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A Grounded Theory Qualitative Research Approach to Understanding Enduring Marriage

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A Grounded Theory Qualitative Research Approach to Understanding Enduring Marriage

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Abstract

Serial monogamy developed as the salient pair bond form in earlier times due to environmental pressures of disease, famine, and death that led to relationships organized around the instrumental tasks of procreation and child-rearing. Contemporary advancements in longevity, gender equality, and contraception have shifted the culture, but the serial monogamy paradigm remains the prominent relationship paradigm in the United States today with relationships primarily ending in divorce instead of death. The negative effects of divorce on individuals, children and families suggest the need for a new paradigm for marriage, a shift from instrumentally driven serial monogamy to enduring marriage organized around intrinsic relationship variables. The majority of marriage research has focused on marriages of 20 years or less, leaving a gap in the marriage literature on long term marriage. The present grounded theory qualitative study aimed to understand the systemic environment of an enduring marriage in order to explore the reasons couples remain together and the components influential in enduring marriage. Seven men and women in the United States participated in this research study. Individuals who have experienced a continuous, long-term marriage for 35 years or more participated in one in-person or tele-interview that lasted a maximum of two hours. Thematic data analysis revealed an ecosystemic model of enduring marriage that consists of 21 themes, nine categories, and four concepts representing participant's experiences of enduring marriage. The four concepts that emerged from the data include: (a) individual experiences, (b) relational processes, (c) relational dynamic, and (d) community.

Interconnecting all the concepts to represent the influence of societal and developmental change over time is the chronosystem. The model highlights consistencies with previous marriage research on factors that contribute to healthy marriages and expands upon the previous knowledge to further define the concept of enduring marriage, including factors that uniquely impact enduring marriages. Systems-based clinical interventions are discussed as findings emphasize the importance of implementing interventions that target intrapersonal, interpersonal, and contextual factors. Future research is encouraged to expand this study's initial findings related to enduring marriage.

Keywords: enduring marriage, marriage, ecosystemic theory, older adulthood, aging

CHAPTER I

Introduction and Literature Review

Purpose

The purpose of this dissertation is to understand the systemic environment of an enduring monogamous marriage in order to explore the reasons couples remain together and the critical components in enduring marriage. The focus of marriage research has primarily been the mitigation of divorce and increase of short-term marital quality (Buehlman, Gottman & Katz, 1992; Halford, Osgarby & Kelly, 1996; Halford & Sanders, 1990; Jacobson & Follette, 1985; Jacobson & Addis, 1993; Weiss & Heyman, 1990); therefore, a gap exists in the research regarding the identification of variables that contribute to enduring marriage. Monogamy is a form of pair bond representing an exclusive, committed relationship with one partner at a time that is comprised of instrumental and intrinsic tasks (Black, 1996). Instrumental utility (O'Neill, 1992) suggests a relationship is valuable because it provides access to other aspects of life that are viewed as beneficial (i.e., procreation, resources for child rearing) which reinforce human desire to maintain pair bonds to reach opportunities outside of the relationship bond. By comparison, intrinsic value (O'Neill, 1992) suggests a relationship is valuable in and of itself, not due to the access it provides to additional resources. Serial monogamy is one form of a monogamous pair bond which entails a lifestyle consisting of committed short-term monogamous relationships that often result in multiple relationships throughout an individual's life (Mead, 1970; Pinsof, 2002). Marriage signifies the social organization of humans into mutually exclusive relationships that continue to be a key form of societal organization that is consistently influenced by

cultural changes (Buss, 2011). Thus, marriage is a cultural expression of monogamy, and as an institution has become a pillar of culture. While one definition has not been established for enduring marriage, the field draws on the current understanding of monogamy, serial monogamy, and marriage to describe enduring marriage as a monogamous pair bond characterized by a continuous, long-term relationship with one partner (Bachand & Caron, 2001).

Evolutionary pressures and adaptation established relevancy for human monogamy and pair bonding based on the need to respond to changes over time. Pair bonding was originally discussed within biological and sociological literature and has been described as a strong attraction that develops between a dyad whose aim is to establish a relationship (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1989; Washburn & Lancaster, 1966). Human bonding is first experienced in the relationship between a mother and child, and it continues as infants rely on their caregivers to provide for life-sustaining needs. Human bonding develops close interpersonal relationships with the presence of attachment processes that create mutual and reciprocal emotional exchanges. It appears that environmental pressures shaped attachment needs and emotions to extend beyond the mother-child bond and include adult pair bond relationships, creating an emotional dyadic and family commitment that heightened the chances for infant survival (Zelman, 2015). Paleolithic and Neolithic environmental demands shaped pair bonding into serial monogamy given the adaptive nature of short-term monogamous relationships in response to environmental norms of short-term life expectancy through untimely death, poor health, disease, famine, war, accidents, and other death inducing influences (Buss, 2011). Due to the impact of spousal death on future well-being, widowed partners were

driven to establish new relationships to survive and had the added benefit of increased variety in the gene pool (Ridley, 2003). Short-term relationships are grounded in the instrumental tasks of procreation and child rearing which provide an adaptive response to the environmental pressures in the culture during that time.

As human social organization has grown in complexity, culture has evolved and adapted in response (Wilson, 2012). While one definition of culture is not present within the field, culture is discussed as a set of rules created by a group that involves attitudes, beliefs, norms, values, and behaviors that are shared within a particular group and carried into future generations in order to ensure survival (Matsumoto & Juang, 2012). As environmental and human demands evolve, culture is shaped by these influences and humans respond differently as well. In societies that experience modernization connected with economic development, human development is concomitantly influenced, creating changes in cultural attitudes, which ultimately influence human relating (Inglehart & Norris, 2003; Wilson, 2012). Contemporary society and modern medicine have produced increases in human longevity (American Psychological Association, 2015; OECD, 2013), greater gender equality (Inglehart & Norris, 2003), and the use of birth control (Goldin & Katz, 2002), which greatly changes the calculus of pair bond relationships. For example, serial monogamous dissolution is now less likely to be the result of death and more likely to be the consequence of divorce (Pinsof, 2002). These modern environmental demands may have shifted the current culture in a way that renders serial monogamy maladaptive, as evidenced by negative outcomes of divorced and single parent families displaying decreases in individual and societal well-being, including depressive symptoms (Frech & Williams, 2007), poor health (Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 2005), lower educational attainment

(Barber & Demo, 2006), higher poverty levels (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), partner aggression (Anderson, Umberson, Elliott, & Vangelisti, 2004), and childhood anxiety, emotion dysregulation, and interpersonal difficulties as a result of parental instability (Carlson, 2000; O'Leary, Slep, & O'Leary, 2000). It is also important to note that divorce can be adaptive in circumstances when people leave dysfunctional or abusive marriages, and many of the immediate negative effects of divorce stress decrease over time (Amato, 2000).

Marriage research has focused on ways to decrease unhealthy patterns by identifying risk factors that predispose couples to a greater likelihood of marital distress (Buehlman, Gottman & Katz, 1992; Halford, Osgarby, & Kelley, 1996; Halford & Sanders, 1990; Jacobson & Follette, 1985; Weiss & Heyman, 1990). While focusing on risk factors is one way to understand distressed couples and relationship satisfaction, another approach is to focus on the factors that contribute to healthy couples and satisfying relationships (Carstensen, Gottman, & Levenson, 1995; Fung & Carstensen, 2004; Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1993; Sperry & Carlson, 1991). The majority of research conducted with couples has included samples who have been monogamously partnered or married for 2-15 years, and the couples therapy modalities derived from understanding this population tend to display poor long-term outcomes (Jacobson & Addis, 1993). With these limitations present, preliminary research has been conducted exploring the factors associated with long-term marriages, which was defined in the study as being married more than 25 years. Specifically, eight key factors have been suggested as important for the development of satisfying long-term marriages: trust, problem-solving and coping skills, commitment, honesty and communication, quality time, a

shared value system, reciprocal appreciation, and love (Kaslow & Hammerschmidt, 1992). While there has been a trend toward focusing on understanding successful long-term marriages (Fenell, 1993; Kaslow & Hammerschmidt, 1992; Lauer, Lauer, & Kerr, 1990), participant samples are limited by rarely including couples who have been married greater than 35 years. This limitation is a significant concern because the average human life expectancy is 78.7 years (OECD, 2013), which offers the potential for 50 or 60 years of marriage. Therefore, there is a later marital stage with a limited understanding regarding the benefits of remaining married to one person for a long duration as well as the factors assisting couples in maintaining a satisfying enduring monogamous relationship.

Through addressing the instrumental and intrinsic goals of pair bonding, this study aims to develop a theory addressing the following research questions: What are the benefits of enduring marriage, and what are the components important for couples remaining married for greater than 35 years? Given the facility for in-depth analysis of the pair bonding process and consideration for the multifaceted nature of the questions, the process of theory development will utilize grounded theory qualitative research methodology to discover emergent ideas that increase the field's understanding of enduring marriage in relationships today. Through interviewing one member of a marital dyad, results will provide an opportunity to create a revised and current model for monogamy based on relevant concepts that emerge from the research that can be applied to community program development, as well as individual, couple, and group therapy.

Defining Monogamy

Monogamy is a form of pair bond representing a relationship with one partner at a time, and it is sometimes also referred to as social monogamy (Black, 1996). The theoretical underpinnings of monogamy will be explored in detail through the literature review in order to provide a framework for the importance of studying monogamous pair bonds.

Purpose of monogamy. Pair bonding within mammals is typically driven by a combination of social and biological factors. With humans, three primary types of pair bonds exist: social, sexual, and genetic (Reichard & Boesch, 2003). A social pair bond is characterized by a relationship that possesses a strong emotional and physiological connection in order to establish an intimate relationship beyond a common interpersonal relationship, which is generally understood as a monogamous relationship. Sexual pair bonds primarily are formed from the strong desire to fulfill the behavioral and physiological sexual attraction component between partners, with the primary focus of the pair bond being to engage in sex. Genetic pair bonding is the result of partners choosing to have offspring that possess similar genetic makeup (Reichard & Boesch, 2003). Serial monogamy has primarily been researched within the areas of psychology and evolutionary biology to capture patterns of sexual behavior where there is only one sexual partner at a time but possibly several partners during a lifetime (Mead, 1970). While serial monogamy posits that a lifelong committed relationship is not a reality, exclusivity remains central to serial monogamy because an individual engages in only one relationship at a time.

