having better jobs or education, are seen as a threat to male pride, which may result in physical violence. Moreover, it was postulated that male entitlement gives leeway for male family member to control the females (Morse et al., 2012), which was similar to what Karam described in terms of his rights as a male within his culture.

This is prominent within the context of honour based cultural practices, as women may experience immense pressure and at times carry underlying fear of the consequences when disobeying gender based cultural expectations (Morse et al., 2012). As the Jordanian culture is considered to adopt honour-based ideologies, the ramifications of women disobeying traditional gender roles, may result in physical and sexual abuse as well as homicide (Chesler & Bloom, 2012).

As reflected in the findings from this analysis, and in support of previous literature, the presence of cultural gender norms, introduce challenges within the lived experience of marital tension.

Some participants attributed the presence of tension with the loss of a blissful existence, described as: '*the honeymoon phase* (Waleed, L:6) and '*the rosy period* (Marianna, L:4)', marking the beginning of a new yet challenging reality. This transitional phase was associated with the various layers that unfold overtime as the

participants acquainted themselves with their spouses. It was also expressed in differing ways, such as Dalia's sense of remorse over her decision to wed, '*I would just hate the idea of marriage*' (L:252-253). This shared experience depicted a clear distinction of the loss of a blissful fantasy, and being faced with an unpleasant reality, which in turn, brings to the fore the role of marital tension in this transition. Similar findings from previous literature depicted this transition, such as that of Aron et al. (2002), who described it as the 'typical honeymoon-then-years-of-blandness' pattern, whereby the couple transition from a stage of experiencing intense emotions and excitement towards one another, to a dramatically reduced level of interest bordering on indifference (p. 178). Other scholars, such as Kurdek (1998), also identified the decline in marital quality of life, and termed it as 'the honeymoon-is-over effect', which predominantly occurs amongst newlyweds (p. 495). Essentially, the decline in marital happiness, quality and satisfaction have been extensively explored by scholars (Barris, 2021; Lavner & Bradbury, 2010), specifically in the presence of marital tension (Birditt et al., 2017; Manalel et al., 2019). This may be reflective of the aforementioned transition towards the end of the honeymoon phase, when experiencing marital tension.

The key findings in this theme are in line with the previous literature, in that they support the covert and insidious depiction of marital tension, that contribute to the loss of a blissful marital stage. They also support the notion that the differences brought to the fore by each spouse, can be an exacerbating factor in fuelling marital tension.

5.2.2 Theme 2 – Engaging with marital tension

This theme revealed the dynamics that participants experience, whilst being faced with ongoing tension, which was described as a feeling of being stuck in an unpleasant place. It is a common aspect of commitment within marital relationships, for the couple

to feel stuck (Jamison & Beckmeyer, 2021), or to encounter a felt sense of constraint and entrapment, particularly when the individual invests greatly in the relationship (Rhoades et al., 2010). This was expressed by the participants in various ways, for example, Marianna described it as: '*being awkward'* (L:234-235), whilst Waleed used the metaphor '*in between like a rock and a hard place'* (L:116). Amir shared this sense of stuckness by describing feeling '*suffocated'* (L18): in his own home. In contrast, Karam expressed wanting to escape from the unpleasant situation as a result of tension. This is a common response when encountering this sense of entrapment, as couples may have the need to evade the situation (Putnam, 2011). Other scholars addressed this phenomenon from different aspects. For example, Rhoades et al. (2010) explored whether the sense of being trapped and constrained within romantic relationships, may contribute to the termination of the relationship. Whereas Jamison and Beckmeyer (2021), highlighted that commitment and stability in romantic relationships can be driven by feelings of entrapment, despite levels of dissatisfaction. Essentially, it would appear that no other scholars have addressed the sense of entrapment experienced within the lived experience of marital tension. Moreover, considering the fact that divorce is considered a taboo in the Jordanian culture (El-Saadani, 2006), these findings introduce a unique perspective to the sense of 'stuckness' within a culture that considers marriage a life-long commitment regardless of the marital challenges present.

Whilst describing their shared experience of engaging with marital tension, participants shared various dynamics when handling tension. They also shared their own experiences of facing differing ways of handling the tension within their marital relationships. The challenges in facing this variation, seemed to have a key role in their experience of engaging with marital tension. For example, Farah who described

needing her spouse to engage with her emotionally in a '*calm and relaxed*' (L:127-128) way, but he was unable to do so, which left her in the situation of feeling uncared for. Evidently, with couples employing different means of emotional regulating and self expression in the face of marital tension, this can result in increasing its intensity (Figley, 2012). This is particularly present in a common dyadic interaction otherwise referred to as demand-withdraw, where one spouse actively seeks resolution, whilst the other actively avoids the issue needing to be addressed (Sagrestano et al., 1998). This dyadic pattern seems to have been experienced by Saif, as he described being adamantly persistent to communicate and resolve the tension, whilst his wife preferred to avoid confrontation. Similarly, Lailah also described experiencing the demand-withdraw pattern, where she withdrew through taking time for herself to process, as her husband demanded actively addressing issues when they arose. Essentially, some individuals opt to utilise the strategy of passing time as a means of allowing issues to work out on their own (Gottman, 1993). Previously, scholars have pointed out the potential power imbalance that may arise due to this dynamic, leading to marital dissatisfaction (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2000; Noller et al., 1994; Sagrestano et al., 1998). Some scholars have identified gendered responses to disagreements, whereby wives demand and husbands withdraw (Kurdek, 1995). However, the findings in the present study highlight a contrasting view, given that Saif (male) was found in the demand position within the marital relationship, whilst Lailah (female) was found in the withdraw position. Additionally, the fact that the Jordanian society is a collectivist society led by a culture of shame and honour, gender norms are potentially asymmetric (Hofstede, 2021; Ratrout & Attar, 2002), women are generally seen in a more submissive role (Shek, 2006; Xu et al., 2016). However, considering the slow shift towards modernisation within the Jordanian society (Al-Badayne, 2012), the

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findings in this study reflect similarities between both genders, thus supporting the notion of gradual change in societal gender roles. In essence, the findings in this study introduce the lived experience of this dyadic interaction, as well as the repercussions that follow.

For the participants, the experience of marital tension was accompanied by a multitude of negative and challenging emotions. Seemingly, marital issues can exert an emotional toll on the couple (Carr et al., 2014). Specifically, martial tension can lead to couples harbouring negative emotions about the relationship or towards one another, one of which can be resentment (Manalel et al., 2019). The findings in this study suggest the same, in that resentment was one of the shared feelings by some participants, such as Amir, who explained that despite the difficulty in acknowledging this feeling, it was predominantly present when experiencing marital tension. Moreover, within romantic relationships, ensuring a sense of safety with the partner is essential, however, in situations where one's needs are not met, this might introduce a threat of rejection (Murray, 2005). This might appear in the form of exclusion and avoidance of the partner, in the form of moving away from or not approaching them (Kerr & Levine, 2008). This was reflected in Lailah's experience of feeling rejected due to her husband's aversion to physical touching during marital tension. As she explained, '*I can't touch him*' (L:287), and that it '***does feel like a rejection***' (L:288). Furthermore, anger and sadness seem to arise as a result of distress in marital relationships (Guerrero et al., 2008), which was also found in the analysis of this study. Most of the participants expressed emotions of anger, whilst both Marianna and Saif expressed feeling angry, sad and helpless. Essentially, this finding supports previous literature in highlighting the subjective lived experience of the various negative emotions endured within ongoing marital tension.

