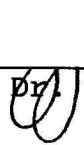AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Cort Dokken for the degree of __Master of Arts__ in

Interdisciplinary Studies in the codepartments of

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Title:Spousal Communication in the Family Setting

(Married with Children) Redacted for Privacy

Abstract approved:_____
                              Dr. Gregg Walker

Communication plays an important role in the life
of a couple. This study seeks to determine the nature of
couple communication. This study compares and contrasts
the differences and similarities in communication between
childless couples and parenting couples. The material
for this study comes from interviewing ten married
couples along with their responses to a written
instrument.

This study tries to answer the following questions:
Is there a difference in communication between couples
who have children and those who do not?
Does the content of communication vary if the couple
is parenting or not?

Is the communication pattern of parents unique enough
to be assigned individual characteristics?
How do the couples themselves describe their
communication?

Spousal Communication in the Family Setting
(Married with Children)

by

Cort Dokken

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I would like to thank my wife, Kathie, without who's help I would never have completed this research. I would like to apologize to my children, Karena, Kaylinn and Connor, for not spending as much time with them as they thought I should. My love to them all.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Any one walking into any major book store who heads
over to the psychology or self help section will find a
myriad of books on the subject of marital communication.
When two people enter into the commitment of marriage,
they also pledge to communicate effectively with each
other. The initial relationship is built upon
communication, and they become married with the
expectation of the free flow of communication.

Many couples also find it an economic necessity to
marry later and put off having children until later in
life. According to Castro (1991) this is a fact we have
never before faced in our society. Because of this, the
communication freedom they take for granted is jeopardized
when the children arrive.

Regardless of when couples get married and if they
have children, partners, wives and husbands communicate.
This research project focuses on communication as an
important dimension of marriage and questions whether
communication is different between couples who are parents
and those who are not.

A Personal Interest

My own experience, developed from interactions with my friends and acquaintances who fall into the category of DINKS (Dual-Income-No-kids, a modern acronym), is that couples without children have virtually no concept of the change that children will introduce to their communication pattern. On the other hand, I have friends who no longer remember what communication was like before children were around. In fact, one woman I interviewed told me that she talked with me more that day than she had with her husband in recent memory.

My study indicates when a couple begins a family, communication between spouses is curtailed greatly, or at least changed drastically as children demand a great deal of time. The communication patterns and style in my marriage relationship have changed a great deal since children arrived.

My interest in this subject has increased as the length of my marriage has increased. The number of friends with children has grown as time has passed and conversely the number of friends who are childless has dropped greatly.

It appears, from close observation, that couples with children only talk when there is nothing else to fill their time and have little chance to finish a dialogue without interruption. In contrast, couples without children tend to talk to fill the time.

Childless couples tend to carry on in-depth political and social conversations and do not appear to be aware of what it would be like to experience frequent interruptions. Following these interests, I sought research on the issue of communication in marriage.

Having looked through pertinent literature, I was quite surprised to find little in the way of research into how communication may differ between couples who have children and those who do not. Consequently, this research seeks to discover if communication differs between parents and childless couples.

This interests me, since my own experience indicates that communication differs greatly. Many childless couples I know, some married many years, believe open communication between husband and wife is the rule, rather than the exception. The couples without children do not fully appreciate the or understand the difference that a child will make on their communication. Communication differences do exist.

The childless couples also believe it is natural for a
husband and wife to be able to carry on a conversation for
an hour or two with no interruptions and with deep
concentration if the subject requires. On the other hand,
those couples I know with children believe that lengthy,
in-depth conversations often must be carried out later in
the evenings when the children are asleep.

Researchers on the subject of couple communication,
notably Mary Anne Fitzpatrick, maintain that there are no
differences in the communication style after the child
arrives (Fitzpatrick 1988). Fitzpatrick and others contend
that whatever the couple's communication style is, that
style will endure, no matter what else enters into the
relationship equation. Fitzpatrick believes that the style
of communication be that warm and outgoing, silent and
cool, or soft spoken, will remain with the individual
through out life. At the beginning of the study, I knew
little of what people thought on an individual basis about
communication or how their communication evolved.

My belief, based upon my own experience, was that
once a child was introduced into a relationship,
communication would change greatly as contemplation and
conversation could be broken or interrupted by the
child's demands.

With the introduction of a second child into my life, I
became more aware that communication between husband and
wife is affected significantly, not only in style, but in
content and duration as well. Thus interested, I became
more aware of the interactions and communication taking
place betweens friends with and without children. This
prompted further research into the subject.

Mary Anne Fitzpatrick (1988) argues that couple
communication is simply based upon the couple type.
Fitzpatrick states that couple communication style changes
little with the introduction of children into the family.
Style refers to the form of communication used by a
couple: Two such styles are conflict avoidance and
assertiveness. Fitzpatrick has determined that there are
standard couple types, an area that will be discussed
later, and that these types are constant throughout the
marriage, regardless of changes such as children.
Therefore this researcher will look at the communication
similarities and differences between parents and non-
parents, in an effort to find out which is in fact the
case.

I will review the pertinent literature and discuss how my findings relate to the literature. I will present an analysis of responses to questions I posed to couples interviewed in this project and responses to a demographic questionnaire.

Each subject knew, when completing the interview and questionnaire, that the material contained in each was confidential. The interview and demographic questionnaire were interrelated and some of the questions appeared to be duplicative. This was done, intentionally to verify answers. Copies of the demographic questionnaire, oral interview, and the oral interview consent form are in the attached appendices. All of the information obtained in the demographic questionnaires will be available upon request.

Literature Review
Couple Communication

As noted earlier, a major scholar in couple communication is Mary Anne Fitzpatrick. Her book, <u>Between Husbands and Wives</u>, is a culmination of work dating back a decade. Fitzpatrick (1988) has as her basic tenet that there are five couple types: (1) Traditionals, (2) Independents, (3) Separates, (4) Separate-Traditionals, and (5) Traditional-Independents.

Fitzpatrick (1988) writes that once a couple has set its pattern of communication, usually early on in the relationship or early in the marriage, it will not change. Fitzpatrick (1986) explains that once a couple has set a pattern, it is just that, set. Nothing else being introduced into the situation will change this. Fitzpatrick believes this pattern is set early in the relationship and set for the entire relationship.

Kimball's (1988) ideas seem contrary to Fitzpatrick's. Kimball states that many first time fathers are resentful of the time that children take away from their relationship with their wives. Kimball (1988) asserts that communication does change when changes occur in the couple's status. Alterations such as the addition of a child, changing from a two to one career couple or visa-versa, will modify both the style and the content of the couples communication. The modification will take place to fit the new circumstances the couple now encounters. This would make sense as the pressures, role models and many other factors of their life change.

Bradley's work (1987) supports Kimball's view. Bradley maintains that communication attitudes and behaviors are acquired through a process of osmosis. This would lead to a variation as the environment changes.

If the couple finds that they are unable to talk at the same time each day, due to a job change they will modify the routine to fit the new circumstances. Further if the life situation changes such as the addition of a child the couple will modify their communication to fit this new situation. Griffen (1971) represents changes communication a little differently, calling such events reciprocity, that is, every action causes a reaction. If the climate of communication changes so will the communication.

Upon examining the work on couple communication, one of the first things to come to mind is that Fitzpatrick (1988) does not look at her subjects over a long period of time. She insists that couples are locked into a particular type, but she does not consider the couple after a major life change has taken place, such as the birth of a child or the children leaving home. Fitzpatrick's assertions, therefore, raise questions even as they seek to provide answers. Kimball (1983) Bradley (1978) and Griffen (1971), as stated earlier, seem to disagree with Fitzpatrick. These three authors all feel that as a person's life situation changes their behavior and actions change. Given my experience, this solution or collective conclusion makes the most sense. I find it too difficult to comprehend that a human being will not bend and adapt to the surroundings it is placed in and change as the surroundings change.

Family Communication

Although not distinct categories, family
communication and couple communication do deserve to be
considered separately. The semantics alone conjure up
separate images in our minds. The scholars in this area
deal with couples with children and "mature couples". The
mature couples were couples who had been married quite
some time, but did not as of yet have children, and
couples who no longer had children at home. Galvin (1982)
discusses spouses and how they grow together. She feels
that people who live together may come up with innocuous
ways to communicate with each other. They can pass on a
lot of information to each other in what may appear to be
innocent phrases. She also indicates that a spouse will
tend to grow toward the idea of how each person occupies
their role in the marriage. Put differently, the partners
in the marriage start their marriage with preconceived
ideas of what a wife or husband should be and do. Over
time, the husband will grow toward what he believes is his
role and the wife will grow toward what she believes to be
her role. During this time, the couple will have an effect
on each other. They will change how the other sees her or
his role in the relationship. In other words, they either
grow toward each other or they grow apart if the
differences in their ideals and values are too great.

Fitzpatrick (1986) writes that traditional couples share a lot of emotional and physical closeness and that separates tend to have a more differentiated space. As the couples come to grips with the coupleness, they will define what the couple or the relationship "is".

As couples grow together, they tend to have a dominant spouse and a less dominant spouse. Submissive is not always the appropriate term to use. The spouse that is less dominant is not always submissive. To help in facilitating this study, it was decided that the researcher would not look closely at dominance in the communication setting. Galvin (1982) states that power is, more or less, the ability to obtain the desired response from your spouse, therefore it was decided it would be best to interview separately. That reduced the chance of spousal interference in the exchanges with the researcher.

In a family, however, there are often "power coalitions" where members of the family join together to create a power base. Children may join a parent against the other parent to obtain the results sought. The researcher was not concerned about power coalitions in this research. In general, the children were not yet old enough to have generated a strong power base with one parent against the other.