Neuroscience of human pair bonding. Theories of monogamy have evolved over time in their application to animals and humans and consist of a variety of hypotheses for the development of monogamous pair bonds. The neurochemical theory for monogamy suggests that mammalian monogamous behavior is influenced by particular hormones (Young, 2003). For example, prairie voles and montane voles have been studied extensively to learn about factors leading to monogamy. Sexual behavior among prairie voles leads to the secretion of the hormone vasopressin in males and oxytocin in females. The secretion of vasopressin in males promotes protective behavior toward their mate, while oxytocin in females promotes high affiliation (Insel & Hulihan, 1995; Insel & Young, 2001), which contributes to increases in monogamy compared to the polygamous behavior of the montane vole who possesses significantly less vasopressin and oxytocin receptors to facilitate monogamous pair bonding (Shapiro & Dewsbury, 1990). As a result, prairie voles exhibit lifelong attachment to one partner and montane voles are promiscuous. This difference appears to have developed in response to their differing environments, that is, vole pair bonding is adapted to the unique contours of the environment in which they inhabit.

The research demonstrating neural mechanisms underlying pair bonding in prairie voles has provided a framework to begin to understand the biochemical processes influencing human attachment and bonding (LeDoux, 2002). Neurobiological processes are inherent in the formation of the mother-infant bond (Gordon, Martin, Feldman, & Leckman, 2011), and research continues to be conducted exploring the neuroscience underlying human relationships. Similar to prairie voles, humans secrete vasopressin and oxytocin at initial attraction and during sexual excitation and intercourse, and it appears

these hormones influence human affiliation (Scheele et al., 2012; Schneiderman, Kanat-Maymon, Ebstein, & Feldman, 2014). In addition to chemical processes facilitating pair bonding, neurons and neural networks are formed in the brain during childhood based on biological and environmental factors, including human interaction, and lead to developmental changes in the brain (Siegel, 1999), which plays a critical role in pair bonding. Thus, the emotions of caring and empathy engendered by the parent-child relationship and facilitated by neurochemical processes may have provided the genesis for monogamous attachment as males began to participate in cooperative child care (Zelman, 2015). That is, monogamous attachment is simply an extension of previously established neural pathways shaped by the mother-child attachment process. Pair bond relationships may owe their genesis to not only environmental demand, but brain neuroplasticity that has the capacity to take existing wiring and through novel stimulation rewire and create new neural networks (Cozolino, 2014). While our extensive understanding of the social and biological processes of monogamy provides a rationale for the relevance of monogamy within society, not all humans choose to engage in monogamous relationships.

Alternatives to Monogamy

Monogamy is the primary accepted relationship structure across cultures (Buss, 2011), but consensual non-monogamy (i.e., open relationships) is an alternative. A consensually non-monogamous relationship consists of all partners agreeing to engage in multiple, concurrent sexual and/or romantic relationships (Conley, Moors, Matsick, & Ziegler, 2011, 2013); however, sometimes the agreement only allows one partner to engage in outside relationships (Klesse, 2006; Pines & Aronson, 1981). We will focus on

some of the key findings related to the most common non-monogamous relationships, polyamory and polygamy, but only limited research is available regarding the biological, psychological, and social factors relevant in non-monogamous relationship structures.

Polyamory. Polyamory is a relationship where partners agree to enter a non-monogamous relationship that includes engaging in sexual and/or romantic partnerships with multiple people simultaneously (Klesse, 2006, 2011). Polyamory is not related to a particular religious practice and is not related to marriage. This type of non-monogamous relationship has been described as a benefit over monogamous relationships because of the decreased pressure on one partner to meet all relationship needs (Mitchell, Bartholomew, & Cobb, 2014). Polyamorous relationships distribute relationship needs across multiple partners, and each relationship tends to operate relatively independently of relationships with other partners. Currently, limited psychological research has been conducted related to polyamory; therefore, further psychological research is needed to understand this non-monogamous relationship structure.

Polygamy. Polygamy consists of a marriage involving more than two partners; the relationship may include a wife with multiple partners (polyandry) or a husband with multiple partners (polygyny; Sinha & Bharat, 1985). Polygamy is illegal in most Western countries (including the United States), but it is legally practiced and accepted in societies worldwide, particularly in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and the Pacific Islands. This pair bond structure is often linked to economic hardships, practical considerations, and social status (Broude, 1994; Dodoo, 1998; Hayase & Liaw, 1997). Minimal psychological research has been completed focusing on this form of pair bond due to the

overall opposition to the practice of polygamy in the United States (Gallup, 2006; Saad, 2011).

Summary. In summary, consensual non-monogamy and monogamy are the primary types of relationship structures available for pair bond selection. This study will be focusing on monogamous relationships since non-monogamous relationships represent a form of pair bonding that appears to be adaptive in response to particular environmental constraints, including environments with limited resources (Buss, 2011; Wright, 1995). Despite the focus on monogamous relationships for this study, it was important to briefly discuss non-monogamous relationship to establish the overall context without prematurely focusing on monogamous pair bonds (Anderson, 2010; Mint, 2004).

Contemporary Monogamous Relationships

Enduring relationships display long-term commitment that is most often personified in U.S. culture through the institution of marriage (Goldstein & Kenney, 2001; Pinsof, 2002); therefore, I will also explore the literature related to U.S. contemporary marriage in the 21st century. A variety of cultural changes have occurred recently that are shaping human relating, including longevity (American Psychological Association, 2015; OECD, 2013), gender equality (Inglehart & Norris, 2003), and birth control (Goldin & Katz, 2002), which provide greater power of choice. As a result, monogamous relationships in the 21st century have taken on various forms, including marriage, cohabitation, infidelity, and divorce.

Marriage. Marriage has been a key factor of societal organization for millennia, and humans have been drawn to commit to marriage for various reasons over that time. In earlier eras, motivations for pair bonding stemmed from procreation and economic

advantage; therefore, it was not necessary for couples to identify a partner that offered anything other than biological and financial resources (Zelman, 2015). Marriage in the 21st century is conceptualized as a form of pair bonding that is mutually exclusive and an enduring dyadic relationship that is based on a mutual and voluntary commitment to a sexually exclusive partnership for life (Pinsof, 2002). While the pathways into marriage are becoming more varied, marriage remains a key goal for most individuals as they expect they will marry at some point in life (Wilcox, 2010).

The primary organization of pair bonding in earlier societies was sexual pair bonding, but as society developed in complexity the evolution to social pair bonding developed into the concept of marriage. Zelman (2015) describes the changes in interpersonal dynamics as a result of the emergence of marriage. Fathers adopted a larger role in family life, and offspring were raised by both mothers and fathers; therefore, relationships were built to create family structure and extend family integration. Additionally, marriages that joined groups together through blood (Ehrenreich, 1997) provided an opportunity for communities to interact and support each other through exchanging resources or offering mutual protection (Zelman, 2015). These cross-group interactions lead to further marriages, trading, and technological stimulation, which provided a purpose for marriage as one means of community growth and health, not merely reproductive utility.

Marriage remains an important construct within our culture with more to be understood as culture continues to influence the dynamic. While marital trends have emerged as a result of cultural changes, marriage research remains relevant because the majority of people (88-95%) are still marrying at some point during their life (Goldstein

& Kenney, 2001). Overall, men tend to marry later than women, but in the 21st century, it has been recognized that the median age for men is 27 years and the median age for women is 25 years, which is a historical high (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). This leads to women and men often living independently for a portion of time during their early adulthood.

The 20th century brought with it significant cultural changes as the emotional connection between husbands and wives became a more relevant relationship entity, exhibiting elements of companionship, friendship, and romantic love (Cherlin, 2005). Furthermore, the roles of husbands and wives changed with increased gender equality and dual-income households, which promoted a transition to more flexible gender roles that were open to negotiation (Cherlin, 2005). This transition aligned with the individualistic zeitgeist of the culture, with relationship success becoming more determined by individual satisfaction.

The rise of individual satisfaction has come at the cost of dyadic adjustment and stability, with a rise in relational pathology (Jacobson & Addis, 1993; Jacobson, Schmaling, & Holtzworth-Munroe, 1987; Rampage, 2002). Couple and family psychology research has focused on ways to decrease unhealthy patterns of relating to address the rise in divorce rates and transition couples to a more healthy and pleasurable relationship. The majority of the research has focused on risk factors for divorce in order to prevent the termination of a marriage (Buehlman, Gottman & Katz, 1992; Halford, Osgarby & Kelley, 1996; Halford & Sanders, 1990; Jacobsen & Follette, 1985; Weiss & Heyman, 1990). Some couples have found ways to develop happy, satisfied, long-term marriages and these couples who have been identified as healthy have been found to

possess various key characteristics. In particular, healthy couples tend to have underlying beliefs that their spouse has good intentions underlying his or her behavior, spousal differences will be resolved, and they have a purpose beyond their individual self (Sperry & Carlson, 1991). Additionally, a marital relationship that is also a friendship appears to be a crucial factor for happy couples (Gottman, 1999). Overall, findings have shown that longer marriages tend to be characterized by greater positive and less negative interactions (Carstensen, Gottman, & Levenson, 1995) and have less potential for situational conflict with a greater ability to regulate emotional responses associated with conflict (Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1993). Marriage research has begun to explore the marital environment of couples who remain married for a longer period of time and has found that the social environment changes as people age and couples begin to spend increasing amounts of time together, resulting in greater emotional closeness, which has a positive impact on the marriage (Fung & Carstensen, 2004). Preliminary research has begun to explore factors associated specifically with long-term satisfying marriages with couples who have been married for more than 25 years (Kaslow & Hammerschmidt, 1992), and the findings suggest eight key factors for couples: trust, problem-solving and coping skills, permanent commitment to the relationship, honesty and communication, quality time, a shared value system, reciprocal appreciation, and love.

While marriage research has been valuable for developing models to enhance therapeutic change, limitations are present and further research is required. The majority of the literature leading to the development of traditional cognitive behavioral couples therapy (TBCT; Baucom et al., 1998; Dimidjian, Martell, & Christensen, 2002) has

focused on behavior exchange and immediate marital functionality as opposed to other variables, which has resulted in a relationship enhancement model that demonstrates short-term improvement with poor long-term outcomes due to relapse and divorce rates regressing to the mean within four years (Jacobson & Addis, 1993; Jacobson, Schmaling, & Holtzworth-Munroe, 1987). However, integrative behavioral couples therapy (IBCT; Jacobson & Christensen, 1996) integrates emotion and behavior and has shown stronger long-term outcomes (Baucom, Sevier, Eldridge, Doss, & Christensen, 2011). IBCT places more focus on the intrinsic values of acceptance, tolerance, and commitment beyond the instrumental tasks of cognitive restructuring and behavioral change.