The experience of engaging with ongoing marital tension seemed to involve certain considerations for the participants, both internally as well as when interacting with their spouses. One of the considerations was driven by an underlying worry of having a similar experience of the parental marital tension that they witnessed at an early stage in their lives. That is, there was a fear associated with facing marital tension, as it was seen as an alarming indicator of reliving their parents' marriage. As an example, Marianna's experience of witnessing intense parental marital tension, had led to her resorting to avoidance when facing tension, as a protective measure. This intergenerational process has been overlooked by scholars (Willoughby et al., 2012), however, it has been addressed to a certain extent in recent years. For instance, it has been suggested by Curran et al. (2011), that the knowledge and observations gathered from parental marriage, can be a contributing factor in modelling what constitutes a marriage, thus shaping one's interactions and view within one's own. This was implied by Waleed, when he explained his conscious decision to steer away from replicating his father's stance of being consumed with the '*Arab male pride*' (L:262) and refusing to apologise when he is wrong, as he perceived this to be a major cause for parental marital tension. Essentially, early life experiences of witnessing parental marital tension, seems to provide insight for individuals to decide upon what to take away from it (Curran et al., 2011). This was also illustrated in a study conducted by Cunningham and Sillingstead (2015), in which it was found that parental marriage exerts a long-term influence on adult offspring, where hope and determination to avoid their parents mistakes come to the fore.

5.2.3 Theme 3 – Actively attempting to resolve the tension

The final theme explored how participants adopted various approaches to resolve marital tension, one of which included their active attempts to taking a breather prior

to attempting to resolve the tension, in order to regulate their emotions. This was done in order to achieve clear and safe communication. Coping with stressors in the relationship involves the decision to disengage or actively deal with the issue at hand. Temporarily avoiding conflict allows space, thus providing the opportunity to lessen the negative impact of the dissonance (van Erp et al., 2011). This was revealed in Karam and Lailah's experiences, where they both described the overshadowing impact of emotions on their self expression, therefore it was deemed helpful to take time prior to attempting to engage or communicate with their spouses. This finding reveals the importance of actively attempting to manage marital tension, in order to ensure maintaining the status quo of the marriage. According to Amir's experience, this is essential in order to guarantee the maintenance of 'this feeling of security' (L:152) in the relationship. In essence, this was also highlighted by Bowman (1990), who stipulated that active coping efforts to reduce levels of stress, can contribute to better marital quality.

Another approach to resolving marital tension was the utilisation of effective communication. All participants had introduced various ways of effective communication, which were deemed as being valuable for them. This supports the findings reported by Al-Khazale and Younes (2015), as it was postulated that communicating through self-disclosure amongst Jordanians, is an immanent tool for connecting with their spouse in case of dissonance, which in turn leads to marital compatibility. Moreover, findings reported by Bodenmann et al. (2001), have also highlighted that improvement in communication and togetherness, decreased the level of dissonance in the relationship. Additionally, utilising effective communication can contribute to higher levels of marital satisfaction, and lack, thereof, may result in distress. Thus, open and effective communication is considered to be a key

intervention in ensuring helpful marital functioning and satisfaction (Lavner et al., 2016). Marianna's experience supported these findings, when she expressed the immense feeling of sadness that she had due to the absence of effective communication with her spouse during times of marital tension. In a study conducted by Ogechi et al. (2010), it was found that marital issues are resolved through effective communication, where they escalate in the absence of it. Moreover, the presence of it would aid in stabilising the marriage. These findings were supported by the participants shared experiences, when they stressed the benefits of effective communication on their sense of closeness with their spouses. Farah, Saif and Karam described the sense of safety in talking with their spouses, by using various means of effective communication, such as discussing issues calmly whilst allowing a safe space for self expression. This mirrors constructive tactics in ways of coping with conflict, such as attentive listening, calmly discussing differences, and reaching means of compromise (Coyne et al., 2002).

Finally, all the participants held a future oriented outlook when seeking to resolve marital tension, with their being keenly aware of the future implications that such tension could have on their marital relationships, if it were not addressed. This was reflected in various ways, with some communicating an underlying sense of fear about the stability of their marriage. For example, Amir described his active attempts to maintain open and honest communication, as he was well aware that '*things, very easily can break apart' (L:170-171).* A similar concern was conveyed by Waleed, who also described a state of heightened awareness in his communication, due to his shared concern: *'you know, might ruin your marriage'* (L:119-120). Previous research has addressed concerns relating to fear of abandonment through the lens of attachment styles (Fraley et al., 2011; Gillath, 2005). However, none have addressed

future concerns for the stability of the marriage, when experiencing marital tension. Other participants' future outlook was focused on maintaining the peace in the relationship, such as when Karam reported that, in his experience, this could be done through finding *'a mutual place to meet'* (L:101). Previous research has addressed the relationship between the means of handling conflict and the level of marital satisfaction, where it was held that a collaborative approach in conflict management contributes to higher levels of marital satisfaction (Greeff & Bruyne, 2000). A third and final proactive measure taken to manage future tension was shared by Saif, who described his active attempts from the onset of marriage to maintain open and honest communication, explaining that he was *'reaping the fruits'* (L:598) of utilising this earlier on in the marriage. This finding supports previous research, where it was found that maintaining constructive communication pertaining to relationship issues, revealed an increased level of relationship satisfaction and survival (Srivastava et al., 2006). Other scholars have also explored how proactive personalities, particularly in men, revealed higher levels of marital satisfaction (Xie et al., 2018).

5.4 Personal Reflexivity

Personal reflexivity encompasses reflections on the researcher's assumptions, values, beliefs and experiences that may relate to or impact on the study, and how the process of engaging with the research has influenced them personally and professionally.

I found myself drawn to understanding couples' dynamics from a young age. As an unmarried Jordanian female in her early thirties, I have been able to develop a unique understanding of the Jordanian culture and the intricate non-verbal communication utilised amongst Jordanians. This has equipped me with rich insights to perceive deeper layers entangled within this phenomenon. However, this position resembles a double-edged sword, as my lifelong knowledge and personal experience of witnessing

marital tension within a Jordanian context, comes with a set of assumptions, beliefs, values and judgements. Whilst I acknowledged the unique subjectivity I introduced into the double hermeneutic, I was also adamant in remaining reflective throughout this research journey.