Hocking (1982) deals with familiarity and lie detection. He develops the basis to conclude that the more familiar a family is with the members, the more likely they are to detect deceit in a member.

Hecht (1984) writes that satisfying communication is often related to intimacy and the length of the relationship. The more developed the relationships, the closer the friendship between spouses or family members. He goes on to say that the kind of conversation which is satisfying in longer relationships is not necessarily so in the shorter ones. The longer the relationship, the greater the understanding that delayed satisfaction is acceptable. The parents in the study are generally satisfied with their communication. They note that they talk less, but they still, for the most part feel that the relationship is satisfying. As one husband and father says "I do enjoy talking with her (spouse), I enjoy talking about political things. I enjoy jousting with her. things like that." One wife puts it this way "We need to have a life. I have spent more time talking to you than I have with my husband this week. It is thought provoking, we need to sit down and talk more. We are still close together, the war brought us closer together, so we would talk. Interesting."

A Previous Study

Fitzpatrick has conducted numerous investigations of marital and relational communication. A 1986 study Fitzpatrick co-authored (Fitzpatrick & Witteman 1986) presents her primary research method. Her sample involved, "couples randomly drawn from lists of married students living in university housing and a small number of couples who had participated in marriage encounter weekends..." The sample consisted of 51 couples one of which was later dropped leaving 50 couples in the study.

The research was conducted by having the couples do two fifteen minute role plays after a ten minute conversation. The results, the recorded conversations, were then coded for analysis. Fitzpatrick (1988) drew an abundance of information relevant to the (1986) study from her past studies. Fitzpatrick (1988) placed all the couples in her various couple type categories coded the results and applied them to the current study.

This researcher was able to gain the cooperation of ten couples to facilitate the research. The couples were chosen from an available pool of acquaintances, co-workers and friends. One couple was unknown to the researcher until they volunteered for the study.

As none of the individuals in the study were full time
students, and most were working full time in professional
careers, the income of the group was higher than the
national median income.

Sex Differences in Communication

Researchers have found there are sex differences in
communication. Burgraf (1987) concludes that differences
in marital communication arise out of the fact that men
and women do not communicate in the same manner. Wives
control the outcome of conversations two times as often as
husbands. This tends to occur more often as the marriage
progresses. Wives also tend to have the control of
conversations, regardless of the subject matter at hand.

This researcher wanted to look at couples who were
childless and of a young age, and then compare these
childless couples with parenting couples. Consequently
much of the family research is not directly to answering
research questions related to the differences and
similarities between parents and childless couples.

This research looked at some couples who had less than two years together. This provided an interesting perspective of being able to talk with those who were new to marriage and a relationship and those who had a great deal of time invested in their relationship. This was helpful to the study by providing a great deal of contrast to the changes that take place as a relationship grows and matures.

A Synthesis

This discussion has considered communication literature related to marital communication. Before moving on to the scholarly work in the areas of interviewing and research, it will be necessary to tie the communication literature together with a look at power and interplay.

When one is looking into couple communication one must at least consider power. Who is the more powerful partner in the relationship? The husband is not always the person wielding more power (Strong 1989). As one wife states "I make most decisions. He doesn't make too many decisions." and her husband responds "The decisions are pretty much individual." (indicating that his wife makes them).

Strong (1989) shows that if you monitor conflicts you generally find power struggles. Strong further states that the person who earns or distributes the most money will be the one with the power. Other writers disagree with this.

Finch (1989) writes that the paycheck is not the best measure of power. This research did not look into power within the couple directly. The researcher did consider argumentation and conflict resolution. This necessitated an examination of the literature dealing with inter-couple power.

Finch further writes that as the couples mature, the specter of the paycheck loses its force on the partner who brings in less monetarily. Powers (1977) disagrees with Finch. He states simply that disagreements are the result of a failure to communicate in other areas.

An interesting study in this area presents family stages. Galvin (1982) lists eight stages in the family establishment:(1) newly married, no children (2) new parents with infants to three years old (3) preschool children to the oldest being six (4) school age family, children six to twelve (5) family with young adults, oldest twenty (6) family as launching center (7) post parental family, and (8) post retirement.

The author indicates that disagreements decrease and communication increases as you move from stage one to stage eight. All of my research subjects were in stages lower than stage four. This would lead me to expect a higher level of disagreement to be present.

While Galvin's categorical description is useful,there are possible additions. A good addition would be, (1.5) long time couples without children, and less important to my study, (7.5) return of the children.

Back in the seventies when Galvin's book was being researched, there would likely be less need for the category 1.5, but it is not uncommon today to find couples who were married in the late nineteen seventies who still do not have children. This is a cultural phenomenon where couples were delaying childbearing in order to pursue careers and other activities.

With the twenty-first century drawing closer, our society is beginning to realize that to maintain the standard of living that our parents had, it is becoming more of a necessity that both partners of a couple work. This will lead to the need for new research into couple communication and family communication. The influences affecting communication, children, work, day care and finances will all take on different importance.

New studies are emerging in these areas. A scholar
who devotes much of her energy to research in this area is
Ann Crouter. Crouter (undated manuscript) describes how
work in the eighties and the increasing stresses
associated with it, are changing the communication
patterns between spouses and between parents and children.
Crouter (1987) describes how stress on the job is brought
home to the family or spouse and the change in
communication that takes place. If a person comes home to
a spouse only, after a high stress day, the communication
is more likely to be tense, but manageable, than if he or
she comes home to a spouse and children. The added
influence of the children will make the tension rise.
Regarding dual earner couples, Crouter (1987) discovered
they have more negative interaction than single earner
couples do; this includes the interaction with their
children.

Taking the above section into account, this
researcher has to look into the possibility that not only
will children affect communication, but also the fact that
both partners working may affect the communication
process. The studies cited above all appeared to be done
with the idea of looking more at the change in
communication brought about by work related stresses than
home related stresses.

Hopefully, future studies can take into account that both work and home related stresses combine to affect communication. Only Crouter, in her writings, focused briefly, on the fact that the stresses could be cumulative.

A writer of the late nineteenth century summed up communication in marriage and between people quite succinctly. As cited in Dinesen (1977) "Many conflicts of marriage are actually conflicts of humanity and actually arise out of desire for monetary things and of wishes that are in variance with each other . . . One should not judge what you don't understand."

Interviewing and Surveying

The major portion of this research was based upon a written instrument and oral interviews. Consequently, I will review the literature pertaining to interviewing and research.

Whitbourn-Krauss (1990) points out that when interviewing spouses, the answers will vary, depending on whether you interview the spouses individually or as a couple. In many couples, discrepancies can be seen when you do not separate the spouses. Wives will often believe that they are having a discussion when they are not.

In reality, the husband is just sitting back and being a
passive listener. Whitbourn-Krauss further states that
separating the spouses will lead to the most honest answer
being given. By separating the spouses they can answer as
they feel without having to worry about hurting their
partners feelings. Spouses tend to be careful as to what
they say around each other, especially when dealing in
sensitive areas, and often respond, if the other spouse is
in the room, with "I need to check with _____" (the name
of their partner).

     With this in mind, I opted to use a strictly
confidential study, so that the couples could answer as
they wished without worrying that their partner would find
out. Garrett (1978) backs this up by pointing out that in
a successful interview, the interviewer is always in
control. This is, of course, much easier to accomplish if
the spouses are separated.

     She further states that good interviewers alter their
strategy to fit the changing situation. I tried to do this
as much as possible and still follow my interview guide.
To maintain control, it is best to keep the subject at
ease with you and the situation.

This of course requires the interviewer to change tactics throughout the interview process. Interviewers must not let the subject upstage them, or gain control of the interviewing process. Keeping the subject relaxed is therefore, highly important. Interviewers must not allow their own biases to show through (Garrett, 1978). Interviewers must also look to their own reactions to see how they are reacting to the comments made by the interviewee or the situation. Interviewers must be sure to observe their own reactions to make sure they do not affect the person being interviewed.

I attempted to create a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere, one in which the parties felt free to communicate honestly. I also kept the interviews formal enough that the information gathered was consistent from interview to interview.

Hyman (1954) writes that friendliness and rapport are helpful but a certain amount of formality is appropriate and important in conducting direct interviews. Garret (1978) agrees with Hyman on this account. They both feel that too much interaction between the subject and interviewer has a negative affect on the outcome.

In other words, interviewers should not let subjects know what they think of a particular answer or the answers in general. If interviewers start to notice that they are sending non-verbal clues, they must maintain control over themselves ant the situation to maintain the integrity of the interview.

Why the Face to Face Interview

Why should this interviewer take the time to conduct and transcribe direct oral interviews? A National Academy of Sciences (1979) reports that face to face interviewing is a foremost method of survey research. In survey research, one must look at the population you are trying to describe. Backstrom (1981) suggests that the interviewer decide what she or he wants to discover and talk with the people who hold the key to what she or he need to know. Direct interviewing is sometimes the best way to get this information.

A number of publications Backstrom (1981), National Academy of Science (1979) and Marsh (1982) point out that interviewing face to face is the best way to collect information, especially concerning past activities, motivations, beliefs, or attitudes that are being studied.

When a researcher is doing a direct interview, she or he can observe any non-verbal communication or adjust the questions when the responses would indicate the need to do so. The researcher can also follow up on information that is incomplete or needs clarification.

Thomas (1977) warns that researchers must be aware of all that is going on in front of them; the inside jokes, the hand movement the particulars of the culture which would leave an outsider unsure of the full meaning of the communication taking place. Researchers must also be aware that subjects will follow their lead. Speak at length and the subject will do likewise. This researcher encouraged those interviewed to go into depth if they were willing to do so, and prompted them when they hesitated.