Additionally, participant samples for marriage research have primarily included early relationship couples (married 2-15 years) as a means to better understand the factors leading to successful marriages and how the family system is impacted as a result. Research related to long-term marriages has focused primarily on couples who have been married 10 to 45 years (Fenell, 1993; Kaslow & Hammerschmidt, 1992; Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1993). These findings limit the generalizability of the results since couples in enduring monogamous marriages have relationships that may last nearly twice as long due to increasing lifespan (OECD, 2013).

Marriage has experienced an important cultural shift in the 21st century related to the expansion of the definition of marriage in society to include same-sex couples. Prior to 2004, marriage was not an option for same-sex couples in any U.S. jurisdiction until Massachusetts passed the first law legalizing same-sex marriage (Goodridge v. Department of Public Health, 2003). Due to the short time frame of the cultural shift that has taken a decade to expand across the U.S., same-sex couples have only recently been

engaging in a marital relationship and the psychological research field's understanding of the unique experience of same-sex long-term marriages is yet to be explored due to this time constraint. While this study does not incorporate same-sex married couples, it would be valuable for future research to explore long-term married same-sex couples to better understand their unique experience.

Marriage signifies the social organization of humans into mutually exclusive relationships that continue to be a key form of societal organization that is consistently influenced by cultural changes. A couple of key cultural changes that have influenced marriage have been the increased occurrence of premarital cohabitation as well as infidelity.

Co-habitation. Living together before marriage was uncommon in the United States prior to the 1970s, but it has become increasingly common with at least 50-70% of couples cohabitating premaritally by the 1990s (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Stanley, Whitton, & Markman, 2004). Many people state that cohabitation provides an opportunity to test out a relationship prior to committing to marriage, but only 15% of couples actually end up ranking that as a primary motivator for cohabitation (Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009). The majority of couples slide into deciding to cohabitate, which can create long-term negative relationship outcomes (Manning & Smock, 2005). Couples who intentionally decide to cohabitate are more likely to experience a happy marriage compared to those who slide into the relationship unintentionally (Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009).

One of the primary negative outcomes related to premarital cohabitation is a higher rate of divorce within the United States (DeMaris & Rao, 1992; Dush, Cohan, &

Amato, 2003). The inertia theory (Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman, 2006) has suggested that one reason why premarital cohabitation is associated with poorer marital outcomes is that cohabitation makes it harder to end a relationship and therefore increases the likelihood that a relationship with poorer quality and less commitment may progress into marriage. Couples who cohabitate premaritally have been found to possess many of the relationship risk factors for divorce, including lower marital satisfaction (Stanley, Whitton, & Markman, 2004), more negative observed communication (Cohan & Kleinbaum, 2002), more conflict (Thomson & Colella, 1992), and more physical violence (Brownridge & Halli, 2000; Stanley, Whitton, & Markman, 2004).

Infidelity. Infidelity is a prominent concern for contemporary monogamous relationships with approximately 22% of men and 13% of women reportedly having engaged in extramarital sexual relations (Whisman & Snyder, 2007). Additionally, nonpaternity estimates resulting from infidelity range between 1.7% and 29.8% (Anderson, 2006). Infidelity is a short-term mating strategy that is an artifact of an instrumental task orientation toward pair bonding. Primate females are attracted to resources (e.g., wealthy mates) for child rearing, youth, and health for procreation, which are qualities that may not reside in the same person (Buss, 2011). Males are attracted to quantity of opportunities to get DNA into the next generation; thus, there is a proclivity toward promiscuity (Buss, 2011). While infidelity may be driven by biological desire, negative effects have been demonstrated as infidelity is linked to declines in psychological health (Cano & O'Leary, 2000; Hall & Fincham, 2009), and greater likelihood of divorce (Betzig, 1989).

Divorce. Divorce has been defined as an undesirable end to marriage (Pinsof, 2002) and short-term and long-term effects of divorce are apparent for children and adults (Amato, 2000; Bray & Hetherington, 1993). Some form of divorce or formal monogamous dissolution has always been part of the human species, but in recent history, more couples are becoming divorced (Rampage, 2002). The CDC released an analysis of marriage and divorce across the 20th century (Plateris, 1974), and the results demonstrated the following trends in divorce. At the beginning of the 20th century, divorce began to slowly increase from 8% in 1901 to 16% by 1930. During the 1930s and 1940s, divorce rates fluctuated with the impact of the depression and war, with a spike in 1946 at 43%. Divorce rates maintained around 25% during the 1950s, but 1967 saw significant shifts with changes in the divorce laws. Divorce rates continued to steadily rise until reaching 50% in the 1980s, which has maintained into the 21st century, with a median marriage duration of eight years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Additionally, while many people remarry with the belief that the relationship will proceed differently, statistics show the divorce rate increases exponentially with each remarriage (CDC/NCHS National Vital Statistics, 2012).

Couples who demonstrate more negative communication patterns in their marriage are more likely to be distressed and have lower relationship stability (Rogge, Bradbury, Hahlweg, Engl, & Thurmaier, 2006); specifically, the communication processes of criticism and contempt have been found to be significant risk factors for low marital satisfaction and ultimately divorce (Gottman & Silver, 1999). Additionally, couples who are more distressed are more likely to interpret negative behavior as evidence that a spouse does not love them (Bradbury & Fincham, 1992).

Divorce has interpersonal familial consequences as well since it creates a new dynamic in the parental relationship which results in a more complex family dynamic (Ganong & Coleman, 2004). The psychological distance present prior to divorce is often apparent to family members and leads to elevated levels of distress for entire kinship groups (Hawkins & Booth, 2005).

Culture

Culture has evolved from simple connections to greater complexity through globalization and technological advancements, and society is currently experiencing turmoil as it determines how to respond. Globalization has led to connections between cultures that have brought positive opportunities for conversation, growth, and integration, but despite these opportunities, these greater connections have created a culturally complex environment where global integration and social disintegration struggle to exist together (Marsella, 2012). The Western culture of the 21st century has attempted to respond to these complexities through pressures and technological advancements. One pressure includes the increase in social interactions required to sustain a globalized culture, but humans appear to have a limit to the number of stable social connections they are able to maintain (Dunbar, 2010), and then they are required to use heuristics and simplified models, which can have negative effects, to comprehend the actual number of social connections present in the 21st century. Cultural advances that have created pressures include greater human longevity (American Psychological Association, 2015; OECD, 2013) and the use of birth control (Goldin & Katz, 2002), but humans are having difficulty adapting to the increased stress related to these cultural complexities.

The increasing complex culture has significant implications for marriage as social relationships are impacted by these environmental influences. Increases in divorce rates have been a prominent response to the cultural shift and continue to be present in modern society. Pinsof (2002) has suggested that divorce constitutes an adaptive response to individual longevity and should be considered a new norm for our culture, but this paper has already discussed the research on negative consequences that accrue from divorce and a divorce culture. Enduring marriage may offer an alternative that may be more aligned with the seismic shifts in modern culture, and studying the characteristics of enduring monogamous relationships may provide evidence for a pair bond structure that can adapt to changing, complex environments.

In modern times, the age of agriculture is coming to an end, and society is transitioning into a new age of information and technology. While the age of agriculture placed a premium on male strength for physical labor (and consequently devalued the worth of women), the new age operates off of brain power, the purview of both men and women. This leads to greater equality between males and females with information and technology as the drivers for the economy and greater freedom for women (J. Thoburn, personal communication, July, 2015). Serial monogamy was an adaptive form of pair bonding in response to the Paleolithic and Neolithic environments, while the modern era is presenting a different kind of environment. However, serial monogamy has maintained its position as the primary form of pair bonding, which leads to marriages increasingly ending through divorce (Rampage, 2002) and the divorce rate increasing exponentially as people remarry (CDC/NCHS National Vital Statistics, 2012), causing familial fragmentation and concomitant negative effects on individuals, families, and society.

Serial Monogamy as Maladaptive Relationships Form

Fragmented families. Children of divorce are more likely to experience instability in their living arrangements as parents form and dissolve marriages and partnerships. The National Survey of Family Growth reported that 14% of fathers do not live with any of their children, and 12% live with some but not all of their children (Goodwin, Mosher, & Chandra, 2010). Living arrangements alone add to the complexity of post-divorce co-parenting (National Center for Health Statistics, 2008). Parenting is a vital role in children's social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development (Gage, Everett, & Bullock, 2006); therefore, the absence of one or more parents in the home environment can have significant associated developmental risks. Additionally, conflict between parents leads to infighting and young adults from divorced families report slightly poorer mental well-being than young adults from intact families (Shimkowski & Schrodt, 2012). With poor examples of healthy communication, children may grow up with unhealthy role models which can negatively impact their future relationships.

Beyond immediate risk factors associated with fragmented families, children of divorce have been shown to have less commitment to the idea of a lifelong marriage since they have not witnessed a successful long-term relationship (Amato & DeBoer, 2001). Also, children are less likely to trust when they grew up in a fragmented home environment (Shulman, Scharf, Lumer, & Maurer, 2001), which can have significant impact on relationship satisfaction and connection. Lastly, children of divorce have a higher likelihood of instability in their own marriages since they are twice as likely to divorce compared to children from married parents (Wolfinger, 2005).

Poverty. Marriage is recognized as a means to access economic, social, or service-oriented resources (Baldock, Manning, & Vickerstaff, 2007), and serial monogamous relationships have been found to be associated with a loss of income and overall financial stress, particularly for women and minorities (Avellar & Smock, 2005). In particular, divorce can have a substantial negative effect on income, wealth, poverty status, and overall economic well-being (Hughes & Waite, 2009; Waite, Luo, & Lewin, 2009). Furthermore, children in the United States have the lowest relative standard of living based on findings showing that 60% of single-mother households in the U.S. were poor compared to 5-45% in other developed countries (Bradbury & Jantti, 2001). These larger amounts of single-parent families contribute to greater societal poverty levels and decrease access to resources for children that would otherwise be provided in a two-parent household.

Abuse. An extreme form of partner conflict is intimate partner violence and has been identified as a significant contributing factor to negative outcomes. It is relatively common in divorcing couples, with recent estimates between 40% and 80% of divorcing couples experiencing abuse (Kelly & Johnson, 2008; Newmark, Harrell, & Salem, 1995; Pearson, 1997), which is significantly higher than the general population (12-30%; Field & Caetano, 2005). Abuse has significant harmful mental and physical health consequences for victims and their exposed children (Mechanic, Weaver, & Resick, 2008). Children can be direct or indirect targets of abuse, and as a result experience greater physical and emotional risks factors (Evans, Davies, & DiLillo, 2008). Abuse and violence can be a barrier for couples who aim to divorce due to the fear of potential

negative consequences. Violence within the home is a key stressor for the family system leading up to a separation or divorce.