Initially, I reflected on my role as a Jordanian woman, and whilst I take pride in my culture and home country, I am well aware of its flaws and limitations, especially considering that it is a male dominated society. This, in turn, has subjected me to unequal gender roles and sexist interactions throughout my life, leading to my embracing a feminist stance from a young age. This cultural dynamic was also present in my experience of witnessing marital tension within my family as well as extended family and friends. Consequently, I developed certain beliefs about gender roles within marital tension, such as: wives tend to hold most of the marital responsibility, be compliant, avoidant and suppressed, whilst husbands tend to be in a superior position, emotionally absent, pressured by their role to be 'the provider', and holding the expectation of their wives being the care giver. Subsequently, I held the assumption that these gender roles may lead to marital tension and eventually conflict, as both spouses are facing challenges on personal and dyadic levels. As a result, I found myself relating to the male participants differently to the female ones. I noticed myself anticipating sexist connotations during my initial interviews with male participants and felt more empathy and protectiveness during my initial interviews towards the female ones. However, through the use of my reflective journal, I was able to identify and disentangle my thoughts and feelings, in order to remain with their subjective experiences. Whilst there were elements of gender roles present in the data, I was pleasantly surprised by other participants whose experiences challenged my assumptions. I found that all of the male participants in the study, made active efforts

to communicate with their spouses, and the female ones reflected high levels of self expression.

In reference to my history of witnessing marital tension, I was also under the impression that the experience of marital tension contributes to creating a barrier and eventually distances the couple from one another. This led to a further assumption that facing up to marital tension is usually avoided and brushed under the carpet. This was another instance where my reflective journal proved to be valuable, as I was able to bring this to my awareness when I noticed myself expecting 'worst case scenarios' in the shared lived experiences of marital tension. Whilst avoidance was vaguely reflected in the data, a few of the participants' main response to marital tension seemed to be active communication. It was also clear to me, that their main concern was reconnecting with their spouse and finding solutions to resolve the tension.

Engaging in this research journey has not only enriched my perspective personally, but also, professionally. One of the key things that I have learnt is that, whilst holding my own assumptions, beliefs and judgements is a natural human process, it is imperative to remain with the autonomous subjective experience of others.

5.5 Theoretical and Practical Implications

This section addresses the theoretical and practical implications of this study. In essence, the field of CoP integrates theory and practice, as both dimensions are valuable (Blair, 2010; Strawbridge & Woolfe, 2010). It focuses on applying psychological facts and knowledge into therapeutic practice (Jones & Mehr, 2007). For this study, a qualitative interpretative phenomenological approach was adopted, thereby introducing theoretical underpinnings that could be utilised in the professional practice of CoP.

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. Initially, it fills a gap in the literature addressing marital tension and means through which it is managed. More specifically, it has involved exploring this lived experience through a phenomenological lens, which no other study has done to date. Essentially, previous research has touched on this phenomenon either in a vague and ambiguous manner or explored it through experimentation from a quantitative positivist position. Additionally, this phenomenon has never been studied drawing on a sample of participants of Jordanian nationality. Hence, the research has extended the literature by filling the research gap globally, through focusing on this under-researched demographic.

Research pertaining to the Jordanian demographic, to date, has scarcely explored marital dynamics. Some of the areas previously investigated include beliefs about marriage (Adely, 2016), financial dynamics (El-Dine, 2018), the relationships between psychological stress and marital adjustment (AlZyoud, 2020), marital satisfaction (Smadi, 2017), sexual functioning (Abu Ali et al., 2008), and self-disclosure and management of marital conflict (Alkhazaleh & Younes, 2015). However, no previous study has explored the experience of marital tension. This highlights one of the key contributions of this thesis, as it has extended the literature for this demographic, and provided deep and diverse insights into the field of CoP.

This research has involved addressing cultural sensitivity and contributed to giving a voice to this focal ethnic minority group, by providing space to embrace the ethnic autonomy and lived experience. This is in line with the ethos of the field of CoP, to focus on the expansion of diversity and inclusion of ethnic minorities, both in knowledge and practice (BPS, 2017b, 2019). Considering the insidious cultural obligation of maintaining secrets behind closed doors (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2005), developing therapeutic rapport may be deemed challenging at times. Consequently,

this study has contributed to catalysing and enhancing the process of building rapport and trust within the therapeutic relationship, by introducing clearer understanding and knowledge regarding the experience of marital tension as well as cultural elements, such as gender roles. This, in turn, will enrich and inform therapeutic interventions when working with this demographic. Essentially, as addressed by the BPS practice guidelines (2017b) and HCPC standards of proficiency (2015), when dealing with clients from different cultures, therapists must make sure that they understand and are conscious of the cultural differences introduced by clients. In some instances, the clients may be worried or embarrassed to raise a specific matter, fearing it may be misunderstood due to the different cultural norms and standards. Hence, having rich prior knowledge on the subject matter can introduce unique cultural dynamics into the therapy room that play a role in therapeutic work.

In essence, the findings of this study introduce an abundance of depth and knowledge to inform therapeutic practice. This is crucial when considering the quality of therapeutic work, as conveying knowledge and confidence enhances the therapeutic alliance (Littauer et al., 2005). This is particularly crucial when working with Arabs, as the act of self-disclosure, building trust and expressing vulnerability may be deemed particularly challenging considering that it is associated with loyalty to those who are close to them (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000). Therefore, being equipped with the knowledge introduced from the findings in this thesis, provides guidance and direction in delivering effective therapy and building a strong therapeutic alliance. For example, the first theme 'Facing initial challenges of marital tension' provides a sense of how the onset of marital tension is experienced and how the difference in life perspectives as well as their beliefs about gender norms may exacerbate the tension. Having prior knowledge of this fact and introducing that into the therapy provides both the

practitioner as well as the client, a deeper understanding of the potential relational dynamics introduced by marital tension, thus a leeway for further exploration (Qushua & Ostler, 2020). For instance, tentatively using the metaphor 'elephant in the room', is a powerful therapeutic tool, which extends beyond the boundaries of or limitations of the clients' beliefs, allowing them to make sense of their experience from different angles (Abbatiello, 2006). Moreover, exhibiting efforts through having rich knowledge and incorporating that within a therapeutic plan, aid towards developing stronger therapeutic rapport (Littauer et al., 2005). Another potential catalyst for strengthening therapeutic rapport would be to tentatively address the topic of gender roles and the complexities introduced alongside them, considering that Jordan is still dominated by an honour-based culture (Eisner & Ghuneim, 2013). Having prior knowledge about diverse world views as well as pertaining the appropriate skills to meet the needs of said clients, holds a pivotal role in upholding a safe therapeutic space, as well as strengthening rapport.

The second theme 'engaging with marital tension', also introduces a deeper understanding of how Jordanians experience engaging with the tension, the underlying emotions and thoughts, as well as how they respond to it. The unique insights introduced within this theme, enables the practitioner to have a deeper awareness and understanding when developing their therapeutic intervention. For example, naming some of the challenging emotions introduced within this theme, such as anger, frustration, resentment, rejection, sadness, worry and helplessness, would also introduce a safe and non-judgemental space for clients to reflect on their own process. Essentially, identifying and naming thoughts and emotions, aid in developing emotional awareness (Lohani et al., 2020). This is due to the fact that resonating with these emotions would introduce a safe space for clients to feel seen, heard and

understood. Distinctly identifying challenging emotions in therapy, paves the way for harnessing a deeper underlying process, and gaining ownership accordingly (Connolly-Zubot, 2020). This process of attending to the clients' unmet emotional needs, enhances a sense of safety and connectedness within the therapeutic relationship (Pascual-Leone and Greenberg, 2007). Also, introducing the notion of 'stuckness' in the tension, provides leeway for the clients to explore this difficult position and begin a safe process of further exploration. The notion of naming a challenging reality or situation, aids in conveying a sense of acceptance and understanding, thus facilitating a safe therapeutic space for clients to engage with intense thoughts and emotions whilst embracing what might have felt like an avoidable and challenging reality (Qushua & Ostler, 2020). Considering the insidious cultural obligation for Arabs to maintain secrets behind closed doors (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2005), this sense of safety is essential within a therapeutic environment, as it aids in developing trust, thus paving the way for personal introspection and transition (Qushua & Ostler, 2020). Moreover, being mindful of the fact that early life experiences contribute to how marital tension is perceived and experienced, for example exploring whether clients hold an underlying worry about repeating their parents' history, would introduce further depth into the therapeutic work. This is essential when attempting to create a safe for transformation within a marital relationship, by taking into account the unique and individual diverse backgrounds introduced by the couple (McGoldrick & Hardy, 2008).