The literature on the research interview is quite extensive. When taken as a whole, it provides a great deal of information and guidance on interviewing. The individual books or articles do contain shortcomings. Thomas (1977) encourages interviewers to talk at length to the subjects so that they will respond in kind. Doing so will also give the interviewee a greater insight into how you feel about a subject and prompt them to answer the questions as they feel you want them answered.

I practiced using such phrases as "yes" or "go on" to prompt the subjects to talk at greater length. This way I tried to keep from interjecting my own thoughts into the situation.

Research Questions

This study was designed to get answers to the general question, "What is the nature of couple communication and does it differ when there are children involved?" More specifically:

1. Does couple communication differ between couples who are parents and those who are not?
2. How does the content of communication vary between couples without children and those who have children?
3. Can we assign certain communication characteristics to the couples who have children?
4. How do the couples characterize their communication?

CHAPTER TWO

DESIGN OF THE RESEARCH

This study used a written survey instrument to gather demographic information and oral interviews to learn about couple communication. The following discussion describes the research procedure.

Each interviewee was given the written instrument to complete while his or her spouse was being interviewed. Then the roles were reversed. This procedure was followed in all but three cases. In these three cases, it was impossible to schedule the time so that both spouses and the interviewer could be at the same place at the same time. This is how this problem was handled. A day was arrived upon that would allow the interviewer to interview one spouse in the late morning and the other spouse in the early to late afternoon. The spouses agreed not to speak to each other once the interviewing process had begun. This kept the method as similar as possible to that used with the other respondents. Not allowing any of the spouses to discuss the study between the time they were either interviewed or filled out the written instrument minimized their influencing each other's answers. All but three of the interviews took place in the subjects homes.

Confidentiality

Maintaining confidentiality was very important to the study. It insured that the subjects would answer honestly, knowing that their spouses would not be privy to their responses.

The couples first met together with the researcher. They were told the purpose of the study and a description of how confidentiality was to be maintained was read to them. The couple was asked if they had any questions. They next signed a form stating that they agreed to be interviewed, that each individual understood that all oral interviews would be transcribed, and that all would be held in strict confidence. At no time would the names be attached to the answers. All the answers were given a code so the researcher could identify the couples, but these codes would be destroyed as soon as the research was complete. At this point, one spouse was given the written instrument to complete while the researcher and the other spouse went to a separate area to complete the oral interview. They were not allowed to speak with each other until the couple had completed the entire series. The researcher remained with one spouse at all times to ensure this in seven cases.

In the remaining three cases, the researcher had to rely on the honesty of the couples not to speak with each other by phone while the researcher shuttled between the two.

The Couples

The researcher studied ten couples, five with children, five childless, over a period of three months. The childless couples were married fewer years, although one childless couple had been married over nine years. The childless couples were also younger; all were in their twenties as opposed to the couples with children who ranged in age from the late twenties to the early forties.

The Researcher

This researcher has been married over eight years and has children of his own, hence the interest in the subject. He has been employed in a professional occupation that requires he take many recorded statements every week. The researcher is required, as a responsibility of his position, to discuss sensitive matters with many people under stress.

The Research Method

Given the nature of the interviews and the number of participants, qualitative, analytical approach was used to interpret the information gathered. Smith (1988) states that all interviews are naturalistic conversation. Babbie (1989) writes that field research more typically yields qualitative data.

Frey (1991) concludes that qualitative analysis is best for deciphering first hand text of communication data, and qualitative analysis bridges the gap between how people behave in laboratory studies and how they behave in every day life. True (1989) backs this up. She writes that qualitative data is the observation, conversations, anecdotes, letters and diaries, data expressed in words. Other than a few quantifiable demographic facts, this study deals entirely with words; communication and how people perceive their environment.

True (1989) and Anderson (1987) together confirm that qualitative studies are very important. True (1989) writes, statistical significance does not always translate into social significance. Anderson (1987) puts it this way, qualitative research offers a contribution which does not seem to be available through quantification.

Interviewing couples about their communication relationship involves looking at a social situation. This research considers the nature of the question: does social/interpersonal communication differ between couples with or without children? Anderson (1987) argues that qualitative research begins with an interest in the situated individual and is directed at explaining social action. Stone (1985) writes that any study of human phenomena requires the researcher's world view to be made known. This needs to be known so that those reviewing the researchers work have an understanding of how the researcher sees the pertinent world around him or her. Secondly, the researcher need to be known to future researchers to allow them to analyze the interplay between interviewee and researcher (Kavle 1983).

To do this qualitative study the researcher had to study human phenomenon. Wertz (1983) writes that, the individual phenomenal description of the phenomenon is a single person's expression of the matter which is being studied, with all irrelevant statements excluded. The approach taken thus involved analysis of the individual statements and relating them to the rest of the subjects in the study.

With this in mind, further research in this area could determine more if subjects report a similar communication pattern, but not if they had the same answers. Responses from the interview subjects need to be looked at and analyzed in context, not for exact verbatim response to questions posed. In the same vein, Stone (1985) asserts that the duration of each interview should be self determining. Once the subjects have presented all of the answers they feel are related to the situation being researched, the interview is considered complete. This researcher, while probing, did allow the subjects to reveal what they considered important.

The researcher would press the point until he felt further pressure would damage the atmosphere of the interview and have the effect of reducing the amount of information the subject would be willing to reveal. As to be expected, subjects reacted differently to a personal interview.

Some subjects were uncomfortable giving answers longer than a few words while others talked at great length. A common area among the couples with children was a great interest in discussing how their lives and communication changed after the birth of the first child.

In more than one instance, the subjects talked well over an hour about these changes, and how children affected their relationship. This was not an intended session. Most of the parents started these conversations on their own. The individual sessions had brought into focus the fact that their communication has changed, and they wanted to talk about the changes.[1]

Stone (1985) writes that the researcher cannot be viewed as an independent observer, but must be seen as a participant observer. The interview is an engaged human discourse. He further states, that the qualitative research interview aims at obtaining uninterrupted descriptions. This research was done with the subjects having no foreknowledge of the questions to be asked. The subjects therefore had only the time from the asking of the question, to their response to mull over the possibilities. The responses were also transcribed as told, in the subjects own words.

Validity

Validity is the relation ship the subjects play to the world at large. Research may have valid conclusions in relation to the subjects studied, although the area may be so narrow as to negate any relation to the world at large.

Further the results may be valid but pertain only to a narrow band of the population. In either case though, the results are still valid.

Anderson (1987) writes that validity is set in time and place. This statement seems irrefutable. We know that what is true of our society would not translate well to the native tribes of the Amazon rain forests, and in all likelihood, the social truths of today will not apply to the societies of two hundred years past, or hence. With that in mind this research aims at validity as applied to our society as it is today, and for as long as it retains a similar form.

Kirk (1987) states that validity is a question of whether the researcher actually sees what he or she thinks he or she sees. Validity, therefore, is a question of the researcher's point of view or reference. If a researcher is unfamiliar with a subject or group of subjects, she or he may conclude one sees one thing when in actuality the actions being observed have nothing to do with what the researcher assumes he or she is observing. He or she (the researcher) draws tentative conclusions from her or his current understanding of the situation as a whole, and acts upon them (Kirk 1987). In essence, Kirk is pointing out that the researcher will overlay his or her reality on the situation being investigated.

If the reality of the researcher differs greatly from that of the subjects, the conclusions drawn will not be valid. In this area, the research is valid. Kirk further states validity is related to time, place, and subject group. The results of this study are therefor valid for similar subject groups.

As Anderson (1987) states, a valid scientific argument can be a story. It is the insightful telling of the relationship among empirical facts in a manner that connects those facts to some larger discourse about the world in which we live.

Stone (1985) explains that the criterion for validity is not whether another researcher (or judge for that matter) would use exactly the same words and expressions or even arrive at an identical description of the phenomenon. Rather, validity is indicated by whether such differences in wording and expression (by the subject) are intersubjectively understood to reflect a correspondent meaning or indicate similar themes to those that emerge from the data as explicated by the original researcher.

Reliability

Reliability, simply stated, is the ability to replicate a study and achieve the same results. Any method of measuring reliability makes certain presumptions about what is being measured. It also has limitations with regard to the accuracy of the estimate. The fundamental presumption is that the attribute being measured remains the same over repeated measurements.

If the attribute changes between repetitions of the measurement, the results will be wrongly labeled inaccurate and in error, instead of the accurate measurement that it actually is (Anderson 1987). Smith (1988) writes, if the same people repeatedly respond to the same instrument in virtually the same way, the instrument is considered reliable.

The interviewees in this research responded consistently to the two instruments used. Another method to achieve reliability is the test-retest method. This involves administering the instrument to the subjects on two separate occasions, Smith (1988). This researcher used a variation of this method by having some similarity of questions, between the two instruments being administered.

Babbie (1989) states field research does have a potential problem with reliability, especially when it relies on the researcher's judgment or opinion. He further writes, you can be more trusting of comparative evaluations: Identifying who, in a certain group, is more conservative than whom, as opposed to stating that the person is very conservative. Using Babbie's test of reliability, comparing within the group, this research can be considered reliable. This research describes how the variables relate within the group being studied, that is, how do the couples with children compare to those without. Babbie (1989) continues, even if you disagree with the researcher, you will be able to get something of value out of the research he or she has done.

True (1989) asserts that when proving reliability between studies, you must use a similar group of subjects. For this research to be replicated, the subjects/interviewees of future studies need to be college educated and in professional/technical occupations. If they do not fit into the group that has been studied, the results will not be easily comparable and may even call the validity into question.