Mental illness. All of the risk factors already discussed (fragmented families, poverty, abuse) expose a child or adult to influences that may predispose them to greater mental health concerns (e.g., depression, anxiety). In particular, increased stressful life events have been shown to mediate the relationship between divorce and psychological distress among mothers, and the stressful events can influence the chaos present during a divorce that impacts development (Evans, 2003). In particular, the chaos related to living in multiple homes, low financial resources, and greater fear of violence has been shown to be associated with overall negative child mental health outcomes (Asbury, Wachs, & Plomin, 2005) and couple mental health outcomes (Fiese, Hooker, Kotary, & Schwagler, 1993). Specifically financial stress, which is a common result of serial monogamous relationships, has been found to be associated with poorer mental health outcomes (Vinokur, Price, & Caplan, 1996). Furthermore, parent-child contact is important for child development and parental satisfaction, so decreased contact has been associated with greater mental health concerns (Edin, Nelson, & Reed, 2011). For parents, this time can be particularly stressful following divorce and an increase in depressive symptoms over time is common (Kamp Dush, 2013). Finally, children who experience negative mental health outcomes as a result of parental separation can carry these vulnerabilities into adulthood and future relationships, which continues to impact society and relationship structures (Wolfinger, 2003).

Fragmented families are at greater risk for the negative outcomes outlined above, which demonstrates a concern for the high rates of serial monogamous relationships.

Marriage has experienced significant transitions in the 21st century as a result of various cultural shifts; therefore, society is at a greater risk for perpetual negative individual and systemic outcomes.

To provide a theoretical framework for understanding the development of monogamy over time, I will provide a description of the evolution of monogamy from a structure organized around instrumental utility to one organized around intrinsic relational values. Varying value orientations are important because as culture shifts toward greater complexity, pair bonds that have moved beyond the initial instrumental goals of procreation and childrearing and are informed by intrinsic values may more easily develop into enduring relationships.

Theories Regarding Instrumental Value of Monogamy

Meat for sex hypothesis. Pair bonding appears to have developed from hunter-gatherer culture where relationships reflected male and female sexual strategies. One hypothesis is the meat for sex strategy where males offered meat to higher status females for access to short-term mating (Kaplan & Hill, 1985). Protein was highly valued in the Paleolithic era and there is some evidence that children receiving consistent protein from a hunter father had a genetic advantage over children where there was no distinct father figure. The skeletal remains of Cro-Magnon children, whose lives were organized around the pair bond family, showed less malnutrition than the remains of Neandethal children whose families were organized around the infant mother relationship (Shreeve, 1996). Monogamous pair bonding seems to have offered instrumental value in providing resources that would have been otherwise inaccessible to a single parent family.

The meat for sex hypothesis was given stronger credence when its potential origin was discovered in sub-dominant chimpanzees (humans' nearest cousins), who make themselves more attractive to potential mates by utilizing the meat for sex strategy to develop sexual relationships with higher ranking females (Zelman, 2015). The theory posits that over time human women began selecting men who demonstrated willingness to invest in the relationship and create an interdependent relationship within the hunter-gatherer society. As women and men relied on each other more, the connection moved beyond a "sex contract;" instead, women started to also value men for their reliability and competence in overall child rearing (Geary, 2005). Monogamous relationships that follow this hypothesis recognize instrumental value in the relationship as long as resources are being provided and an exchange is occurring. When this function is lost in the relationship, the mates may deem the relationship no longer valuable and seek out another mate who meets their needs, which contributes to an adaptive pattern of serial monogamy for survival.

Throughout history, males have utilized resources to attract desired females for access to short-term mating, and these monogamous pair bonds were considered adaptive because they created healthier offspring through the instrumental provision of higher resources. The human characteristics inherent in a pair bond relationship also provide instrumental value as particular features tend to lead to more adaptive offspring. This situation establishes the need to identify criteria that signify a valuable mate and utilize strategies to attract a mate in order to find a partner who possesses the desired characteristics that provide further instrumental value.

Sexual strategies theory and mate selection. Evolutionary psychology has emphasized the importance of mating strategies and preferences in selecting a partner; in particular, women and men have been found to approach mate selection differently as a process of evaluating characteristics in a potential partner to determine whether the partner will be an effective short-term or long-term mate (Buss, 1989; Gangestad & Simpson, 2000; Trivers, 1972). Within evolutionary theory, sexual strategies theory (SST; Buss & Schmitt, 1993) has been the prominent psychological theory for exploring how evolutionary goals and strategies explain sexual behavior and the associated gender differences.

SST (Buss & Schimitt, 1993) argues that females and males developed varied mate preferences based on physiological differences that evolved over time for purposes of survival. Furthermore, mate preferences and characteristics appear to arise from differences in the instrumental value of pursuing a short-term or long-term relationship (Schmitt, Shackelford, & Buss, 2001). Female mate preferences are tied to mating strategies that drive behavior directed at the instrumental goal of producing and raising children. Therefore, women's short term sexual strategies consist of acquiring the DNA of young healthy males who, because of their youth may be resource poor while long-term mate strategies consist of seeking out high resources from a partner, the potential for a long-term relationship, and the level of protection provided by the partner (Buss, 2011; Meston & Buss, 2007). Approaching long-term relationships requires a different set of mate preferences for women that focus on material and reproductive advantages through wealth and status, genetic advantages for children, and parental investment (Buss, 2011; Meston & Buss, 2007; Ridley, 2003).

Male mate preferences and strategies have also been found to be associated with instrumental goals. Male short-term mating strategy is driven by the desire for frequent sex and varied partners with the instrumental goal of producing a large number of offspring (Buss, 2011). Standards for a short-term mate tend to be lower due to a focus on fulfilling the desire for numerous offspring without a concern for long-term investment in a relationship or the offspring. The idea is that even with no investment, the sheer quantity of offspring makes it likely that some will survive. Men's long-term mate preferences include youthfulness which is directly related to physical health and fertility (Buss, 2011; Meston & Buss, 2007). The long-term strategy of pair bonding provides a context for men to maintain consistent and exclusive access to a woman to ensure children are genetically his, however this strategy involves paternal investment of resources. Males increase their chances of finding a desirable mate by offering resources and committing to one partner at a time in exchange for increased paternity certainty, which provides the foundation for a monogamous relationship.

Parental investment is one of the instrumental motivations for the development of a pair bond because it offers greater certainty of survival to offspring through a mutual expenditure of resources. The expenditure of resources for one child means a decrease in the parent's ability to invest in other offspring; therefore, the theory highlights the tension between quality of parental investment and quantity of offspring (Reichard & Boesch, 2003; Trivers, 1972). Parental contribution has been studied to assist in explaining the evolution of pair bonding toward monogamy where human female and male parental investment motivations appear to differ significantly. Females have fewer gamete resources compared to males. The average female has about 450 ova that are potential

offspring, while males have billions of sperm, therefore it is incumbent on females to carefully assess sexual partners to insure the highest chance of survival for limited offspring. Females are also physiologically constituted to care and rear children for the long-term, as evidenced by periods of gestation and lactation, which leads to greater obligatory parental investment. By contrast, a male's required contribution is minimal and primarily includes the investment of sperm (Trivers, 1972). The differential levels of parental investment contribute to human female's utilization of effective long-term mate selection strategies. Long-term sexual strategy looks for committed partners willing to directly invest in the survival of offspring. Research with various animal species has found increased death rates among fatherless offspring (Geary, 2000; Hill & Hurtado, 1996), which suggests that the presence of both parents in child rearing is instrumentally valuable for reproductive success. In application to human pair bonds, partners who find a long-term mate with increased levels of parental investment may experience greater offspring survival. Once a mate is selected, the pair bond continues to engage in interpersonal interactions that provide instrumental value and prompt continual cost-benefit analyses to determine the future of the relationship.

Social exchange theory. From a social science perspective, social exchange theory has been utilized extensively to analyze interpersonal relationships with a core assumption that individuals make relationship decisions by engaging in a cost-benefit analysis of relationship behaviors as well as an evaluation of potential alternatives to the relationship (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1961, 1974; Thibaut & Kelly, 1959). Costs include the parts of a relationship that have negative value to a person (i.e., effort, time, money) and rewards are the parts of a relationship that provide positive value (i.e., acceptance,

support, companionship). Through this paradigm, relationship decisions are based on instrumental value made by calculating overall relationship worth through comparing actual and anticipated costs and rewards. When the outcome worth is positive, the relationship is likely to continue. By contrast, when the outcome worth is negative, the relationship is likely to end because the individual may feel the relationship no longer provides the instrumental value previously present (Sener, 2011). Therefore, the crux of the future of the relationship lies in the instrumental value calculation over time made by each person in the relationship. Perceived or actual inequity can create distress and associated emotional responses. When a partner perceives he or she receives less than what he or she gives, it is common to experience anger or resentment; in contrast, when a partner perceives receiving more than giving, the experience of guilt or shame may arise (Sener, 2011). In each of these situations, the exchange between partners violates the relationship norm of mutual reciprocity and becomes distressing, and when the situation is left unresolved it can perpetuate a negative relationship cycle. Restoring equity in the relationship can decrease the negative emotions and move towards a balanced social exchange.

Pair bonds exhibit social exchange through tangible or intangible dyadic exchanges of activity that are either rewarding or punishing (Homans, 1961, 1974). In addition to pair bonds choosing to stay together, individuals are more likely to experience relationship satisfaction and enduring relationship stability when social exchange includes individuals receiving balanced rewards for the costs invested into the relationship (Levinger & Huesmann, 1980). Social exchange theory has been conceptualized based on reinforcement principles where future behavior is influenced by

past experiences and can be summarized through four propositions: success, stimulus, value, and deprivation-satiation (Homans, 1961, 1974). First, success states that when people are rewarded for their actions, they are more likely to repeat those actions. Second, stimulus states that the more often a particular stimulus has resulted in a reward previously, the more likely a person will be to respond to it in the future. Third, if the result of a behavioral action is considered valuable for the individual, it is more likely that the individual will engage in that behavior again. Fourth, the deprivation-satiation proposition states that the more often a person has received a particular reward recently, the value of the reward diminishes. Each of these four propositions aligns with the behavioral principles for pair bonds in acting to regulate and maintain the relationship.

Self-interest and interdependence are also central components of social exchange theory that provide greater understanding of the social components of pair bonding (Lawler & Thye, 1999). Within interpersonal relationships, self-interest is not viewed as negative, but focused on the advancement of both parties' mutual benefit (Roloff, 1981). When looking for a partner, people tend to prefer someone who has similar characteristics because seeing those characteristics as a value in another person reinforces the individual's personal self-concept (Aronson, 2003; Morry, 2007).