The third theme 'Actively attempting to resolve the tension', reveals the various ways of how tension is resolved, thus introducing creative outlets for the practitioner to introduce resources for their clients on how to manage the tension. This is essential when considering the effectiveness of individual as well as dyadic means of coping,

such as emotional regulation, as it can stimulate their wellbeing (Falconier et al., 2022). Moreover, it contributes towards improving marital quality, satisfaction, harmony as well as interpersonal coherence (Bloch et al., 2014; Gottnam, 2014). A form of emotional regulation is elicited within this theme, whereby the benefits of 'taking a breather to regulate emotions' is emphasised as a helpful technique to resolve the tension. Furthermore, 'maintaining effective communication' can be incorporated within a comprehensive therapeutic plan, whereby clients can gain these skills and utilise them after taking time to regulate their emotions. This in turn would contribute to creating a safe space for self-disclosure and expression within the clients' marital relationship. This is essential for marital functioning as well as satisfaction (Lavner et al., 2016). Finally, addressing the potential presence of needing to engage in a proactive manner, may introduce a myriad of underlying processes, that clients' may need to consider.

In practical terms, the findings from this study reveal various elements within the lived experience of marital tension, and how it is managed by Jordanians residing in the UK. This introduces an abundance of knowledge that can be utilised not only with informing therapeutic interventions, but also, in developing couples counselling workshops and materials for group settings. Further, it is hoped that this new knowledge will bring about further advancements in the field, through generating relevant research, or perhaps building on this study.

5.6 Limitations

While the research has uncovered gaps in the literature pertaining to marital tension, this section will address some of its limitations. For example, the recruited participants in this study include an equal number of four females and four males. It could be argued that conducting cross-case analysis for each gender might have improved the

homogeneity of the sample and provided gender accounts to the experience of marital tension. Whilst this could have introduced further insights, it would have addressed different research to that intended. Therefore, in order to answer the research question at hand, the research design in this study provided cross-case analysis for the participant population as a whole. Also, all of the interviews were conducted online, due to COVID-19 restrictions. It could be argued that the absence of a physical presence meant there was a lack of capturing of non-verbal communication, through body language, for example. For this reason, as an IPA researcher, I paid particular attention to my participants' facial expressions and tone of voice and kept detailed notes throughout the interviewing stage of the research, in order to remain with their experience as close as possible.

A further limitation with this study, is the cultural challenge for the participants to reveal details of about their experience of marital tension, which may have been considered personal issues that should remain within the privacy of their own home (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000). This is particularly relevant given the culture of shame that predominates in Jordan (Al-Mahadin, 2020) and hence, the need to present oneself positively to others prevails (Benstead, 2018). However, this potential limitation was managed through utilising leadership skills and identifying potential barriers ahead of time. Explicitly, I highlighted the ethical procedures, considerations and responsibility I adhere to, particularly confidentiality and anonymity.

Another limitation pertaining to the method of IPA is its reliance on the role of language in understanding the lived experience. Language is viewed as a means to capture the lived experience, and is used to construct the participant's perspective of the given experience (Willig, 2013). In other words, language contributes to shaping the way in which the experience is conveyed or understood and thus, the expression of the

experience itself is limited by the participants' vocabulary (Willig, 2019). Thus it could be argued that language was a limiting factor with this particular study, given the fact that English was the participants' second language. However, their fluency in the English language in all cases had equipped them with an abundant vocabulary to express themselves clearly.

5.7 Future Directions

Further to the limitations discussed in the previous section, this part addresses several possible avenues for future research. First, as this study explored marital tension on an individual level, it could be beneficial for future research to consider conducting a similar design, but on a dyadic level (i.e. with both spouses in the relationship being interviewed). This would provide the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of further elements of the experience of marital tension, from the varying perspectives of both spouses.

Second, the study sample comprised participants who had been married for up to five years. This timeframe was chosen as these years are considered a critical period for the couple (Ruvolo, 1998) and are regarded as the basis for the dynamics and functioning of the marital relationship (Gottman & Levenson, 2002; Risch et al., 2003). Nonetheless, future research may benefit from exploring the experience of marital tension for participants that have been married between five to ten years. This could shed new light on this relatively insidious phenomenon and may aid in introducing further insights, considering the lengthier duration of experiencing marital tension.

Third, all of the participants in this study experienced love marriages, i.e. they had feelings of affection and mutual love to one another and had an independent relationship prior to getting married. However, arranged marriages, where the

marriage would be arranged by the parents, rather than the couple making a free independent personal choice for being in the marital union (Adely, 2016), are also common in Jordanian society. Hence, it would be useful for future research to explore how marital tension is experienced within this type of marriage due to its high presence in the Jordanian culture (Adely, 2016), for it might introduce unique insights.

Fourth, the participants that took part in this study identified with being part of a collectivist society. A recommendation for future research would be to explore the experience of marital tension from the vantage point of an individualistic society. This is due to the fact that these societies introduce different patterns of mating (Triandis et al., 1995). For instance, intimate relationships and marriages in individualistic societies are utilised as media for self expression and development (Dion & Dion, 1993). However, marital interdependence within collectivist societies is identified as a reflection of the self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), therefore, exploring this within an individualistic cultural context may introduce new insights and views into the lived experience of the couple.

Fifth, each theme introduced in the findings of this study holds its own merit for potential further exploration in its own right. For instance, exploring how the onset of marital tension is experienced, may introduce a more focused perspective on the initial challenges that participants face. Moreover, exploring the relational dynamics when engaging with tension, perhaps from a dyadic perspective, may introduce further insights into the internal processes within the participants' worlds during ongoing tension. Finally, gaining deeper insights into how participants actively attempt to resolve marital tension, perhaps also dyadically, may introduce further understanding into dynamics of tension resolution.