Frey (1991) concludes that measurement reliability involves measuring a variable in a consistent and stable manner. For this research, one person administered all of the instruments and conducted the oral interviews from identical interview guides. We can conclude, therefore, that the research data was gathered in a stable and consistent manner.

Babbie (1989) insists that when you are talking about reliability, you are in a sense talking about generalizability. He contends that when discussing generalizability and reliability of a group, do not generalize about the group but generalize about the relationships within the group. The study will be far more reliable if you discuss the relationships of the group. The researcher needs to focus on how the subjects relate to the rest of the subjects in the group, not how they compare to a person or group outside the group being studied. One can not really generalize beyond the research population.

The last problem of generalizability focuses on the subjects relationship to the population as a whole. That is, if one studied drug users from the inner city, she or he should not expect the results to relate well to the people in the suburbs, or a population where the lowest yearly income is five hundred thousand dollars.

The generalizability of this study relates to well educated professional/technical couples and similar couples.

Validity and Reliability of This Study

This researcher believes, that the results of this study are valid to the extent that they reflect the communication patterns within the group being studied. The study can be shown to be valid, even though it does not include statistical data. As stated by Anderson (1987), a story which connects facts to a larger discourse about the world can be a valid argument. This research "has facts", the results from the instruments that were administered.

This researcher stated earlier that reliability relates to the ability to replicate results between studies. The researcher is quite confident that if the study was done using similar subjects, the results would stay constant, that is, replicate the original study. As Anderson (1987) writes, if the attributes remain the same, the results should be easily replicated.

To help establish reliability, some questions were similar in the two instruments used. This gave the researcher a check to verify that the respondents were answering similar questions in a similar manner.

The subjects did answer in a consistent manner. This
result helps demonstrate the reliability of the
instrument. The researcher does not purport to be making
the claim that the results will relate to the world at
large. The researcher only hopes to show that they relate
to groups similar to the subject group. This researcher
compared the answers to others within the study and
postulates that the study is related to the population of
individuals of similar socio-economic status.

The researcher is aware of the fact that this study
is attempting to make conclusions about communication with
or without children in the family while excluding other
variables. This is, of course, a very difficult task.
Communication is fraught with peaks, valleys, and
pitfalls. Communication is a very "loaded" area.

People communicate in a great number of ways and
communication is affected by just as many happenings
outside the researcher's scope of knowledge. The subject's
mood, how their work day went, or even their outlook on
life when the instruments were administered all play a
part in the final answer.

NOTES

[1] This session after the formal interviews was initiated by four of the parent couples. None of the childless couples spoke about change in their communication, or if they expected any change to take place if and when they started a family. The unprompted sessions, though they did give the researcher more information, could have altered the results of the study. The researcher understands this and has attempted to use as little of this information as possible.

CHAPTER THREE

RESULTS

Demographic Results

The average age of the subjects is 30.5 years; couples with children averaged 36.1, those without averaged 25.0. The youngest subject is 22 the oldest 43. Eleven subjects were born in Oregon. All currently live in the northwest, or to be more accurate between Portland and Corvallis. For all but two of the subjects, this is their first marriage. The two remaining subjects, both men, are in their second marriage. The childless couples have been married one to nine years. Those with children have been married nine to twelve years. Nine of the subjects reported living together prior to marriage. Of those who lived together prior to marriage, the length of time ranges from one month to six years. Incidentally, the men reported that they lived together, prior to marriage, for longer periods than the women did.

On the whole, the subjects are well educated. Two completed high school only, one has an AA degree, one subject is working toward a masters degree, four have masters degrees, and the rest have bachelors degrees. All but four subjects work outside the home.

These four subjects were mothers who opted to take on the demanding job of raising the children. The families had what most would consider good incomes, ranging from $30,000.00 to $80,000.00 per year.

Where Do They Talk

One would clearly expect that there would be little difference, in the responses, as to where the conversations take place. That assumption is generally correct. The common difference relates not so as much to where the couples feel comfortable communicating, but how the structure of their lives differ. The couples with children state that children control a great deal of their daily activity and therefore the structure of their daily lives. Because of the inherent difficulties of moving about freely with small children, couples with children find that they do most of their talking at home. For them, the most likely place to talk would be either the kitchen/dining room area or the bedroom. On the other hand, couples without children are more free to move about. They also report a great deal of communication takes place in the home, generally kitchen/dining room or living room area, not the bedroom. Those without children also report talking while out; for example, in the car, at a restaurant, or at a mall.

In essence, a couple that does not have children can carry
on a conversation when or where the need arises. The
childless couples still report that a great deal of the
talking takes place in the home. This is also true with
the parents. It is obvious that couples with children have
built in distractions. This results in the reduced ability
to carry on conversations in many circumstances. Because
of the "kids" parents are limited in the time they have to
talk.

Appendix A contains a breakdown of the answers the
couples reported during the oral interview. The answers
are in order of frequency, the subject brought up the most
will show up first in the box. The numbers next to the
boxes correspond to the question in the oral interview
guide. The parents answers are in the boxes to the left
the childless couples answers are to the right.

The parents report a great deal of the conversations
take place in the dining area while they are preparing or
eating the meals, and in the couples bedroom after the
little ones have gone to bed. Occasionally parents talk in
the car, but this is limited by the chatter emanating from
the back seat.

The research results show that there is some
difference in where couples communicate depending weather
or not they have children. The home is still the prime
location to carry on the conversations. The most
significant factor is where they spend their time. Since
children tend to keep the couple near home, it is the most
common location to carry on the conversations. Since
couples without children move about more easily, and have
fewer distractions, they have more chance to carry out the
talks in varied locations.

When Should We Talk About It

A vast difference shows up when you consider the time
that the couples have their conversations. Couples with
children are limited to the time they have when children
are not making demands. The subjects report that time to
talk is a precious commodity. Most in-depth conversations
are carried out when the children are asleep. This results
in many conversations taking place late at night. If not
late at night, the next most common time is meal times.[1]

Couples without children tend only to be limited by
the hours they work, and since all have access to phones
at work, even this is not much of an obstacle. The couples
report that they often have long conversations.

They tend to talk a great deal in the evenings, but this is by no means the only time.

In this aspect, parents and non-parents vary greatly. Children are time consuming. They require a great deal of attention. With their attention being diverted to the children the couple has less to put into the important task of communication. After a days work, the children want to play with or attract the attention of the parent who was gone all day. While one spouse prepares the meals, the other generally takes care of the children.

With all the demands upon their time, the couples with children find it difficult to fit conversation in to the schedule. The parents' time tends to be spent in task oriented activities, getting the children fed, bathed, and ready for bed. This leaves only a small amount of time for talk.

What do Couples Talk About

The non-parents discuss vacations and leisure activities a great deal. Mountain biking, for example was mentioned frequently. Generally, wives bring up the long range vacation plans, or any long range planning to be done. The men tend to be more oriented to the here and now, or spur of the moment activities.

Finances, the future, and leisure are the most common
areas to be discussed by the childless couples.
Finances/taxes play a large role in the day to day
conversations of these couples. The future, which one can
relate to finances and taxes, also fills up the
conversational time. Often, the future focuses on the
starting of a family. One woman was quite interested in
discussing how to raise their future children, what type
of discipline to use, how would her husband handle this
type of situation, and what does he think of the methods
used by their relatives when dealing with their own
children. Where to live came up in the same breath as the
discussion of starting a family.

The couples were trying to decide where to set down
roots. The idea of starting a family meant choices of
where to live and how to live. The couples all felt that
starting a family would greatly reduce their mobility,
both in the area of housing and job.

Discussion of hobbies and leisure activities fill a
lot of the communication time of the non-parents. Two
hobbies cropped up more than once. These were stereo
equipment and guns. One would suspect that this is both a
function of the subjects' age and area in which they live,
at least with respect to guns. Other than that sporting
activities are the topic of choice.

Softball, basketball, mountain biking, all consume a large portion of the conversation time.

One interesting man has as his hobby, beer. His foremost interest is beer; Making beer, drinking beer, who has the best micro brewery, the newest micro brewery. He even commented that his upstairs bathtub was at this moment full of his most recent bottling.

The childless couples also mentioned social and political happenings as a topic of conversation. One subject stated that their last long conversation had been about Kurdish refugees. She went on to say that she is interested in hearing about and discussing current social and political activities, although she admitted her thoughts are not always "politically correct".

As one would expect, children dominated the conversation of the couples with children. All the subjects with children responded that their children or "kids" were a topic of daily conversation. Raising the kids, what they want for the children's future, and how to discipline are all prevalent in their discussions. The second most common topic is that of fixing up the house and yard. The third most common area of conversation is finances.

This area, finances, ties the preceding two together. The couples discuss how they will be able to pay for the kids tennis shoes, how to allocate money to fix the house, and whether or not to take out a loan to landscape the yard.

As with the couples without children, those with children also discuss future plans, vacations and leisure activities. Or as one husband put it "The ultimate vacation, the Caribbean Islands, a pipe dream". Another husband said "I spend my time planning vacations without the kids and my wife spends her time planning family vacations". All of the couples with children spend more time talking about the day to day necessities of raising the family and keeping the home, than they do leisure activities and hobbies.

Not surprising to this researcher [who has three children], parent couples report that children dominate their conversations. The kids were the number one topic of conversation. All but one mother mentioned children as the number one topic that they share. That particular mother said she brings up everything as her husband talks very little. The fathers listed the number one topic as work/finances, they did not separate the two. Children followed a close second.

The results were three fathers named work/finances and two naming children as the common conversation. Those fathers who named work/finances first, named children second.

An interesting phenomenon showed up during the oral interviews. The couples without children usually had no problem coming up with the last topic of conversation. The couples with children did. They tended to have to dig deep into their memory, some could not come up with anything at all. One woman finally blurted out "door knobs" as their last topic of conversation.