Interdependence theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) within social exchange expands the cost-benefit analysis model to add a consideration that individual's perceptions of rewards, costs, and equity significantly impact the expectations of the rewards and costs. These expectations are largely shaped by the comparison level utilized (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Minimal research has explored comparison theory with pair bonds, but Broemer and Diehl (2003) found that social comparison to ideal or distressed couples

leads to associated changes in the pair's view of their relationship, and this finding is prominent if the comparison couple appears to have similar characteristics.

Social exchange theory's central focus rests in behavior exchange and cost-benefit analysis of the relationship in order to evaluate whether the relationship can be considered as having instrumental value. This has a significant impact on monogamous pair bonds because with cultural shifts over time and the need for adaptation, the instrumental value scale will continually shift which may create dysregulation and dissatisfaction in the relationship and a greater propensity to engage in serial relationships.

Adaptation to the environment and the exigencies of infant helplessness shaped the development of pair bond relationships to place a premium on procreation in a committed relationship and nuclear family-based child rearing. Throughout the Paleolithic and Neolithic eras, the survival pressure of successfully getting one's DNA into the next generation required a careful assessment of potential mate resources, such as health and wealth. Mate selection, pair bonding and the parameters of monogamy have been, in some ways dictated by an unforgiving environment where the specter of death is ever present and the 'selfish genes' of each individual relentlessly seek immortality by passing on their genetic code into the next generation (Dawkins, 2006).

This might present a rather bleak picture of pair bonding and monogamy if that was all there was to relationships, but the pair bond has also been the seed bed for the development of deeper relationship values, where relationships are pursued for reasons in and of themselves. While historically research has pointed towards significant differences in male and female preferences, emerging research identifies that male and

female preferences may be evolving, and men's desire for physical attractiveness (women as sex objects) and female's desire for wealth (men as success objects) have become lower priorities with greater cross-sex similarities becoming more prevalent (Pedersen, Putcha-Bhagavatula, & Millar, 2011; Peterson & Hyde, 2010). The preferences that appear to be shared include dependable character, emotional stability/maturity, pleasing disposition, and mutual attraction/love (Meston & Buss, 2007). Additionally, romantic love, attraction, lust, and attachment appear to be part of long-term pair bonding within all cultures and extend beyond instrumental values (Campbell & Ellis, 2005; Fisher, Aron, Mashek, Li, & Brown, 2002). Sexual strategies, mate preferences and social exchange theories demonstrate the instrumental values that underpin many of the behavioral choices of human monogamy, but mate preference priorities have evolved to include more intrinsically valued goals for monogamy.

Theories Regarding Intrinsic Value of Monogamy

Sternberg's triangular theory of love. Love is a construct that has been discussed for millennia and significant evidence is present for the antiquity and universality of romantic love. Love consists of behaviors, emotions, and cognitions that become connected with a desire to maintain a close relationship with a particular person (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991). Ancient civilizations discussed romantic love and the majority of cultures continue to discuss romantic love (Jankowiak & Fisher, 1992) to the point that it appears love is not culturally bound (Neto et al., 2000). Additionally, similarities have been identified between caregiver-infant love (Bowlby, 1969, 1982) and adult romantic love (Fraley, Brumbaugh, & Marks, 2005; Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988) suggesting that bonding mechanisms have evolved through

generations to establish pair bonds through the use of love. Love is an essential factor for men and women (Levesque, 1993; Seiffge-Krenke, 2003) engaging in interpersonal relationships as it is a driving force in human experience and appears to be implicated in the development and maintenance of pair bonds.

From a psychological perspective, love consists of cognitive and social components, which have been discussed at length by Sternberg through his development of the triangular theory of love (1986, 1997). This theory posits that there are three components to love (intimacy, commitment, and passion), and they represent the varying needs people have within a relationship (Aron & Westbay, 1996; Sternberg, 1986, 1997). Intimacy is defined as the feelings of closeness and connection towards another individual as a way to facilitate mutual trust and intimate feelings with the partner. Commitment entails the decision to invest in a current relationship for the future because it is perceived as a lasting relationship. Passion is the physical and chemical component that is primarily connected to sexual attraction. These three components have been understood to interact and combine to create love styles (Sternberg, 1997). Intimacy, commitment, and passion contribute to a varying degree, and the strength of the various components compared to each other in a relationship influences the love experienced (Sternberg, 2004). Men and women appear to experience love components in similar fashion with little evidence for gender differences (Gao, 2001).

Eight love types have been identified through the combination of the three love components. *Non-love* describes the absence of all three love components. *Liking* describes the relationship that is characterized as friendship with a significant presence of liking and no passion or commitment. *Infatuated love* is often the initial stage of a

romantic relationship and arises when the relationship is a result of intense passion and an absence of intimacy or commitment. *Empty love* encompasses strong commitment and an absence of intimacy or passion. When the love components begin to combine, a development of more complex relationships occur. *Romantic love* is a combination of intimacy and passion, which is characterized by being physically drawn to one another and feeling a strong bond. *Companionate love* is a combination of intimacy and commitment and is characterized by a relationship type that is beyond friendship due to the long-term level of commitment. *Fatuous love* is a combination of passion and commitment with an absence of intimacy, which characterizes a relationship with a strong commitment made based on varying physical attraction. Lastly, the ideal relationship consists of a complete form of love known as *consummate love*, which includes a balance of all three love components to create a successful and satisfying relationship (Sternberg, 1997). Similar to how relationships evolve over time, the components of love vary through the life span as well (Seiffge-Krenke, 2003). Passion is particularly important and is often at its highest level in early relationship formation, and although it remains a central component for consummate love to be present, the components of intimacy and commitment become increasingly important for developing a stable, long-term relationship (Acevedo & Aron, 2009). Furthermore, all of the love components may increase as the relationship matures, but an increase in the intimacy component, and overall compassionate love, appears to be the most important component for satisfying long-term relationships, although some research has suggested that compassionate love is most important at the early stages of the relationship (Clark & Monin, 2006; Grote & Frieze, 1998; Sternberg, 1997). Currently there remains a limited

understanding of the differential effects of each love component on various relationship outcome variables, especially in older adult relationships (Berscheid, 2010; Sumter, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2013). The research that is present focuses on the individual love components (as described above) but does not address the combination of those components and the impact of the various love types at different stages of a relationship; therefore, further research is needed to understand the importance of each love type across the life course. The intimacy and commitment love components that appear to be most important for developing a satisfying enduring monogamous relationship emphasize the intrinsic value of the relationship with a greater focus on the relational properties between the couple. This relational focus is important in the development of a bond between partners, and research has demonstrated how attachment processes aid in the love components present in romantic relationships (Madey & Rodgers, 2009).

Attachment theory. Attachment is a key concept for understanding interpersonal relationships since it explains some of the environmental factors that influence the lens people use to view the world. Attachment theory explains the process through which infants become emotionally connected with their primary caregiver (Bowlby, 1969, 1982). Children express both physical and emotional needs, and caregivers can respond to those needs in a variety of ways, which leads to the development of cognitive expectations in the child based on the pattern of interaction the infant has experienced. These attachment experiences form an internal working model that influences how the infant responds to distress in future situations and molds the way that the infant learns to relate to others (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). Infants who have learned that their caregiver is available and responsive form a secure attachment bond, whereas those

infants who experience unreliable caregivers develop insecure attachment (Ainsworth, 1991; Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall 1978; Main & Solomon, 1990). Secure attachment is characterized by trust in self and trust in others, with a corresponding ease in relationship dynamics. Insecure attachment is characterized by hyperactivating or hypoactivating relationship strategies fomented by anxiety or avoidance (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Although attachment is developed in infancy, the infant-caregiver attachment retains influence over the lifespan as individuals carry early attachment styles and expectations that provide a framework for understanding future adult relationships (Fraley & Davis, 1997; Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Individuals who develop an insecure attachment in childhood, especially related to abuse or neglect, tend to carry the relationship expectations and attachment model forward to adult interpersonal relationships and expect similar types of relationships (Muller, Sicoli, & Lemieux, 2000; Unger & De Luca, 2014). The presence of an experience of a loving childhood relationship also appears to be important to the attachment process, as secure attachment is more likely found in adults who report a childhood with positive, love-filled adult relationships (McCarthy & Maughan, 2010), and the quality of adult romantic relationships continue to be influenced by previously developed attachment styles (Cowan, Cowan, & Mehta, 2009). In addition to the influence of early attachment relationships on adult romantic relationships, the presence of a secure attachment relationship with a partner is protective because it provides a buffer against negative relationship outcomes (Paley, Cox, Harter, & Margand, 2002).

As previously discussed, evolutionary models based on sexual strategies theory (Buss & Schmitt, 1993) and parental investment (Trivers, 1972) have provided the

primary conceptualization for understanding human mate selection and pair bonding without an incorporation of relevant psychological factors. As an alternative to the sociobiological model, attachment theory posits a psychological model where mate selection is not based solely on strategic choice (Hazan & Diamond, 2000; Pietromonaco & Barrett, 2000). Monozygotic twin studies challenged SST because the twins had no greater similarities in mating patterns/selections compared to random pairs (Lykken & Tellegen, 1993), suggesting that the criteria humans anticipate as important in a mate do not capture the factors that actually are inherent in the selected mate. Additionally, attachment theory places the emotional bond at the epicenter of the mating experience (Bowlby, 1969, 1982), which contrasts with the SST focus that places reproduction of genes as the focus. Reproductive success remains important for human species survival; therefore, it is essential for pair-bond attachment to be reproductively adaptive, which has been demonstrated through enhanced survival and reproductive fitness of mates and their offspring when a secure attachment is present (Hazan & Diamond, 2000).

Attachment provides a mechanism for humans to foster an enduring bond between two individuals (Hazan & Diamond, 2000). Mate qualities of kindness, understanding, and intelligence (Buss & Barnes, 1986; Meston & Buss, 2007) are top ranked for men and women and align closely with the characteristics found in secure attachment bonds (Bowlby, 1969, 1982). Additionally, once an attachment pair bond is created, separations or losses trigger a response pattern of protest-despair-detachment, similar to that found in caregiver-infant behavioral research (Bowlby, 1969, 1982; Fraley & Shaver, 1999; Vormbrock, 1993), which supports human's innate desire to develop

enduring bonds that do not require the continual grieving process of a short-term pair bond.