5.8 Final Conclusions

This study is the first exploratory work to capture in-depth insights into the lived experience of marital tension and how it is managed by Jordanians residing in the UK. The aim was to provide a detailed and deeper understanding of the perceptions associated with this lived experience, through an interpretative phenomenological perspective. A total of eight participants were recruited and interviewed, after which the interviews were transcribed and analysed. Three themes and ten subthemes emerged from the data as per the following theme 1 alongside its subthemes included 'Facing initial challenges of marital tension' ('Sensing the elephant in the room', 'Facing differences in life perspectives' and 'End of the honeymoon phase: facing an unpleasant reality'). Theme 2 and its subthemes involved 'Engaging with marital tension' ('Feeling stuck in an unpleasant space', 'Varying dynamics of handling tension', 'Enduring negative emotions' and Underlying worry about walking in their parents' footsteps). Lastly, theme 3 alongside its subthemes contained 'Actively attempting to resolve the tension' ('Taking a breather to regulate emotions', 'Maintaining effective communication', and 'Taking proactive steps to manage future tension').

These findings have uncovered the various dynamics and parallel processes that take place when experiencing marital tension. They have also revealed internal psychological processes as well as responses to the experience of marital tension. In addition, there has been a clear depiction and understanding of how marital tension is managed, and the intentions behind attempts to resolve it. Evidently, these findings have introduced original contributions to the knowledge and practice within the field of CoP. Firstly, the study involved exploring the scarcely researched phenomenon of marital tension, thus providing a clear and in-depth understanding of this understated

and insidious experience, present in almost all marriages (Birditt et al., 2017; Manalel et al., 2019; Timmons et al., 2017). Secondly, it has given a voice to the ethnic minority group of Jordanians, thereby contributing to the expansion of diversity and inclusion within the field of CoP. This, in turn, will aid in enriching cultural knowledge awareness within a therapeutic setting, both with individuals, as well as couples.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Search Strategy

Initially, a general search with the words "marital tension" was utilised, bringing forth a vast number of search results. Upon deeper exploration of the resources, it was apparent that the notion of marital tension was depicted at times as a means to identify a general sense of stress within the marital relationship. Accordingly, I opted for a more detailed and thorough search, whereby the experience of marital tension was exclusively explored as a phenomenon on its own. Accordingly, a search strategy was utilised using international databases including: EBSCO, Google Scholar and UEL Library. The below table depicts the search strategies used, number of search results as well as number of publications included, that were relevant to this research study:

Databases	Google Scholar	EBSCO (APA PsycArticles and APA Psycinfo)	UEL Library
Search strategy	- **Advanced search** - **With the exact phrase**: marital tension - **Where my words occur**: anywhere in the article - **With all of the words**	- **Advanced search** - **Search term**: marital tension **AND** all other key words (each keyword was entered separately)	- **Advanced search** - **Search Filters: Any field Contains:** (is/exact) - **Search term:** marital tension **AND** all other key words (each keyword was entered separately)
Number of search results identified and screened for eligibility	2880	134	26
Number of publications included, that were relevant to the research study	25	14	7

Further grey literature was included to broaden the scope of relevant studies and expand the view of available evidence. Quality assurance criteria was utilised whilst conducting the search, in order to ensure authority, accuracy, coverage, objectivity and date (Tyndall, 2008). Authority is mainly centred around whether or not the findings incorporate credibility and reliability. Accuracy depicts whether the source of data is clearly defined. Coverage focuses on being aware of any potential limitations, such as identifying whether the data is specific to a certain culture or geographic location for example. Objectivity is focused on identifying the position of the source

providing the data and whether or not the information is unbiased. Finally, paying attention to the date and whether or not the data related to the content is clearly stated and recent.

Notably, the search strategy included targeted websites and organisations that provided insights about: definitions of specific psychological terms that are relevant for the area of this study, particular statistics and findings about the Jordanian culture and ethnicity; reports about the ethos of Counselling Psychologists with regards to human ethics research, code of practice for research ethics, the standards of proficiency for practitioner psychologists as well as data protection. In particular, the used resources include:

- American Psychological Association (APA)
- British Psychological Association (BPS)
- Collins Dictionary
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
- Hofstede Insights
- Office for National Statistics (ONS)
- Statista
- The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC)
- University of East London (UEL)

Appendix B. Recruitment Leaflet

Exploring the experience of marital tension for Jordanians residing in the United Kingdom.

Research participants needed

1. Are you interested in taking part in a Doctoral research about the experience of Marital Tension and means of coping with it?

2. Are you and your spouse both Jordanian and currently residing in the UK?

3. Are you fluent in the English Language?

4. Have you been married for up to 5 years and lived in the UK with your spouse ever since?

If you answer no to any of the above questions, thank you for taking the time.

If you answer **yes** to all of the above questions, I invite you to carry on reading:

My name is **Tamara Naouri,** I am currently doing my professional doctorate in counselling psychology and this is my research study. I aim to explore and understand further the experience of marital tension and how it is managed, by **Jordanian couples.**

Are you interested?

in participating in one 60 to 90 minute online interview, please feel free to email me on **U1814418@uel.ac.uk** for further information.

P.S: participants experiencing physical violence, have previously been divorced or are experiencing mental health difficulties will not be able to participate in the study.

Appendix C: Interview Schedule

Interview questions:

1. What is your understanding of marital tension?

2. How would you describe your own experience of marital tension?

3. How would you describe your emotions when experiencing marital tension?

4. How would you describe your behaviour when experiencing marital tension?

5. How do you manage marital tension when you experience it?

Prompts:

- When you heard the term marital tension, what came to mind?

- Was there a specific situation that came to mind when you heard the term marital tension

- What is it like for you to experience those emotions?

- How do you usually manage these emotions?

- How do you think this behaviour developed?

- How do you cope with marital tension

- What was that like for you?

- How do you feel about that?

- Can you give me an example of that?

- What role, if any, does your upbringing have on your responses to tension within your marriage?

- What role, if any, do your cultural values and practices have on your experience of marital tension?

- Can you expand on that

- How did you come to think about this

Appendix D: Participant Invitation Letter

PARTICIPANT INVITATION LETTER

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

Who am I?

I am a doctoral student from the School of Psychology at the University of East London, currently doing my Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology. As part of my studies I am conducting the research you are being invited to participate in.

What is the research?

It is about the experience of marital tension for Jordanians residing in the United Kingdom. The aim of this study is to understand and explore the subjective experience of marital tension by achieving a detailed and deeper understanding of the perceptions associated with this phenomenon, as well as understand how emotions are managed accordingly.

The study will introduce new insights and help raise psychological awareness of the magnitude of the impact of marital tension on the marriage. It will also introduce a deep understanding and awareness of cultural dynamics, roles, identity as well as traditions.

My research has been approved by the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee. This means that the Committee's evaluation of this ethics application has been guided by the standards of research ethics set by the British Psychological Society.

My main research questions include:

- *How do Jordanians experience marital tension?*

- *How do Jordanians manage marital tension?*

Why have you been asked to participate?

You have been invited to participate in my research as fit into my inclusion criteria to help me explore my research topic. I am looking to involve individuals who:

- Have been married for up to five years
- Both you and your spouse are Jordanian
- Are residing in the UK
- Are fluent in English

You will not be judged or personally analysed in any way and you will be treated with respect. Also, I will maintain your anonymity throughout my research. Please note that you are free to decide against participating in the study.

What will your participation involve?