Who Leads the Discussion

The stereotype in American society is that of the wife being talkative while her partner, husband, is silent. She is seen as being the one to start most conversations and do most of the talking throughout the discussion. To some extent the couples themselves believe this. All of the interviewees with children reported that the wife started most conversations. At the other end of the spectrum are the couples without children. Six of the interviewees in this category report that the husband initiates conversation most often. Two said that they initiate conversations equally and two report that it is the wife who generally starts the conversation.

While this finding, that the wife is often the initiator of conversation, may be mitigated by the age of this group, it is still significant. The responses to the question of who talks more fairly mimics response to the question of who initiates conversation. That is, with parents, the woman tends to speak more and in childless couples, the man tends to talk more.

There is one deviation to this, one couple with children state that once a conversation starts the conversation is pretty well divided equally.

Related to this is who brings up what topics. The topics most likely for a respondent to bring up among the non parents are the topics of work, finances, and activities/vacations. One husband listed sex. The researcher would have expected this to mimic other similar questions but it did not. Hobbies showed up at the end of the list along with discussion of social issues.

When asked what their spouses brought up, it became apparent that the couples did know each other quite well. Two of the interviewees could not think of any subject their mate brought up, but the other eighteen did very well at naming the subjects

their spouses brought up, based on the subjects the spouses themselves thought they brought up.

Though the two questions seem similar, "what topics do I bring up?, and, on what subject do I talk the most?", the answers were not always the same.

The greatest deviation in answers was from the couples without children. One couple who listed work as the topic most often brought up also listed mountain biking as the topic that they discussed the most, preceding travel, politics, engineering/science with work as the last topic the "talked" about. This would seem an isolated incident if it had not been for the fact that other couples answered similarly. Parents still listed children in this as the most talked about subject.

Another question asked was, what do you like to talk about simply for enjoyment? Here the subjects reported a whole new array of topics. What they enjoyed talking about and what they tended to talk about were often two different things. One woman listed diet and exercise. She did not appear to need to discuss these topics, being in good physical shape, but she enjoyed doing so. It would seem therefore, that her physical condition is a result of this interest.

The subjects were asked to estimate how often they had a discussion with their spouse in one week. The non-parent responses showed that they talk more than the parents. This easily related to the time constraints placed on couples with children.

On the average, couples without children report having 17.8 conversations per week. Parents report having 8.3 conversations per week. After dropping the most extreme answers non parents report 12.7 conversations per week and parents participate in 6.7 conversations per week. Couples without children believe they have nearly twice as many conversations per week as the couples with children.

What do They Enjoy Talking About

When conversation is not directed, and the subjects can talk about anything they want, most of the previous topics are abandoned for topics which the subjects find pleasing, topics that are less likely to involve personal stress. Only one mother mentioned that she talked about the children first, and of the ten parents interviewed only two mentioned the children at all. For the parents, the number one topic is current events and politics, followed by vacations and "leisure things", as one subject referred to vacations and hobbies.

Two subjects said "everything" and two subjects said "anything". One husband said "anything to keep her on an even keel". A mother reported wanting to have "adult conversation" after taking care of the kids all day. This researcher found that discussion of current events and politics was very popular. To some extent this could be expected, given the educational level of the subjects.

Communication Methods

Characteristics of Their Communication

The couples report that the major portion of their conversations are either casual conversations or discussions. They may have reported this simply to show harmony in the marriage, although this would be most difficult to determine in this research situation. They give this answer after being given the choice of; arguments, discussions, casual conversations or disagreements, etc. One married couple describes the following: The husband states that most communication is in the form of disagreements or conflict, "Uh we,re less likely to reach an agreement than not". The wife's account is that most of the communication is in the form of discussions or disagreements, but she notes that she makes most of the decisions, "Well the conversations end when i'm finished discussing it, I probably control it".

The couple does indicate (in the after interview discussion) that they did disagree less prior to the birth of their first child. One woman, not a parent, insists that their major form of communication is discussion and casual disagreements, and one man simply says that his conversations are simply "shooting the breeze". [2]

The researcher also queried the subjects as to whether or not they had a goal in mind when talking with their spouse. Almost half of the respondents, eight, indicated that they had no goal when they entered into conversations with their spouse. Nine subjects responded that their goal in the conversation was to gain or pass along information. One said he was "simply passing the time". Another said her goal was "adult conversation" and another reported he was just "making conversation".

Cessation of Communication

When asked how they ended their conversations, most childless couples reported that the conversation faded away, or that they ran out of things to say. A variation on this was voiced by one husband: " After we say a couple of dumb things we know it is time to stop". The rest simply stated that conversation ended when the information had been exchanged, or when they move on to something else, more conversation or activities.

One husband reported he would request that the subject be dropped when he was tired of it.

On the opposite side, the parents report that most often their conversations end by interruption. Three couples reported that the children interrupting ended most conversations. One man notes that he does not know how the conversations ended, while his wife states that the conversations fade off and she controls all conversations. The last couple, who report that they talk after the children are in bed, say that the conversation ends "when we can't stay awake". The husband states that the conversations "drift off".

The greatest difference between the couples has to do with the children interrupting, or in other ways affecting the conversation. The parents conversations are greatly controlled by the actions of their children. If the children demand attention, the conversations are put aside. Getting the children ready for bed generally requires that one or both parents tend to the children, thereby reducing the time available to talk. If the parents wait until the children are in bed they themselves are tired and have less energy and concentration to apply to the conversation.

This research reveals that many, if not most, conversations do not have a planned ending. The subjects in this study state that it is most common for the conversation to just drift off. Parents, given a chance to carry on a conversation to conclusion, are more likely than not to find the conversation fades away, or changes to another topic almost without their awareness. A precise end to the conversation is uncommon. A husband puts it quite succinctly: "We know when to end the conversation. After we have said a few dumb things." This was the theme throughout the study. The people studied did not have a definite end or conclusion to their communication. It "drifted off" or "faded out" or they changed topics, unconscious of the fact that a shift in conversation had taken place.

Conflict Resolution

Couples with children report that they usually can reach an agreement in their general conversations. Two husbands reported the couple is not likely to reach an agreement and one wife reported that the chance of an agreement in most instances was 50/50.

Couples without children also report that most of the time they can reach an agreement, or as they state, "usually".

The difference in this case might be related to the topics of conversations they discuss. Parents tend to discuss topics which are more serious, such as children, finances, and the home. Non-parents spend more time discussing leisure activities. The topics the parents discuss are generally more stressful and the outcome of the decision more likely to have great importance to the individuals in the relationship.

The researcher asked the couples if they ever had disagreements in public. Eighteen of the twenty subjects said yes. The answers in the affirmative ranged from "not often" to "yes" to "all the time". Only two respondents said no; both were women from the group with children. Other than that, the groups answered quite similarly.

Argumentation

The researcher queried the interviewees about arguments. Did they try to win the arguments? Could they typically reach an agreement if needed? How would the discussion/argument end?

When asked whether or not they wanted to win the argument, the results were quite even. Four of the parents thought winning was unimportant. Three said yes, they tried to win, and two put winning second on their list.

The major concern was not winning but getting the point across. One woman answered her main goal was "to blow off steam". The general feeling of the subjects was that the first priority in decision making or arguments was to get their point across, or "make myself understood". Winning the argument or discussion does not usually play that great a role in the disagreement. One woman answered: "When we really get into it (an argument) I start to blow off steam. I don't necessarily want to win I just want to let it (aggression & frustration) out." A man answered that in an argument he is concerned with winning; "I probably am concerned with winning. If it was a big fight it would probably end with my wife being silent, and it would just end there. It would have to be brought up at a later time."

While on the subject of argumentation, the researcher asked the subjects how their decisions were typically made. Most subjects report that the couple made decisions jointly most of the time. As one wife put it the decisions were "a team effort". "_____ and I are a team we work out everything if there is a problem we sit down and work it. We usually find a way to solve everything, at least so far." Only one subject, a husband, reported that the decisions were usually made by the individual with little joint input, and joint decisions were rare.

The couples, where one or both of the partners regarded winning an argument as important, had the higher number of decisions being made individually. They did not always come out and say that the decisions were made individually, but when going through their responses they had firm beliefs on what they would have control over and what their spouse would. One couple came right out and said that most decisions were unilateral, the wife made most or all the decisions. The husband acknowledged that his wife made the decisions. The others were less up front about it. Either they did not want to admit it or they did not realize that this pattern had set in.

This result did not appear to the researcher as being out of character. A person who is concerned with winning an argument will be more likely to be competitive within the couple. A competitive person will try to "win" when competing with the partner and therefore try to have control over the outcome of the family decisions.

The responses as to who has the greater say on what subject was broken down, along what many would consider, according to traditional sex role lines. The subjects report that the wives make most decisions about the children, the house/home, and social activities. The men make the decisions about the yard, power equipment, finances, and the car.

It was interesting to note that the areas of power in the decision making arena do not vary between the various age groups or whether or not the couple has children. One suspects that this phenomenon is based more upon areas of interest that men and women have. We will not delve into the possible societal reasons here.

Four of the couples with children state the mother has control over most of the areas that affect the children. The one mother who did not claim a greater control over their child's activities and decisions relating to the child also calls herself a part time parent.

When asked how they end their disagreements or arguments all subjects had to search their memories to come up with an answer. The parents tend to spend time working through the argument often after the children are in bed. One father stated that "if I can't see an end, we can't work it out, I just stop talking". He noted that his wife's response is to go for a drive. His wife answered that if no agreement is reachable, the conversation just fades away. Another father calls the arguments "heated negotiations". His wife claims that who ever has the strongest feelings will win the argument. And one woman simply states "I control the outcome of all disagreements".