Attachment theory provides a model where enduring bonds with the intrinsic value of emotional ties are central to human mating. Sociobiological theory's emphasis on sex differences in mate preferences has overshadowed the reality that men and women both become attached to a mate and participate in the advantages of being part of a stable pair bond (Zeifman & Hazan, 1997). The attachment model for human mating involves individuals who develop romantic infatuation with those in close proximity and who demonstrate reciprocal interest (Hazan & Diamond, 2000). Furthermore, when infatuation is mutual, psychological and neurochemical processes lead to intense desire to be in close proximity which releases hormones that boost desire and lead to further development of the attachment and pair bond relationship (Hazan & Diamond, 2000). Attachment theory demonstrates that pair bonds possess intrinsic value that make the relationship meaningful for more than child rearing, economics or companionship. The purpose of the attachment relationship is to provide a haven for safety and security in order to facilitate the curiosity and courage needed by a child to explore his or her environment and grow. In like manner, the adult attachment bond provides an emotional home base from which each member of the dyad can explore life and grow, where all of the relationship elements work in the service of mutual maturation.

Social investment theory. A leading theory in explaining development into adulthood is social investment theory. This theory proposes that human change throughout the lifespan is shaped by environmental and social influences (Helson, Kwan, John, & Jones, 2002). Across cultures, people appear to change in similar ways and the

universal tasks of social living guide these transitions (Bleidorn et al., 2013; Helson et al., 2002). The majority of cultures affirm the value of marriage, having children, and engaging in work; therefore, these activities and roles may be catalysts for widespread shared patterns of personality development. Pair bond relationships, in particular marriages, are a strong source of social influence that produce reciprocal changes in people based on being in relationship with another person; therefore, it is important to further explore how relationships may be intrinsically motivated according to this theory.

Social investment theory, personality, and maturity. Social investment theory has been extensively applied to the understanding of maturity, specifically personality development throughout adulthood, and social roles are believed to be one of the driving mechanisms in personality change (Lodi-Smith & Roberts, 2007; Roberts, Wood, & Smith, 2005). Personality traits emerge early in a human's life and are characterized by relatively enduring patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that distinguish one person from another. While historically the theories surrounding personality development purported that little change occurs in personality (Costa & McCrae, 1997; McCrae & Costa, 1982), increasing evidence suggests that while personality patterns are enduring, they also retain plasticity and are amenable to influences after childhood and through older adulthood (Helson & Kwan, 2000; Roberts, Robins, Caspi, & Trzesniewski, 2003). In particular, people tend to become more agreeable, more conscientious, and less neurotic as they age (Roberts, Wood, & Caspi, 2008). Social investment theory proposes that increased personality maturity is a result of culturally defined social roles and part of normative life transitions to adult roles (Roberts, Wood, & Smith, 2005). There are three assumptions that support social investment theory's

proposition that social roles drive changes in personality. First, people participate and invest in social roles, such as work, marriage, family, and community, which create identities for people. Second, when a person invests in a particular social role they adopt a set of expectations and contingencies which rewards them for becoming more socially dominant, agreeable, conscientious, and less neurotic. Third, role investment is critical for experiencing the value of social roles (Helson et al., 2002). As people progress through the primary life transition points in adulthood, social roles help explain the normative patterns of personality change which are often directly related to the previous level of role investment. This explanation is in contrast to the five-factor theory which purports that personality maturation is primarily determined by genetic factors (McCrae & Costa, 2008).

The crux of the process of personality development within the social investment framework lies in committing oneself to social institutions outside of one's existing identity structure. Without commitment, people do not respond to role expectations and social pressures within the new context because the rewards are not desirable (Lodi-Smith & Roberts, 2007). Change as a result of a new role is more likely when a person has emotional or long-term concerns regarding the investment. The new social role contains expectations for appropriate behavior in that role which exert social control and exposes a person to responding in a different manner (Sarbin, 1967). Additionally, social circles will hold a set of expectations for how the person should act and will reward or punish depending on whether actions are consistent with those expectations. Exposure to new social roles and expectations lead to changes in a person, although it is significantly dependent on the person's level of investment in the role and associated expectations.

Evaluating greater investment in the relationship role requires relying on another index, longevity and stability, to explore the presence of social investment theory in interpersonal relationships. People who are more emotionally stable and controlled tend to experience longer and more stable relationships (Roberts & Bogg, 2004; Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2002). Furthermore, personality change occurs as a result of various interpersonal experiences (e.g., divorce, marriage), and marital experiences are associated with changes in social dominance, emotional stability, and conscientiousness (Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2002; Roberts & Bogg, 2004; Roberts & Chapman, 2000; Neyer & Asendorpf, 2001). Therefore, engaging in a marital relationship has intrinsic value because it is meaningful to just be in relationship with another person. Dual demands of increasing self-sufficiency and increasing responsibility tend to push people into behaving in more collective ways with increased self-control with age (Wood & Roberts, 2006).

In summary, monogamous relationships can be beneficial simply based on the value gleaned from being in relationship with another person. The relational connection can promote change in people as they respond to contingencies, models, and feedback from the environment. Moreover, the level of investment in social institutions and social roles such as marriage, work, and community are crucial in order to reap the intrinsic value of being in relationship with others.

Summary and Study Rationale

Serial monogamy has endured through the hunter-gatherer era (Paleolithic) and the agricultural age (Neolithic); however, new pressures are present for contemporary marriages that are changing the focus of marriage, including increased longevity and

greater power of choice through gender equality and the use of birth control. Additionally, a cultural shift away from agriculture and industry to information and technology is present and traditional male/female roles are being challenged by new patterns of relating. Divorce may be a given in society (Pinsof, 2002), but a focus shift toward the factors that contribute to enduring marriage is needed. Couples therapy modalities have tended to focus on instrumental goals and behavior change demonstrating positive relationship outcomes in the short-term, but long-term outcome is poorer as couples tend to relapse within four years (Jacobson & Addis, 1993; Jacobson, Schmaling, & Holtzworth-Munroe, 1987). Divorce has become recognized as a viable relationship choice, especially as the social exchange pattern becomes more dominated by negative interactions than positive interactions, which provide a rationale for ending the relationship. TBCT may provide a reprieve for a few years as couples focus on behavioral exchange in the relationship and healthy coping skills, but once the old ways of relating resurface, the couple's social exchange pattern can become increasingly negative, leading to a potential temptation to divorce if there are minimal other values in the relationship.

While instrumental value may be an underpinning of many human choices, human priorities have evolved to include more intrinsically valued goals for relationships, and the research has found that IBCT shows stronger long-term outcomes for couples, which is of interest because the orientation is more focused on the intrinsic values of acceptance, tolerance, and commitment. In particular, the love component of commitment as well as the bonding and trust between partners align with Kaslow and Hammerschmidt's (1992) preliminary findings of factors related to long-term marital

satisfaction. While literature has increasingly recognized the need to understand the unique foundation of long-term couples, limitations in the research methodology are present.

Marriage literature has relied on participant samples of early relationship couples (2-15 years) as a means to understand marriage, but these findings can only be generalized so far when couples are remaining married for long-term periods (i.e., up to 80 years). When long-term marriages are studied, long-term marriage is typically defined as 10 to 45 years (Fenell, 1993; Kaslow & Hammerschmidt, 1992; Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1993), which often still includes a period when children are living at home and spouses are working. The later marital stages when children have left home and couples are near the end of their career or retired are where instrumental and intrinsic values in the relationship may shift. As a result, this study aims to understand the experience of enduring marriage for couples who have been married more than 35 years in order to explore the components that keep individuals married to their spouse as their relationship changes over time. Clinical implications for this research include creating a revised and current model for enduring marriage based on the relevant concepts that emerge from the research that can then be applied to community program development, as well as individual, couple, and group therapy.

CHAPTER II

Method

Philosophy of Science

Every research project is guided by a philosophy of science that provides a conceptual framework (Ponterotto, 2005). Philosophy of science refers to the framework that guides research, provides a structure for conducting research, and supplies a rationale for the research that entails various assumptions a researcher is willing to make (Haverkamp & Young, 2007; Morrow, 2007). Three main paradigms exist to guide research: positivist, post-positivism, and constructivism. Positivism states there is one true reality of the world and the researcher aims to explain, control, and predict aspects within that reality. Post-positivism acknowledges that bias is often present and there is no one true objective reality. Constructivism is the idea that multiple individual realities exist and are all relevant since reality is subjective, influenced by context, and interactional (Ponterotto, 2005). The interactional nature of this philosophy of science emphasizes how the conversation between scientist and participant is important for gaining in-depth data that is an understanding of the meaning behind the experiences of the participant. The interpretation and integration of multiple participant experiences provides a solid foundation for research findings.

The two primary approaches for collecting data are the nomothetic and idiographic (Millon, , Millon, Meagher, Grossman, & Ramnath, 2004). The nomothetic approach gathers broad and general information in order to generate theories that can be generalized to a group of people establishing universal laws of behavior; therefore, this research typically studies the variability within and between groups of participants. In

contrast, the idiographic approach aims to achieve an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon through emphasizing the uniqueness of the individual and allowing the individual to share his or her experiences through a detailed description. Researchers using an idiographic approach utilize an emic perspective where an individual has a set of contextual variables that make behavior and perceptions unique and important for understanding overarching phenomena (Ponterotto, 2005). Therefore, the ultimate goal with data collection from this approach is to attain specific descriptions from each person in order to learn about varying behavior patterns of an individual in varying contexts (Conner, Barrett, Tugade, & Tannen, 2007). Idiographic approaches are common within qualitative research studies due to the research aim of evaluating variations within group, rather than between groups (Behi & Nolan, 1996).

Research Design

Kazdin (2003) has emphasized the importance of developing an understanding of a construct prior to engaging in hypothesis testing of relationships, and the utilization of observation and close relationship with the concept is imperative for the generation of theory. The utilization of a clinical context provides the researcher a direct observation of the processes involved and delineates areas for study. Therefore, this dissertation utilizes an idiographic approach to data collection through qualitative method to provide an initial exploration of the topic in order to gain in-depth data that might generate more generalizable constructs for quantitative research.

Little research has explored individuals' experiences and systemic influences related to enduring marriage within 21st century marriages; in particular, enduring marriage has not yet been operationally defined through scientific analysis. Additionally,

long-term married couples are a distinct subpopulation, evidenced by approximately 50% of marriages in the United States ending through divorce with a median marriage duration of 8 years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Because individuals engaged in long-term monogamous relationships are unique and the contextual factors are complex, an idiographic approach is an appropriate initial focus on understanding the depth of meaning in the subjective experience of enduring marriage (Gilgun, 2009). This research method approach to data collection is considered to be most useful as it provides vivid descriptions of the experiences of these individuals and accounts for human individuality, thus highlighting the importance of examining a variety of factors for each unique individual. Working within the idiographic paradigm, it is essential that I evaluate my own biases and how they contribute to data collection and interpretation, allowing the participants to engage in the process of constructing the meaning from the data collaboratively.