If you agree to participate:

- You will be invited to take part in an individual semi-structured interview that comprises of open-ended questions, in the form of an informal conversation.
- The interview will be audio recorded and will take around 60-90 minutes.
- The interview will take place remotely online via Microsoft Teams.
- Your participation would be very valuable in helping to develop knowledge and understanding of this research topic.

Your taking part will be safe and confidential

Your privacy and safety will be respected **at all** times. Please note that:

- Participation is entirely voluntary.
- You have the right to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.
- You have the right to ask for your data to be withdrawn, and for personal information to be destroyed, up to three weeks following your participation.
- No identifiable data from the data collected, or any written material resulting from the data collected, will be published. However, due to my professional obligation to safeguarding practices, I cannot maintain confidentiality in the event where my participants or others are at risk of harm. This means that I will be reporting my concerns to my supervisory team.
- The audio-recordings will be stored in a password protected file. Only my assigned supervisors, Dr. Cristina Harnagea and Dr. Fevronia Christodoulidi, and myself will have access to the information.
- There are no risks to you in taking part, however, due to the sensitive nature of the topic, the study may induce an emotional or psychological impact during or after the interview. As a precaution, there are couples' therapy and mental health services listed on a debrief sheet, which will be given to you immediately after the interview.

What will happen to the information that you provide?

- Once the interview recording is transcribed the audio will be destroyed.
- Access to information will be limited to the researcher and the supervisory team.
- Data will be transcribed and analysed by using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The data will ultimately be grouped together in the final write up of the thesis.
- Any identifying features and personal information from the transcribed data will be excluded and pseudonymised for anonymity.
- The anonymised data will be seen by my supervisory team and examiners. It could also be presented in workshops, conferences and academic journals.
- The contact details and transcripts will be kept until the VIVA examination has been successfully completed.

What if you want to withdraw?

You are free to withdraw from the research study at any time during the interview, without explanation, disadvantage or consequence. Separately, you may also request to withdraw your data even after you have participated data, provided that this request is made within 3 weeks of the data being collected (after which point the data analysis will begin, and withdrawal will not be possible).

Contact Details

If you would like further information about my research or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Researcher: Tamara Naouri
Email: U1814418@uel.ac.uk

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research will be conducted please contact the research supervisor Dr Cristina Harnagea. School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ,

Email: charnagea@uel.ac.uk

or

Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Dr Tim Lomas, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.

(Email: t.lomas@uel.ac.uk)

Appendix E: Consent form

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

Consent to participate in a research study

Title of the Study: An interpretative phenomenological analysis exploring the experience of marital tension for Jordanians residing in the United Kingdom

Lear Researcher: Tamara Naouri

I have the read the information sheet relating to the above research study and have been given a copy to keep. ☐

The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. ☐

I understand what is being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me. ☐

I understand that my involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential. Only the researcher(s) involved in the study will have access to identifying data. It has been explained to me what will happen once the research study has been completed. ☐

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason. ☐

I also understand that should I withdraw, the researcher reserves the right to use my anonymous data after analysis of the data has begun. ☐

For the purpose of the study, I consent to my interview being audio-recorded and for it to be transcribed. ☐

I am aware that the data collected may be retained in an archive and I am happy for my data to be reused as part of future research activities. I am aware that my data will be fully anonymised. ☐

I understand the researcher's limitations and their obligation to breach confidentiality if safeguarding or risk issues have been raised. ☐

I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me. ☐

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

………………………………………………………………………………….

Participant's Signature

………………………………………………………………………………...

Researcher's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

………………………………………………………………………………...

Researcher's Signature

………………………………………………………………………………

Date: ………………………….

Appendix F: Debrief Letter

PARTICIPANT DEBRIEF LETTER

Thank you for participating in my research study titled "An interpretative phenomenological analysis exploring the experience of marital tension for Jordanians residing in the United Kingdom". This letter offers information that may be relevant in light of you having now taken part.

What will happen to the information that you have provided?

The following steps will be taken to ensure the confidentiality and integrity of the data you have provided.

Your personal information and data will be kept confidential and stored according to UEL and BPS's data management policies. Access to this information is limited to the researcher and allocated supervisors.

Data from the audio recordings will be saved on a password protected file and will be transcribed. Any identifying features and personal information from the transcribed data will be excluded and pseudonymised for anonymity. The data will ultimately be grouped together in the final write up of the thesis. The anonymised data will be seen by my supervisory team and examiners. It could also be presented in workshops, conferences and academic journals.

Once the interview audio is transcribed the recording will be transferred to a password protected computer, and will be destroyed once the VIVA examination is complete. Also, the contact details and transcripts will be kept until the VIVA examination has been successfully completed. Upon request you can withdraw the data you have provided after 3 weeks from the time the data collection took place. However, the researcher reserves the right to keep and use the anonymised data if the participant chooses to withdraw during the data analysis stage.

What if you have been adversely affected by taking part?

It is not anticipated that you will be adversely affected by taking part in the research. Nevertheless, it is still possible that your participation – or its after-effects – may have been challenging, distressing

or uncomfortable in some way. If you have been affected in any of those ways you may find the following resources/services helpful in relation to obtaining information and support:

For mental health and wellbeing services:

iCope Psychological Therapies Service: https://www.icope.nhs.uk/

Sane: www.sane.org.uk/support

Samaritans: www.samaritans.org.uk

Mind: www.mind.org.uk

For Relationships Support:

Marriage Care: https://www.marriagecare.org.uk/venue/london/?tab=infomation

Relate: www.relate.org.uk

Tavistock Relationships: https://tavistockrelationships.org/

You are also very welcome to contact me or my supervisor if you have specific questions or concerns.

Contact Details

If you would like further information about my research or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Researcher: Tamara Naouri
Email: u1814418@uel.ac.uk

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted please contact the research supervisor Dr Cristina Harnagea. School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ,

Email: c.harnagea@uel.ac.uk

or

Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Dr Tim Lomas, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.

(Email: t.lomas@uel.ac.uk)

Appendix G: Excerpt from Reflective Journal

Reflexive Journal Entry (November 2021): I noticed myself feeling emotionally charged as I read through [participant's] transcript. I can see how engrained it is in her mind that she is the 'emotional' one, and her husband is the 'calm' one. In my perspective I saw the negative connotation and self judgement in being 'emotional'. I've seen that with most married women in my life, primarily the notion that having emotions is deemed as 'bad' or 'irrational'. The general assumption that I hold here is that men tend to avoid emotions, which then leads them to criticise women when they express their emotions. This in turn, creates a power imbalance, that is fuelled by gender stereotypes, labelling women as 'too emotional'. As an observer of this marital dynamic, I found myself drawn to learning more about cultural pressures to maintain 'toxic masculinity', and how men are expected to fit into the gender stereotype of being the provider, man of the house, and above all keep their emotions at bay. These pressures then lead to emotions resurfacing of anger, passive aggressive sarcasm, and criticism, resulting in women feeling inferior within this dynamic. I realised how deep and overpowering my beliefs and assumptions were, when I took this to my supervision session, and named this observation as 'stigma against emotions'. It was then pointed out to me that my assumption pertaining to her emotional processing, was not grounded in the data, and was in fact far removed from it. Considering that I am at the starting stage of the analysis, the intricate and somewhat unconscious presence of this assumption struck me by surprise. I was able to see the overshadowing effect my beliefs and assumptions had on my perspective of her subjective lived experience. I then decided to take a couple of days to process these realisations and then attempt to re-read the transcript.