The childless couples have more evocative descriptions of the endings to their disagreements. The statement that shouting often ended the disagreements came up more than once. Other than that, they feel that they will be able to find solutions to most, if not all of the conflicts they encounter, if they have enough time.

All couples feel that disagreements can be solved given enough time. The time needed may be measured in increments, minutes to weeks. Some couples acknowledge that they will never agree on some topics, so it is often best to leave these alone.

NOTES

[1] One parent couple reported that they were able to send the children away when they needed to carry on a conversation without interruptions. In fact, they sent the children away so we could conduct the interviews in peace. When we were done, they pointed out how well the children had done. We had been interrupted at least ten times during the interview. Apparently they were oblivious to the interruptions.

[2] The couple who reported that most of their communication was in the form of conflict or disagreement also gave the researcher the shortest answers. They would use one word answers when they could and were the least willing to expound on their answer when asked to do so by the researcher. They gave the interviewer the impression that they have a troubled relationship, and a problem with their interpersonal communication in general.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Do couples communicate differently if they are
parents or non-parents? This researcher found that there
is a difference in the communication of couples with
children and those without children. This finding is based
upon the reports of the parents and correlates well with
work done by the experts in the field. After the
administration of the instruments, the couples with
children often commented that they do not talk as much as
they used to. The comments ranged from "I have spent more
time talking to you today than I have with my husband over
the last few weeks" to "We really don't have much time to
talk anymore, really talk, you know sit down and have a
discussion on something". The one exception to this is a
couple who said they did not talk much before the birth of
their first child, and they do not talk much now.

Does the arrival of a child change the communication
of a couple? According to Fitzpatrick (1988) the style of
couple communication will remain constant throughout the
couples life.

Though the interview questions did not directly address change, differences in communication between childless and parenting couples supports the claim that modification of the couple's communication does occur. This research points to the fact that communication does change as the couples situation is altered with the arrival of a child. How couples communicate changes with the demands placed upon them. Children greatly affect the demands on parents, and have an impact on the amount of time couples have to communicate. Kimball (1988) and Bradley (1987) state that changes in the life of a couple will bring on changes in the communication within the couple. Adding a child to a couple is a definite life changing event. The couple is no longer a couple but now a family, with added responsibilities and stress. Crouter (1987) discusses how stress changes communication. Unlike Fitzpatrick (1988), Crouter (1987) believes that stress will modify communication and communication patterns.

Does the content of communication vary between couples with children and couples without? This research discovered that the content of communication varies greatly between couples who had children and those that did not. Childless couples spend their time talking about leisure activities and hobbies. Examples include: "I bring up things we're going to do, the spontaneous things on the weekend. Sex, I bring up sex probably 90% of the time.

I bring up the spontaneous things."; "Beer, I talk about beer all the time"; "I tend to bring up like social topics, you know like doing things."; "I like to plan for the future, are we going to be living in the same house? Where are we going for vacation? that sort of thing. "I bring up mountain biking, things like that. You know it boils down to what, you know, that we might have some differences in what we want to do".

Parents spend their time talking about children and related concerns. The couples switch their priorities after the birth of the first child. The new child consumes a great deal of their time, and most of their conversation. Parent comments include: "Home improvements, finances, children, plans for the childrens' futures."; "Children, planning for the future, current events."; "We talk about abortion, we talk about politics once in a while, we talk about raising the kids, disciplining the kids, the kids, we talk about the kids."; "we talk about our daughter, work and money, and household chores."; "His work, the children, anything going on in the household that requires discussion."

This is not a wholly unexpected phenomenon. It is not foreseeable that couples will spend a great deal of time talking about mountain biking if they no longer have time to go mountain biking.

Griffen (1971) calls the process reciprocity. She states that for every action there is a reaction. The action of having a child causes a reaction in the communication arena.

The parents comment about the lack of time together, since one or the other is often taking care of a child or the children and therefore away from the other spouse. Another concern parents have is that of time together when they are fully functional. They are often not left alone together until later in the evening. By this time, they are tired and unable to devote much energy or concentration to any discussions. By way of contrast, the couples without children can spend a great deal of time and energy on their discussions and each other. They make the following comments; "Rarely do we have any privacy completely to us, the extent of the conversations take place at home;" "Well uh with the children there are always a lot of interruptions, lot of times it will take a few discussions to finish something." "It's sad, I tried to remember this whole day and I wouldn't say we talked about anything. That's interesting." "We lament the passing of in-depth discussions." "We need to have a life, I have spent more time talking to you than I have my husband this week. It is thought provoking, we need to sit down and talk more.

The war brought us together. Interesting." These
responses would be expected by Arond (1992).

Can certain characteristics be assigned to a couple
on the sole basis of the fact that they have children or
not? It would be difficult, at best, to do this
definitively. Still characteristics which can be
associated with each will generally apply to the
communication relationship condition. If a couple are
parents, they will be less apt, than non-parents, to have
the time to complete a discourse without interruption.
Parents will be more prone to discuss children,
disciplining children, child related costs or expenses, or
any other topic related to children and child-rearing.
Fitzpatrick (1986) assigns communication types to couples.
She asserts that these types will remain constant
throughout the relationship regardless of what other
influences come into play. It would not appear appropriate
to this researcher to assign characteristics to the
couples based solely upon the fact that they are parents
or not.

One could make broad statements such as, "children
require a great deal of time, therefore couples who have
small children will have less time to communicate".

It would be more appropriate to attribute individual characteristics based upon the life stage of the couple similar to those of Galvin (1982). She assigns characteristics based upon the life stage of the couple, newly married, new parent, parents with young children, etc. A particular couple is not locked into one particular category, but moves through them as their family changes.

The couples studied in this research were in a narrow range of life stage categories. After talking with the couples, the researcher can see that a change in communication has occurred during the life of the relationship. The parents lament their loss of the ability to talk whenever or wherever they want to, freely, without the need to worry about the kids.

How do the couples characterize their communication? Childless couples generally characterize their communication as free flowing and in depth. They believe that they can talk about anything they want to for as long as required, just about any place they happen to be. On the other hand, parents feel much more restricted in their ability to communicate. They tend to believe that they don't have the time to talk to their spouse. In general, they do not expect to be allowed the time to complete a conversation without interruption.

Some of the couples believe it is inappropriate to discuss their children in public, and if they have very young children, they are restricted to the time when the children are fully occupied or asleep in order to have that lengthy talk.

Therefore, the researcher can state that, generally, couples without children feel no impediment to their communication, while those with children feel that they are under pressure with regard to their communication.

Do differences in communication or communication pattern exist between couples with and couples without children? They certainly do. As stated earlier, couples with children face more time pressures in their communication than do couples without. As Kimball (1988) states, whenever there is a change in the couple's status there will be a change in the communication. The addition of children is most definitely a change in the status of the couple. They change from couple to family/parents. An interesting factor in this is Fitzpatrick's (1988) assertion that each member of the couple has his or her own marriage. She contends that each partner in a marriage sees the marriage her or his own way, through ones own eyes. That is, the wife sees the marriage through her own eyes and with her own preconceived ideas. While her husband sees the marriage through his own eyes.

They are each living in a reality that they create
separately, based upon their expectations.

The change in status from being a wife or husband to
being a wife/mother or husband/father is great. The
couples replace many of their previous ideas about the
marriage with new ones revolving around the aspect of
family, and many of the activities now revolve around the
new child (Arond 1992).

Those items which before appeared so extremely
important, take on much less importance after the arrival
of the child. The researcher did find one exception to
this in the subject group. One couple with children stated
that their life had changed little after the arrival of
children. They report little in the way of conversation
before children and they also state they talk very little
now. "He doesn't talk much, so it's (communication) about
the same as it was before (the first child)." This couple
also gives, to an outsider, the appearance of an unhappy
relationship. Fitzpatrick (1988) states, unhappy couples
find it difficult to agree on any problem, even the little
ones. And as this couple states, the inability to agree
does cut down the communication they have.

Power, as defined by who makes more decisions that
control the family and family activities, also shifts
after the birth of a child. Prior to children, the couples
give the appearance of a fairly shared power base. After
the arrival of a child the power base shifts (Burgraff
1987). The mother begins to wield more power, and as the
child takes on a greater role in the couples life. As the
child or children take up more of the family's time and
energy, the mother makes more and more of the decisions
concerning the family. One mother states: "There are some
topics or areas where I don't have strong feelings, if I
don't feel strongly about something then he's welcome to
make the decision there. I make a lot the decisions over
the kids and I set up our social life, I make the
decisions, and I run it by him, but he knows he will get
pressure if he says no."

This takes place slowly at first, but in time, the
mother makes many more decisions about family life. This
correlates to questions asked in this research about
decision making. We find, that although decisions may be
made "jointly" if the couple are parents, the woman will
control more of the day-to-day activities than will a
woman in a similar non-parent couple. Burgraff (1987)
points out that of married couples with children, wives
make two times as many decisions about the family, and
decisions in general than does the husband.

Hecht (1984) observes that as relationships mature, the
nature of conversation changes. Conversations which are
acceptable to couples who have been together a long time
would not be acceptable to those together only a short
time. This explains why the more mundane conversations are
acceptable to the subjects who have been married longer,
hence the couples with children. As one father told the
researcher: "I'm the one who brings up the least number of
topics. I would usually bring up what's going on at work,
if something is going on at school, I'll catch tidbits on
N.P.R. driving back and forth and we'll discuss them since
there interesting... you know adult conversation."

The perceived communication satisfaction level of the
couples without children is much higher than the parents.
The parents lament the fact that they can no longer talk
at length with their partner. The ability to carry on
uninterrupted adult conversation, for some mothers, is a
memory from the past and a phenomenon to look forward to
in the future.