Qualitative research allows for the opportunity to openly explore a construct and develop an in-depth understanding within various worldviews. This methodology allows participants to attribute meaning to their experience and describe culturally relevant factors that are informative (Gilgun, 2009). Numerous qualitative theories exist for analyzing data, including narrative research, case studies, grounded theory, phenomenology, participatory action research, and consensual qualitative research (CQR). Grounded theory is used when no theory currently exists; emerging theory is grounded in the data collected (Creswell, 2007). Grounded theory was selected for my study for a variety of reasons. First, the idiographic philosophy of science is consistent with the goals of my study to gain a greater understanding of the unique, individual

experience of participants. Additionally, the type of research question for this method requires participants to explain their experience regarding an area of research where no theory exists. Further, grounded theory was selected over CQR due to the lack of need to have multiple researchers involved in the process. Finally, grounded theory is considered a highly respected and rigorous qualitative methodology that is widely practiced and accepted across disciplines (Rennie, 2006).

Grounded Theory Research Design

Grounded theory was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and is unique from other methodologies due to its lack of emphasis on testing hypotheses but rather allowing the theory to emerge from the data as it is analyzed throughout the data collection process. Approaching the study with minimal preconceived hypotheses allows the researcher to develop theories grounded in the data (Creswell, 1994; Mitchell & Cody, 1993). Grounded theory is focused on the development, not testing, of a theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Essential to grounded theory is the concept of symbolic interactionism, which suggests individuals interpret meaning of events and then perform a particular action based on the meaning assigned, meaning arises from social interaction, and meaning is changeable (Locke, 2002). These components of grounded theory guide researchers to develop theory following the original concept under study (Creswell, 1994) and integrate theory and practice, which provides a valuable framework for linking clinical knowledge with scientific analysis.

Oktay (2004) describes how it is essential for grounded theory researchers to engage in constant comparison, which entails theory development and refinement occurring throughout the data collection process. Additionally, theoretical sampling is

important as the researcher gains the sample characteristics as the study progresses. Grounded theory research is also particularly advantageous for understanding a construct within a specific context, which provides ecological validity and the ability to identify the research findings as reflective of real-world contexts (Charmaz, 2006).

Participants

To follow grounded theory methodology, participants were selected through theoretical sampling, which entails the selection of participants during the data collection process to provide a subset of the larger population in order to develop theory related to the phenomenon under study. Data collection was achieved through interview, with observational data and interviewer self-reflections serving as additional data (Creswell, 2007). For this study, participants were recruited through a variety of methods in order to reach a broad potential participant pool (e.g., email, social media, physical and online advertising, and the snowball technique). Within qualitative research, no cut-off is present regarding the required sample size (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003), and the appropriate sample size is achieved when sufficient data is present to develop overarching concepts and achieve the study goals. Within grounded theory, it is recommended that a minimum of six participants be recruited for the study and data collection and research is complete once saturation is reached and incoming data does not add new information (Creswell, Hanson, Plano, & Morales, 2007). For this study, individuals who experienced enduring marriage (Bachand & Caron, 2001), meaning those couples who have experienced a continuous, long-term monogamous marriage for 35 years or more were recruited. One spouse from a marital unit participated in the study and snowball recruitment procedures were utilized to recruit participants, employing

theoretical sampling as the theory evolved. Participants were 18 years of age and spoke English.

Procedure

Regarding research procedure, each participant completed one audio-recorded in-person or tele-interview with the principal investigator. For in-person interviews, a confidential location convenient to the participant (e.g. library room, private community center room) was selected. In order to interview participants who were geographically inaccessible for in-person interviews, tele-interviews were used. Tele-interviews are secure, video-communications conducted online. Research has shown that tele-interviews have a high to moderate test validity and are highly correlated with in-person interviews (Hailey, Roine, & Ohinmaa, 2008; Jarvenpaa et al., 2002; Richardson, Frueh, Grubaugh, Egede, & Elhai, 2009). The study used Securevideo.com for tele-interviews since it is an encrypted, HIPAA compliant, video conferencing and interviewing website used by mental health professionals (Securevideo.com, 2014). Interviews lasted a maximum of two hours. The study visit began with reviewing the Informed Consent and discussing the purpose of the study, including time for participant questions or concerns. For the interview, participants completed a demographic questionnaire, and grounded theory methods were followed by providing open-ended questions in an unstructured format that served as a basis for additional inquiry (Charmaz, 2006). The broad objective for the interviews was to explore the systemic factors influencing the experience of enduring marriage; therefore, questions that explored intrapersonal, interpersonal, and environmental influences provided the framework of the interview (see Appendix J for a full list of the exploratory interview questions). An example of an exploratory question

would be, “Tell me about a time when you have felt a close emotional bond to your spouse?” Follow up questions were designed to aid the participant in amplifying his or her responses in order to enrich the data. An example of a follow-up question would be, “What specific aspects of that situation led you to feel closeness to your spouse?” All follow-up questions from the initial open-ended questions were provided to inform the overall objective. At the end of the session, participants were asked if they were interested in hearing about the results of the study. If a participant expressed interest, the researcher informed him or her that data would be forthcoming via a newsletter (within 2 years). Additionally, all participants who completed the study protocol received compensation for their time and effort through a $20.00 Amazon.com gift card emailed or mailed to their preferred location. Participants were allowed to contact the investigator after the interview to provide additional information. The investigators contacted participants for information clarification within two months of the interview date. Any contact that occurred after the interview date lasted a maximum of 30 minutes. Therefore, the total time participants could spend in this study was two hours; if contact occurred after the interview, total participation lasted a maximum of 2.5 hours.

Data coding and analysis occurred during the data gathering process, as advised within the grounded theory model. The constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) is common within grounded theory and includes a systematic approach to data collection and analysis where the theory is generated from the data. Using the transcribed interview, fragments were identified that appeared pertinent to the individual’s experience and for generating theory. This process began with identifying themes, which are the key points of the data to be collected from the

transcript. Next, the codes were grouped together to create categories which consisted of multiple themes that all related to a similar idea. Once categories were identified, they were grouped together into concepts that aided in the development of theory. Finally, theory was created with the collection of all the concepts and used to generate hypotheses about the participant's experiences (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Data was examined for similarities and differences across interviews to create an understanding of the conditions that influence the experience of enduring marriage. As previously stated, additional sources of data (e.g., observational data, researcher self-reflective summaries) were used in analysis (Fassinger, 2005) to develop credibility of data collection, which is most commonly known as trustworthiness (Fassinger, 2005; Morrow, 2005). Trustworthiness ensures validity and credibility of research by being aware of existing biases that may interfere with the research, gathering thick descriptions to understand the context and any contradictory evidence, and immerse heavily into the data through multiple iterations of transcription analysis. Future papers and presentations of the data will include participant's phrasing when relevant to present their experiences in an accurate and beneficial manner.

CHAPTER III

Results

Demographic Information

Interviews were conducted by the primary investigator beginning in March 2016 and concluding in August 2016. Data collection concluded after reaching data saturation with the completion of seven participants. Of the seven participants, four participants were female and three were male; participant age ranged from 63 to 78 years (M = 71). All seven participants identified as Caucasian. The length of marriage ranged from 41 to 58 years (M = 49). Table 1 provides participant demographics.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Participant Code	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Years of Education	Length of Marriage (years)	Number of Children
1	Female	Caucasian	78	13	54	2
2	Female	Caucasian	70	14	50	2
3	Female	Caucasian	77	18	58	3
4	Male	Caucasian	70	18	44	1
5	Male	Caucasian	63	16	41	2
6	Female	Caucasian	68	13	49	2
7	Male	Caucasian	71	16	48	3

Review of Data Analysis

Data analysis began with the transcription of the audio-recorded interviews. Each interview was listened to twice; first for initial transcription and next for confirmation of accuracy of the transcription. Consistent with grounded theory, line by line coding was

conducted to develop content-specific fragments ranging from a single phrase to several sentences. The fragments were labeled with content descriptions and organized in a digital spreadsheet. Utilizing the content descriptions, primary themes emerged, and the themes were then organized together into categorical groupings which led to a conceptual framework. Overall, 21 themes emerged from the data and were synthesized into nine categories which fall into a framework of four concepts. Table 2 presents an overview of the themes, categories, and concepts that emerged from the interview data to create an ecosystemic model of enduring marriage.

Table 2

Ecosystemic Model of Enduring Marriage

Themes	**Categories**	**Concepts**
Individuality within marriage	Personal Growth	Individual Experiences
Personal growth process		
Medical condition experience	Health and Aging	Relational Processes
Relationship perspective shift		
Present moment mindset		
Normalization of challenges	Marriage has Challenges	
Conflict resolution		
Marital growth from challenges		
Immediate family	Relationship bonding	
Extended family		
Commitment	Interaction elements	Relational Dynamic
Friendship		
Communication	Behaviors	
Acceptance of individual differences		
Spending time together		
Unconditional love	Love	

Deepening of love over time		
Personal support	Social Support	Community
Marital support		
Individual community engagement	Community engagement	
Joint community engagement		

Conceptual Development

In the following section, each concept along with its corresponding categories and themes will be reviewed in detail. The data aligns with a systemic framework of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and contextual variables interacting to influence the long-term marital relationship. Participants focused extensively on the interpersonal components that have contributed to their enduring marriage. Not only did participants discuss the overall relational dynamic, but they emphasized the significant impact that relational processes contributed to their marital endurance; therefore, the interpersonal factor was divided into two concepts due to the unique influence of the constructs on enduring marriage. In addition to interpersonal components, the data signified that individual experiences and community influence universally contribute to enduring marriage. Concepts will be discussed along with their corresponding categories and themes. Interview fragments will be utilized to illustrate the themes, categories, and concepts that emerged from the data. The fragments have received minor edits for grammar, readability, and assurance of de-identification, but the core meaning of each quote was preserved in this process.

Individual experiences. Participants highlighted how individual experiences uniquely impacted their marriage. Many of these experiences included formative identity

development that arose within the context of the marriage but ultimately played out individually. The concept of individual experiences was derived from the factors specified by the category of personal growth.

Table 3

Themes, Categories, and Concepts Related to the Concept Individual Experiences

Themes	Categories	Concepts
Individuality within marriage	Personal Growth	Individual Experiences
Personal growth process		

Personal growth. The category of personal growth is comprised of two primary themes, including individuality within marriage and the personal change process. All participants articulated the opportunity for personal growth to occur within their marital relationship as they learned more about themselves as a result of being a spouse as well as allowing for personal development through life experiences.