Reflexive journal entry (December 2021): Following the revelations I gathered from my supervision session last week. I decided to reflect on my personal beliefs and assumptions in my personal therapy session. I realised that the underlying frustrations I held around gender stereotypes have been accompanying me all throughout my life. However, upon further reflections I realised that I also relate to this participant's shared experience of not being able to do 'anything' until the tension is resolved. This is something I used to experience, and perhaps still do to a certain extent, in my romantic and personal relationships with others. I realised that I resonate deeply, with her shared experience, and how it affects her 'life'. I recognised that I resonate with this process, because for me peace needed to be restored before life can get back to normal. Perhaps this comes from a place where it was difficult for me to just 'sit' with the discomfort accompanying tension or any form of conflict for that matter. Although I am now more at ease with the processes accompanying the experience of disharmony with others, I couldn't help but feel the strong sense of relatedness to her. I believe that perhaps my immediate response of wanting to protect her from stereotypical labels placed on her as a women, as well as the struggle to sit with marital tension, came from a very personal process that I have been experiencing myself for the past couple of years.

Following these reflections, I was able to bring my personal process, assumptions, beliefs and judgements to my conscious awareness. Despite the difficulties accompanying my personal process, I realised the importance of remaining reflexive all throughout the research process. I attempted to immerse myself in her experience by re-reading the transcript, and was finally able to step into her world, whilst acknowledging my own world in the process. This experience has been eye opening for me and having undergone this at the onset of the analysis process has been rewarding. It allowed me to identify triggers as well as experience first hand, how its presence can overshadow my analysis process.

Appendix H: Excerpt from Transcript

Key: Descriptive comments, <u>Linguistic comments</u>, *Conceptual comments*

Experiential Statements	Original Transcript	Exploratory notes
The differences in life experiences is creating a difference in perspectives Marital tension threatens the peace she wants to maintain Marital tension introduces heavy and challenging situations	Participant: Okay… uhh I think that's an interesting question for me because uhh [pause] I would say, my threshold for what I consider tension is a lot lower than Salem, my husband uhh… and its… I think it just comes from you know different backgrounds, uhh different upbringing, all that stuff, and also because umm [pause] my personality is a bit of a… a, a, a peace maker… so a people pleaser to a certain extent, so I avoid conflict at all costs [nervous laugh] umm [pause] uhh so I think that plays a role in that, umm [pause]. **Interviewer: yeah and when you say your threshold is lower can you expand on that a bit?** Participant: yeah absolutely, so umm [pause] what I might refer to as an argument Salem might refer to as a conversation for example… yeah. **Interviewer: and what is your understanding of marital tension, how would you describe it?** Participant: [pause] umm [sharp exhale] I would probably uhh I… its not something I've you know thought about [nervous laugh] to be honest, I'm, I'm assuming… its any point where umm… the two parties clash… and therefore there's a, a, a, a reaction of at least… from at least one party where it, it could be… uhh, you know it could be anger it could be… just being tense and stiff and frigid uhh [pause] I mean that's what comes to mind [nervous laugh].	She has a lower threshold for tension <u>Frequent hesitance 'uhh' and pause</u> <u>'and its… I think': false start</u> *Is there a difficulty articulating the difference between her and her husband?* Perception of tension differs due to backgrounds and upbringings <u>'uhh different', 'umm [pause]': hesitance</u> *'all that stuff': is there an underlying difficulty with naming further differences?* She identifies as a peacemaker and avoids conflict <u>Hesitant repetition of 'a'</u> <u>[nervous laugh], frequent pauses and hesitance</u> *what role does this play in her experience of marital tension? Is the tension threatening the peace in her relationship?* What she views as an argument he views as a conversation <u>'umm [pause]': hesitance</u> *'example… yeah': is there an underlying need to avoid talking about this difference? Is there a sense of worry or difficulty when thinking about the difference in thresholds?* Hasn't thought about it <u>'[pause] umm [sharp exhale]', 'uhh I… its': hesitance then false start</u> <u>[nervous laugh]</u> *There seems to be an unconscious struggle and preference to avoid thinking about and experiencing marital tension altogether* Clash between spouses <u>'I'm, I'm': hesitant repetition</u> <u>Frequent hesitance while talking about clashes</u> <u>Distancing through speaking in third person</u> A reaction of anger, tension or frigidness <u>Frequent hesitant repetition of 'a'</u> <u>Hesitant throughout then [pause] and [nervous laugh]</u> *There seems to be a clear sense of hesitance and difficulty when describing the tension, given that she prefers to avoid tension perhaps this weighs heavy on her.*
Marital tension manifests in different forms Comfort in escaping tension through avoidance	**Interviewer: Mhm and could you describe that tension that frigidness… how would you describe it more?** Participant: uhhh [pause] so, this isn't drawing just from my experience I'm also kind of reflecting on uhh, different people in my life… umm [pause] I would say some people… uhh would [pause] would just **shut** out the other person… others would uhh [pause] uhh… uhh just, go through their day without … **addressing** any issues that would just be a very you know, bury my head in the sand and not think about things, just avoidance really…	Reflecting on marital tension through other people's experiences <u>'uhh [pause]', 'on uhh', 'umm [pause]', 'uhh would [pause]': frequent hesitance</u> *Is she attempting to distance herself from her experience by reflecting on others?* Marital tension manifests in forms of spouses shutting each other out <u>Emphasis on the word '**shut**'</u> <u>Frequent hesitance and pause</u> *Is there an underlying difficulty with being shut out?* Avoiding issues <u>Emphasising the word '**addressing**'</u> *'bury my head in the sand': use of metaphor perhaps indicates a sense of escape through shutting out all senses* <u>Emphasising her point by describing it again as avoidance –</u> *language flows easier when describing this form of communication. Is this a comfortable form for her?*

Appendix I: Ethical Approval Form

REVIEWER: Jeremy Lemoine

SUPERVISOR: Cristina Harnagea

STUDENT: Tamara Naouri

Course: Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology

Title of proposed study: An interpretative phenomenological analysis exploring the experience of marital tension for Jordanians residing in the United Kingdom

DECISION OPTIONS:

1. **APPROVED:** Ethics approval for the above named research study has been granted from the date of approval (see end of this notice) to the date it is submitted for assessment/examination.

2. **APPROVED, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED <u>BEFORE</u> THE RESEARCH COMMENCES** (see Minor Amendments box below)**:** In this circumstance, re-submission of an ethics application is <u>not</u> required but the student must confirm with their supervisor that all minor amendments have been made <u>before</u> the research commences. Students are to do this by filling in the confirmation box below when all amendments have been attended to and emailing a copy of this decision notice to her/his supervisor for their records. The supervisor will then forward the student's confirmation to the School for its records.

3. **NOT APPROVED, MAJOR AMENDMENTS AND RE-SUBMISSION REQUIRED** (see Major Amendments box below)**:** In this circumstance, a revised ethics application must be submitted and approved before any research takes place. The revised application

will be reviewed by the same reviewer. If in doubt, students should ask their supervisor for support in revising their ethics application.