The results of this research, although not
specifically addressing satisfaction levels, indicate that
parents generally perceive that they are less satisfied
with their communication than non-parents.

Whether they actually are or are not is certainly open to discussion. In some instances, the researcher was told this directly in the interviews. Other parenting couples would discuss the changes after the interviews had been completed. These parents state it would have been impossible for them to fully grasp the changes that would occur after they had children.

Parents speak of the time constraints now on their lives. They yearn for more time to be with their partner, engaged in conversation. They desire the ability to sit down and talk, non-directed, with their spouse without, interruption or the threat of interruption. Mothers appear to want some "adult" conversation. Two mothers in the study directly divulged to the researcher that they miss the chance to communicate on an adult plane.

Limitations Of The Study

The study obviously has limitations. The researcher would have preferred to have a larger sample size. The necessities of time made the addition of more subjects an impossibility.

Given this studies findings, questions about communication satisfaction, marital satisfaction, the perceived changes in communication after the arrival of a child or children, would have been pertinent to this research. These issues were often addressed during informal conversations that followed the formal interviews. These conversations were not audio taped, nor organized uniformly for all couples. The researcher only had the notes, taken after leaving the subjects, to refer to in regards to the non-structured discussions. The discussions after the formal interviews suggest areas of attention in future couples interview research.

This research involves a small sample number of participants; ten couples. Obviously, this small sample reduces the ability to generalize conclusions. The subjects are middle to upper middle class, and well educated. The subjects are caucasian. This limits the generalizability of the study even further. Still the research does reveal the nature of communication in ten couples lives, couples who have views to share about marital communication.

While qualitative analysis is appropriate in this type of study, it has obligations. The researcher does give up some control by allowing the subjects to relay their life events in their own words, but doing so illuminates what we can learn from listening to people talk about their lives. The research relies on the investigators ability to interpret subject answers in a meaningful way. Further qualitative analysis requires the researcher to ground investigation in previous theoretical and empirical work. This study has strived to meet these conditions.

A qualitative approach is appropriate given the questions asked and the number of couples available to the researcher. The researcher grounded his interpretations of the answers, to the questions asked, with modern couples communication literature. The possibility that future researchers answers may differ does not diminish the merits of what this researcher concluded.

Personal Reflections

What have I personally learned from this research? I have discovered that I, like most other parents, am unable to recall or even imagine what it was like to talk with your spouse prior to the arrival of the "kids".

Most parents lament the passing of the ability to converse freely without interruption. Parents speak of the past conversations about hobbies, vacations, their adult toys that are now replaced with talk of children, children's needs, and potty training. It is the wholesale change of lifestyle that shocked the parents. Parents state that they feel it is impossible to communicate to non parents the great change their lives will go through after that first child arrives. None of the parents in this study regret that the decided to have children. It is more to the point that they were unaware of how great the change would be after becoming parents, and the change in the relationship follows.

Two fathers in this study did report feeling resentment toward their children with regards to the amount of time the children take away from their husband-wife relationship, and the financial pull the children have (drawing money away from the fathers interests) As one father states, "Well, the Caribbean or some other pipe dream vacation, a killer stereo, some guns to shoot, now that the kids are here the money goes to the house, yard and kids." Winch (1968) and others discuss how first time parents can grow jealous of the new child. This stems from the child taking time away from a spouse. Parents, in general, do not want to be misunderstood. They would fight to the death for their children.

It is just that they still want to be a couple. They miss the freedom that children take away.

Ideas for Future Research

This research while limited, suggests future investigations. A number of variations could further clarify marital communication. One variation could be done using the following design: (1) Select a minimum of ten couples willing to participate freely in the study; (2) The couples, would participate in interviews in which they would be asked about marital communication satisfaction and how they feel their communication has changed. The couple would describe their perceptions about how communication in the relationship has changed from the time they were first a "couple", through their marriage, to bringing children into the world, to the present day status.

As stated by Marsh (1982) survey data from a group of subjects may be interpreted using qualitative analysis. Stones (1985) believes that interviewing can be a part of a qualitative research plan; True (1989) and Wertz (1983) concur. With this in mind the researcher constructed the interviews in a manner consistent with qualitative analysis.

While a sample of twenty people, ten couples, is not a large enough number to extrapolate from and have a scientific quantitative study, it is a sufficient group for qualitative interpretation.

A second variation might occur as follows: (1) Enlist the cooperation of fifty or more couples, with children for an interview session; (2) Interview the couples on their thoughts on how their communication had changed. Look for certain key phrases or words which indicate a possible change after the arrival of children;   (3) Using a designed coding system, code the responses for statistical analysis; (4) Conduct follow up interviewees after a significant, pre-determined period of time. Review all of the information that has been gathered. This should yield a comprehensive overview of the changes that occur in the couple's communication as they progress in their life. Then compare and contrast the results as to the changes that took place.

Insights

One might ask whether or not partners in these couples understand each other. The answer is mixed depending on the strength of the marriage. Couples do understand each other, and the fact that they have children does not diminish their understanding.

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understand each other, and the fact that they have
children does not diminish their understanding.

If the couple has an understanding and strong marriage
they will weather the ups and downs of child rearing
(Arond 1992). The same can of course be said of childless
couples. Arond points out that children are not an end all
nor a savior for a marriage. If a marriage is strong, the
relationship will adapt to the addition of a child or
children. If it is a weak marriage, the children will
highlight the weaknesses. In the strong marriages, of this
research, the partners will adapt and communication will
still take place, the couple will maintain their
understanding of each other.

Conclusion

This research indicates that children of the subject
couples do affect marital communication. The children
become the focus of their parents lives. The parents
replace previous interests with the well being of their
children. Simply put, the parents find that their lives
take on new meaning and focus.

Children demand a lot of their parents time. Newborn
to young school age children are very time consuming and
generally require almost constant attention. The needs of

This makes it more imperative for the couple to strive for quality communication interaction in the limited time they have.

We do not know if the subject couples communication pattern would change if the children were removed from the relationship for a time, be that an hour or a week. It might be that by removing the couple from the direct influence of their children we would find that the couple slips back into their old pattern of communication. This may be another interesting area to explore in future research

We can address changes in communication after the arrival of children. To understand communication adaption to this situation we must look to the parents. Are they interested in any changes? Do they feel that there is anything that needs to be changed? One father states that the children are good at leaving the parents alone when told to: "Well generally my wife is pretty disciplined with the kids. The kids break in but they don't break it up. I think we often finish them (conversations), I think that I often don't listen then she'll get angry and stop talking." It is interesting to note that this couple experienced children interruptions more frequently than any other children of the couples interviewed.

His wife states; "It's about 50/50 our son probably interrupts in at least half the conversations." Whether or not the mother sees this as a problem is unknown. The father does not even see a problem, in fact he seems to indicate that his children are better behaved than most. Future research might pursue this issue.

If the parents do not believe there is a need for change than they will not have a desire to change. Couples who think there is a need for change may be willing to expend the time and energy necessary to modify their communication patterns. Some couples do realize that their communication has changed. One couple states, "We don't talk much; when we do talk we do it on our night out".Another mother exclaims, "I think that people who have kids never discuss anything. When you see married couples you think that they sit down fifteen minutes every day and talk to each other. But it's amazing how many don't do that ever."

One father says that he and his wife solved the problem this way; "We have lately gotten into the habit of having the kids fed by the time I get home, so we can talk while we eat and after the kids have gone to sleep." Another father says that they have not resolved the issue, "Because of the children, because of the childrens' ages she tends to stay up until they are ready to go to bed. I

get up early and go to bed early, there is a little bit of a rift there, not much chance for us to communicate."

The childless couples in this study, on the other hand, seem to have no trouble communicating "We talk in the bedroom, when we wake up, in the living room. We talk when ever we're together and during the day we often talk on the phone;" states one husband. His wife follows up, "We have conversations at night, evenings, we talk all the time. We do most of our talking at home but if something really exciting happens during the day we call at work or whatever, or anything that happened during the day". The rest of the childless couples responses run in the same vein.

Fitzpatrick (1988) lists categories of couples based in part on how they communicate. Four of the couples with children studied here would fall into her "Traditionals" category. They exhibit the characteristics she uses to define traditional couples; close, protective of the others feelings, and giving. The remaining parents exhibit what Fitzpatrick (1986, 1988) would classify as independents, almost to the extent of being separates. These couples carry out a large portion of their activities alone. They make most of their decisions separately and one could almost say that they have separate lives tied together by the child.

The childless couples would fit well into the
categories of Traditionals and Traditional-Independents.
The later classification has a great deal to do with the
fact that the non-parents are all employed. This being the
case, non-parents do a great deal of after work activity
away from home, and they often do this after work activity
without their partner. Further, because they all work,
there is more autonomy in how the money is spent. This
gives the individuals a great deal of independence, though
they do discuss major money transactions and life altering
events.

Although this study did not directly ask the couples
if the addition of a child had changed their communication
most would likely answer yes. Couples enter into
relationships with a lot of "talk time"; They have a great
deal of time to talk with each other. As the relationship
matures, the "talk time" becomes an expected part of their
lives. The birth of or adoption of a child creates a vast
change in the relationship. No longer are they free to
discuss the topic of their choice whenever they want. They
must care for the addition to the family. Many parents
feel that they now come second and their child first.
Eight of the parents in this study believed this. Many
parents are not ready for this change. They spend a great
deal of time developing the previous patterns of
communication.

With the addition of a child or children, they are required to quickly change course. They find that they expend a great deal of energy finding the time to simply talk with their spouse. The schedule is such that often the conversations are put off until late in the evening. By this time, they find that the amount of effort they have to expend in conversation is more than they have left. One couple, parents, have an almost impossible task of it. The mother stays up with the children until they go to bed, between nine and ten pm, the father goes to bed between eight thirty and nine thirty as he gets up very early in the morning, around four thirty am. They feel that they have almost no time together alone to discuss matters of importance. Their conversations have to take place on the phone during the day if they do not want their children around to catch the conversation.

When the children arrive, the mother becomes the more likely party to make decisions affecting the family. As one mother said, "I make many plans, often without his input, either I can't reach him or he is not interested. In any case, if he objects to the plans, I simply work on him until he understands that it is easier to go along with the plans than to fight my decision(s)".
Most mothers in the study are sure to argue that they make most of the decisions themselves.

This is contrasted by the non-parent wives who say that most, if not all the decisions are made together, particularly the larger ones and those affecting daily activity.

This research is obviously preliminary rather than definitive. This is a first step, an opportunity to look at how a few couples view their own communication. As a first step with a small respondent population, conclusions are not generalizable to the population as a whole. The study reflected my interest in this area of communication. Perhaps this work may pique the interest of future researchers, thus expanding our knowledge in this area. This area of communication deserves more attention.

While this study does not disprove Fitzpatrick's studies, it does raise questions that need to be examined. We may need to consider whether in future studies the researchers look at the possibility that change in the relationship or an altering of the couples circumstances changes their communication. Researchers Kimball, Griffen and Bradley will assert that a change in the couples situation will alter the communication pattern.

This research has contributed to our understanding of how couples communicate. It has brought more clearly into focus the fact that couples are willing to put their children ahead of their own communication. Couples with children believe that it would be an almost insurmountable task to describe, forewarn and convince the non-parents of the changes that will take place when children are added to the relationship.

This study finds that non-parent (study participant) couples make their decisions on a more evenly divided basis. Both wife and husband contribute equally to the decisions and have an almost equivalent say in the outcome and/or determination of activities and actions of the couple.

The conclusions of this study are limited by the number of participating couples and the groups they represent. Still it supports that previous researchers views assumptions about couples communication, (Whitbourne-Krauss 1990) (Crouter 1989) that communication does vary depending on the current situation of those involved. As Anson (1979) indicates, the family situation does effect family communication. The parents in this study believe that their communication has changed since the arrival of their children.

As one father puts it; "What did we talk about last, I don't know, that's a stumper, I can't recall what we talked about." All of the childless couples could remember their most recent discussion.

Finally, this research is not intended to show parenting in a bad light. This researcher simply intended to look into the differences in communication between parents and non-parents. For all the changes the arrival children initiate, parents would not change the situation. They would not give up their children in exchange for communication freedom. I believe one mother does a good job of putting the situation into perspective. She states, "The pleasure of our relationship is tripled. We spend a lot more time just talking about the kids. Some of the spontaneous interplay is gone. But we're committed to this marriage; we make time for each other. And he's so available as a parent, there's more pleasure in the pleasure and less pain in the pain." (Arond 1992 pg. 44)

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Appendices

Appendix A

	Parents	Childless Couples
1	children,future,current evts home imp,finances,kids,abort house hold duties work,days activities	sports,vacations,relig politics,days evts, friends,trips,time off finances,hobbies,beer sports,future,activ
1a	landscaping,home imp,kids can't recall,work	work,her sister,new car kurdish refugees,tax $ mt. bike,sickness, his/my parents,
2	children,plans,schedules domestic affairs,every thing	chores,sex,work,beer spontaneous things, social topics,vacation
3	children,wants,occupation improvements,finances news paper,intrapersonal	plans,her family,beer nothing,hobbies finance purchases,work,vaca's
4	9 say wife 1 says husband	3 say wife 7 say husband
5	children,future plans,polit. days happenings,vacations	work,world issues, mt. bike,sports,diet what to do,hobbies exercise,religion vacation,finances
6	work,imp. family life,home children,politics,baseball domestic things,current events	stereo stuff,school social issues,travel free time,activities vacations,us,sports
7	kids,future,house,baseball politics,leisure time, current events,every thing things we read	non threatening things material purchases hobbies,vacations,beer social issues,daily happenings,time off politics,future plans work,joke with spouse
8	walking,while preparing meal kitchen,driving,restaurants	living room,home,out in the car,on couch with our families
9	3-4,2,2,7,14,14,10,3,7,7	14,70,10,14,3,5 @ 7
9a	evenings,weekends,mid-late day,during day on phone early morning,after dinner	days and evenings dinner time,mornings before work, mid day to late night
9b	kitchen,bedroom,driving family room,house	in apartment/house living room,car,phone
9c	early mornings,weekends when the children go to college 2001	evenings & weekends sunday before noon no schedule,when ever

10	casual conversation @ 3 disagreements @ 3 discussions @ 4	discussion @ 3 disagreements @ 2 conversation @ 1 shooting breeze @ 2 casual discussion @ 2
11a	adult conversation,no,gain or pass info,shoot breeze so he will like me	get point across shoot breeze,pass the time,exchange info
11b	when interrupted,when some- thing else needs to be done when kids break it up,side tracked,too tired to stay awake,beating a dead horse	when point across when agreement,drift off,something stupid said,fade off,when finished,we go on
11c	50%, yes @ 3,no @ 2,usually we discuss when we don't agr	yes @ 8,yes or com- promise,if needed
11d	yes @ 4,no getting point acr oss @ 4,letting off steam some times	yes @ 2,no @ 2,when she is wrong @ 2 point across @ 4
12	children,kids,what we see don't know,no	no,conversational things,sports,beer current events,casual things,restaurants
13	yes @ 3,who does more work what she should wear, no money,very seldom,same	yes @ 3,not often @ 3 all the time
14	personal negative traits physical relationship family,emotional topics kids,kids problems,domestic issues,finances	personal life, sex family,no @ 7
15	joint @ 8 with each partner having area of expertise individual @ 2	joint @ 9 with each having area of more control, joint except sex
16	yes,strongest feelings win no,children interrupt,only when we need to,gets too heated,always,kids interrupt	yes,work it through talk it out,slug it out,after length discussion

results of oral interview:

This appendix is an approximation of the answers given by
the couples during the oral interview. The answers are
listed in the order of frequency.

Appendix B

Copy of signed consent form used in survey.

I understand that OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY requires its researchers to obtain permission from the interviewed subjects for oral and written interviews. I give my permission for my interview to be transcribed if oral, and further understand that all information given will be held strictly confidential.

Signature_____ Date_____

Signature_____ Date_____

Appendix C

Oral Interview

If the questions seem ambiguous, please ask the interviewer for clarification.

1. What topics do you and your spouse talk about that last a few minute or more?

1a. What was the most recent topic?

2. Which topics do you usually bring up?

3. Which topics does your spouse usually bring up?

4. Who usually talks the most?

5. On which topics do you usually talk the most?

6. On which topics does your spouse usually talk the most?

7. What do you enjoy talking about?

8. Where do your conversations usually occur? (public, private, dinner table)

9. How often are you likely to have a conversation in one week?

9a. What time of da

9b. Where?

9c. When?

10. How would you describe the nature of your
    conversations?

    i.e. arguments, discussions, casual conversation,
          disagreements.

11. a. What is your goal when you engage in conversation?

    b. When do you end the conversation? Do you know when
       to end it?

    c. Do you usually reach an agreement?

    d. If it is an argument, are you concerned with
       winning?

12. Are some topics most likely to be brought up in
    public?

13. Have you ever disagreed with your spouse in public? On
    what subjects?

14. Are some topics most likely to be brought up in
    private?

15. How would you characterize decision making in your
    relationship?

    Joint or individual?

    In all cases?

    On all topics or some?

16. When an agreement is warranted, do you typically reach
    an agreement?

    How does the conversation end?

    When does it end?

Appendix D

Demographic Questionnaire

Please answer each question honestly. If you have a question, please ask the interviewer for clarification.

Your Name:_____

Date:_____

1. Age_____   Sex: M_____ F_____

2. State of birth_____

3. Is this your first marriage? Yes_____ No_____
    If no, how many times have you been married? _____

4. How many years have you been married? _____ Number of
        children_____

5. If you lived together prior to marriage, how long did
    you live together? _____

6. What is your educational background:

    Circle highest level completed

    1. Elementary

    2. Middle school/Junior High

    3. High School

    4. College

    5. Post Graduate

7. Do you: 1. Work in the home (home business)?

    2. Work outside the home full time?

    3. Work outside the home part time?

    4. Go to school?

    5. Raise the family on a full time basis?

       (stay at home parent)

    6. Raise the family on a part time basis?

    Circle those situations which best describe your life.

    If a combination of the above, please explain.

8. What is your income?_____   a. less than 10,000

    What is your spouses income?____   b. 10,000 to 20,000

                                   c. 20,001 to 30,000

                                   d. 30,001 to 40,000

                                   e. 40,001 to 50,000

                                   f. more than 50,000

9. Do you or your spouse usually initiate conversation?

    I do _____   My spouse dose _____

10. What is your favorite topic of conversation?

11. What is your least favorite topic of conversation?

12. Articles on marital disagreement list many items of
    disagreement. Here are seven of them. Please rank them
    as they pertain to your relationship.

    1. Children   1._____ most frequent

    2. Finances   2._____

    3. Job/work hours   3._____

    4. Sex   4._____

    5. Where to live   5._____

    6. In-laws/Extended family 6._____

    7. Division of house work 7._____ Least
        frequent

13. Have you and your spouse ever disagreed in an open
    setting?

        Yes_____   No_____   If yes, could you
    explain briefly?