DECISION ON THE ABOVE-NAMED PROPOSED RESEARCH STUDY

(Please indicate the decision according to one of the 3 options above)

APPROVED

Minor amendments required *(for reviewer)*:

Major amendments required *(for reviewer):*

Confirmation of making the above minor amendments *(for students)*:

I have noted and made all the required minor amendments, as stated above, before starting my research and collecting data. Student's name *(Typed name to act as signature):*

Student number:

Date:

(Please submit a copy of this decision letter to your supervisor with this box completed, if minor amendments to your ethics application are required)

ASSESSMENT OF RISK TO RESEACHER *(for reviewer)*

Has an adequate risk assessment been offered in the application form?

YES / ~~NO~~

Please request resubmission with an adequate risk assessment

If the proposed research could expose the <u>researcher</u> to any of kind of emotional, physical or health and safety hazard? Please rate the degree of risk:

☐ HIGH

Please do not approve a high risk application and refer to the Chair of Ethics. Travel to countries/provinces/areas deemed to be high risk should not be permitted and an application not approved on this basis. If unsure please refer to the Chair of Ethics.

☐ MEDIUM (Please approve but with appropriate recommendations)

☒ LOW

Reviewer comments in relation to researcher risk (if any).

Reviewer *(Typed name to act as signature)*: Jérémy Lemoine

Date: 17/11/2020

This reviewer has assessed the ethics application for the named research study on behalf of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

RESEARCHER PLEASE NOTE:

For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's Insurance, prior ethics approval from the School of Psychology (acting on behalf of the UEL Research Ethics Committee), and confirmation from students where minor amendments were required, must be obtained before any research takes place.

For a copy of UELs Personal Accident & Travel Insurance Policy, please see the Ethics Folder in the Psychology Noticeboard

Appendix J: Theme recurrence table

Themes and subthemes	Amir	Dalia	Farah	Karam	Lailah	Marianna	Saif	Waleed
Facing initial challenges of marital tension	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sensing the elephant in the room		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Facing differences in life perspectives	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
End of the honeymoon phase: disappointment due to unmet expectations		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Engaging with marital tension	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Feeling stuck in an unpleasant emotions	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Varying dynamics of handling tension	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Enduring negative emotions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Underlying worry about following in their parents footsteps	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓
Actively attempting to resolve the tension	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Taking a breather to regulate emotions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Maintaining effective communication	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Taking proactive steps to manage future tension	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Appendix K: Excerpt from table of GETs

Theme 1: Facing initial challenges of marital tension	
subtheme 1: Sensing the elephant in the room	*Saif:* I think of it as this uhh, like this ghost in the house, like an elephant in the room that nobody talks about, they both feel the tension and its kind of not okay. *Dalia*: so he gets angry and starts raising his voice and I would then leave the room and just sit in another room and that's it… after ten to fifteen minutes he just sits alone, because he understands that at this point I will get really angry, so he waits until I calm down *Karam*: its something that we feel uhh… that's caused by… unspoken aggression like [nervous laughs] unspoken… unsolved problems, or unresolved issues in the relationship, that would carry the, the tension and would, put some tension in the relationship. *Lailah*: there is a lot of… just, coldness I guess, that would in my mind you know… fall under the umbrella of marital tension, it, it might not be tense in the sense of you know there, there isn't any drama lets say but its, its still… there's no harmony so that would count as marital tension in my mind. *Marianna*: it doesn't have to be like uh aggressive because of the word tension, it is actually quite subtle and also disturbing at the same time *Waleed*: I think its just general lack of conversation and avoiding each other, which is very difficult in a small house uhm… and just yeah just an awkward situation (…) so yeah its just very uncomfortable having that tension in the house
subtheme 2: Facing differences in life perspectives	*Marianna*: the tension comes when uhh, both of them like, clash in the middle… when they each have a different vision or understanding of what marriage is and they come from two different worlds, yet they, they need to be in harmony within one world together… but, but these two different worlds are weighing in on them *Waleed:* tension isn't just uhh what I said earlier which is just two different people's ways of living colliding… its actually, problems they have inherited from their parents or their families coming together too and yeah *Dalia*: marital tension is uhh [pause] the complications or the, the, the problems that you face when you marry someone from a different umm background, from a different family… from a different… everything really, just living a different life - this is the point of view of almost all men [pause] I don't know why but… I think they just uhh [pause] uhh see themselves as, like they're better than us [nervous laughs] unfortunately! and I think its because our culture (…) for me this is a very big problem because I am very independent, I hate taking orders… I really hate taking orders, so when… because he's a man he feels the need to give orders, and you already… like I'm already dealing with our life and our problems, so uhh… I hate the way that he speaks to me when he makes an order *Farah*: imagine two people, from two different families, who are raised differently and living together… its extremely, **extremely** difficult *Lailah*: I think it just comes from you know different backgrounds, uhh different upbringing, all that stuff *Karam*: I see that giving her what she deserves in the relationship by uhh explaining and not being… like doing everything on a mutual level, I see that as me compromising things which are by cultural law and values, they are actually mine, yet I'm compromising them and I feel like I need to be appreciated for that *Amir*: I mean if it were up to me it would be very, different from what I'm [pause] sharing with alia, (…) and I'm also very, bad at planning and uhh, she feels she has to plan things and for, for me taking the time to actually start doing stuff like planning things and thinking about the, future and not having like immediate gratification kind of activity is

	not really what I would be doing in my life in general (…) I resent doing it in the first place and then I feel that she's not liking who **I am** so that's when the tension starts, you know but like you know you always, you've always known what I was like, why are you expecting a life different to that
subtheme 3: End of the honeymoon phase: facing an unpleasant reality	*Marianna*: Umm… its umm… when stress comes into the marital relationship, for example when the partners start to clash, like uhh… after the rosy period of love and all that comes the period of uhh… facing their differences, or lets say the difficulties in the relationship begins I think *Waleed:* disagreements, I think that's something that happens and I think it's the uhh [pause] it's the new side of your partner that you find out after you marry them… I mean there's, there's you know the, the honey moon phase, then there's the… the marriage *Dalia*: I think to myself why did I get married, why did I get married, why, why, why [nervous laughs]… like I was living happily alone going to work [nervous laughs] going out with my friends and family and that is [sharp inhale]… I would just hate the idea of marriage and hate him too unfortunately [nervous laughs] *Farah*: you know when you get married you think… you know he's the perfect person, perfect… yeah? you love each other and stuff but… now, I believe there is no perfect relationship or no perfect person, so if you are searching for that, I don't think you will find it *Karam*: when the relationship started it was more about the emotions, more about giving… thinking that I want to give her the world and I just want to spend every moment of my life only with her (…) now we are living together, eating together, having a baby together, uhh, uhh trying to solve issues with families together… so we kind of have to deal with the outer world in like, using one brain and making one decision… and we are two different people, like we both have different ways of dealing with things *Lailah*: its any point where umm… the two parties clash… and therefore there's a, a, a, a reaction of at least… from at least one party where it, it could be… uhh, you know it could be anger it could be… just being tense and stiff and frigid