Individuality within marriage. While respect for individual differences was a relational process discussed by participants, an additional focus on allowing each spouse to be an individual within the marriage was emphasized as an important aspect that decreased enmeshment and enhanced the enduring marriage. Participant 2 shared her experience of being part of a marital unit while maintaining independence:

> When you're married you're a unit. You might have different views, you might have different things you do on your own, but you are still a unit and you're still Mr. and Mrs. Marriage doesn't take away your independence. You can still be independent, but I think when you get married you are also a unit. It's hard to keep the unit for a lot of people nowadays.

Participant 6 shared how respect was one way that the honoring of individuality occurred within her marriage:

> Respect for one another and respect for letting each person have their own thing and do their own thing. My husband has never told me how to run my life, how to run the household, or how to raise the children. He's just let me be me and has always delighted in good things that happened to me as I have for him. There's no jealousy.

Furthermore, all participants highlighted the importance of having time apart within a relationship and then come together to share about individual experiences. Participant 2 shared how having time to herself positively impacted her marriage:

> *Participant*: You got to have some time to yourself.
>
> *Interviewer*: Do you feel like that alone time helps you be a better wife or not?
>
> *Participant*: I think it helps. You got to get away a little bit.

Personal growth process. In addition to individuality and value in personal pursuits, participants shared how through their life they noticed positive personal changes that surfaced overtime. This personal growth process was characterized by individual change that occurred within the context of the marriage. Some participants shared how this personal growth journey was a way to continually learn and develop into the person they wanted to be and sharing this journey with their spouse brought about positive effects for the marriage. Participant 3 further describes this experience of personal growth occurring within her marriage and the importance they placed on sharing the journey to maintain their marriage during the process of change:

> *Interviewer*: It sounds like sharing with your partner and bringing them in to your personal journey was something that you and your husband experienced and possibly found valuable?
>
> *Participant*: Yeah, yeah, I think that's very important because otherwise you grow apart.

Participant 4 also shared about the value of the importance of personal discovery within the context of marriage:

> Making room for that person to discover who she is; that's been the very center in our marriage.

Not only did participants discuss the opportunity to engage in personal growth throughout life, many participants highlighted that their awareness of areas for personal development often were facilitated by things they would learn about themselves as a spouse. Participant 4 describes this experience further;

> I have had a lot of growth over my lifetime. And, a lot of it has had to do foundationally. Learning what not to do and what to do. I wish I knew as much 25 or 40 years ago that I know today. I believe one of the things that my wife and I do better now than we used to do in the past is that we actually process what is happening and things that have been a pain point.

Additionally, a reciprocal influence between spouses also appeared as participants shared about ways they have evolved personally during their lifetime and how that evolution at times was influenced by their spouse. Participant 7 described how he and his wife reciprocally influenced each other in areas of personal growth:

My wife used to get on me about being too serious about things, so maybe she's helped me lighten up and conversely, I've helped her get a sense about the fact that some things are pretty damn serious, and you better pay attention.

Relational processes. One of the most prominent and consistent concepts that arose was the importance of relational processes in enduring marriage. Participants reported that when they were jointly involved in a situation with their spouse there was a shared experience that uniquely influenced the marriage in contrast to individual experiences. While participants experienced diverse life situations with their spouse, three categories of experiences were consistently discussed across participants that brought about core formation in enduring marriage.

Table 4

Themes, Categories, and Concepts Related to the Concept Relational Processes

Themes	Categories	Concepts
Medical condition experience	Health and Aging	Relational Processes
Relationship perspective shift		
Present moment mindset		
Normalization of challenges	Marriage has Challenges	
Conflict resolution		
Marital growth from challenges		
Immediate family	Relationship bonding	
Extended family		

Health and aging. The first category in this concept captures the relational process of health changes and the aging process. All participants interviewed discussed the unique influence of health conditions or the aging process on their marriage,

especially in the later stages of life. Health became a higher priority for couples which manifested in increased conversations, perspective shifting, and new emotional experiences. Witnessing health changes in others or experiencing health changes personally often was the catalyst for the influence of the health and aging relational process on the marriage. While the specific health conditions varied across participants, the primary themes of medical condition experience, relationship perspective shifting secondary to health changes, and the utilization of a present moment mindset for coping were present.

Medical condition experience. The onset of health changes or normative aging tended to impact relationships through behavioral and emotional aspects. At times participants described the need for the relationship to adapt because of a new medical condition. Participant 1 shared how her husband's new medical condition impacted their sex life:

He had a lot of kidney stone problems and that impacted our sex life quite a bit.

Despite a decrease in their sex life, Participant 1 emphasized the value of their friendship in buffering the potential negative effects of this change in their marriage:

> So in the meantime we didn't really have much sex, and with the years it really went downhill, but I have to say it didn't play such a big role in our lives because we were still friends.

New medical conditions not only changed some of the behaviors in the marriage, but participants also described the emotional impact. Participant 4 described how the onset of his wife's medical condition led to a new level of fear related to the possibility of losing his spouse:

> The first couple of days were the hard days, especially the first night when they [medical providers] couldn't get things under control. I realized I could lose her, and that was hard. My daughter was right next to me and that was probably the most helpful thing, along with prayers. We were entirely surrounded by the faith community.

Relationship perspective shift. Another theme related to health and aging consisted of the relationship perspective shift that occurred universally for participants as a result of experiencing health changes personally or witnessing them in family or friends. Many participants articulated increased worry and fear of losing their spouse; nevertheless, many used this experience to talk with their spouse about the future and how health changes down the road might impact their relationship. Participant 2 shared about how witnessing a friend's changing health prompted discussions with her spouse about their future:

> One of our friends had a stroke, and afterwards I shared with my husband about how we don't know whether we will wake up tomorrow morning or not, and if we do wake up we need to stop putting things off that we want to do.

Participant 6 described how she and her husband experienced a shift in their perspective on life as a result of diagnosed health conditions:

> My husband has heart disease and he has had a couple of stents put in. This started way back in the early 1990's. His first episode was in 1993 and included a heart attack. Then a couple years ago he had some issues and they put another stent in, and he's now really fanatical about working out, taking care of himself, and watching what he eats. He also pays attention to his doctor's

> recommendations. This situation has changed the way we live, certainly our diet and the fact that we do both exercise. We are very conscious of living healthfully, so there's the worry about health changes. Sometimes as I look into the future I go 'Okay, is he someday going to [snap] and something is going to happen?' And I recognize it could also happen to me.

Since health changes and normative aging are common among humans over the age of 50, the later stages of marriage are uniquely impacted by changes in spousal health. Participant 3 describes the realization of this in her marriage as well as the perspective she and her husband adopted as a result of this realization:

> One of the things that I can think of that is definitely more important now is our health, [chuckle] which was certainly not an issue at all in the early days because we were so young. We are both trying very religiously to stay as healthy as we can because we consider that a responsibility not only to ourselves but to each other.

Present moment mindset. While many coping strategies are available to individuals and couples who are experiencing life stressors, participants prominently discussed utilizing a present moment mindset. This coping strategy was described as a way to cope with specific health changes, the aging process, as well as the uncertainty regarding future health changes personally or in their spouse. Spending time focusing on the value of being together and living each day to the fullest brought strength to the marriage. Participant 4 shared about how a present moment mindset was practiced within his marriage:

Participant: Recently, my wife had a stroke and I had a heart attack. And, you know, even through that we're pretty on top.

Interviewer: Yea those are really challenging things to go through as an individual and as a marital couple. How do you think those experiences have shaped your relationship? Or how has your relationship been a strength or a challenge when coping with those health conditions?

Participant: I'd have to say that part of our style is that we both live in the now. We don't dwell in our past and we look to the future, but we don't dwell in the future either because often what's in the future isn't the way that it comes out. So, I think that our major strength is that we are in the now. We are a good support for each other and we are good processors. Again, we're very verbal in our marriage.

Marriage has challenges. Sharing of marriage problems was not the primary focus of participant's stories, but participants provided a resounding emphasis on the experience of enduring challenges in marriage as a valuable relational process for building their enduring marriage. Therefore, the second category in this concept captures this relational process. Participants highlighted the importance of understanding that marriage will have challenges that need to be endured, marriages evolve over time based on life experiences, and there is a need to have ways to cope with marital challenges.

Normalization of challenges. Not only did all participants discuss the marriage experience of having challenges to endure, but participants communicated how much they believed it was important to increase awareness that marriage comes with challenges

and entering marriage with the belief that marriage will be smooth all the time could be problematic. Participant 2 described her experience:

> It's been a good marriage. You always have your ups and downs.

The value of normalizing marriage challenges appeared to be a topic that participants felt was important in maintaining marriage commitment and having resilience during challenging periods of many years of marriage. Participant 5 shared his experience of marriage challenges and commitment:

> Well the most important thing [to developing satisfying long-term marriage] is make the commitment and keep the commitment. I think it seems like people have had a tendency to give up too easy. So, I hope that once future people decide to get married they realize that it's a lifelong commitment and it won't be smooth 100% of the time. Despite this, I hope they can still recognize the value of being with their spouse and committing to marriage.

Conflict resolution. While challenges in marriage may be normative, identifying strategies to cope with these challenges was described as essential in order to develop a marriage that is built to stand the test of time. One avenue of coping with marital challenges over time was the utilization of effective conflict resolution skills. Participants shared the value of working through conflict instead of denying or avoiding the issues. Furthermore, participants universally described communication, including talking and listening, as the primary conflict resolution tool utilized when trying to resolve differences. Participant 7 described the process he and his wife implemented:

> Get them [points of conflict] up and get them resolved. This includes hearing each other out and hearing the other person's side of the story. And if I'm wrong and realize it, then just saying 'I'm sorry. I was wrong.'

In addition to communication, multiple participants shared how time often assisted with healing the wounds of conflict. Participant 2 shared her perspective as follows:

> *Interviewer*: What do you think helped you guys get through those downs?
>
> *Participant*: Time [pause] and talking it through.

Participant 3 shared how the conflict resolution sometimes took time, but staying in communication allowed for healing to occur:

> *Interviewer*: Anything else you would highlight in that experience in terms of what helped you gradually get to the other side?
>
> *Participant*: We were still talking about it and talking with each other.

Ultimately, the opportunity to engage in conflict resolution required both spouses being willing to engage in the process. Participant 7 discussed the need for both he and his wife to be willing to repair their marriage following one of their most challenging times:

> But you know, what one person wants doesn't necessarily accomplish everything. It takes two people. In our situation, it could have been that my wife did not accept my overtures and determine that this marriage was through. If that was the case, it didn't matter what my determination or my feelings were, but in the end, she was open to repairing the marriage. So, it takes two to tango.

Additionally, half of participants highlighted the value of utilizing compromise in the marriage and not holding onto the decision for future ammunition when something goes wrong. Compromise was described as a relationship agreement and joint decision;

therefore, contentment in the final decision was essential in utilizing compromise for a positive outcome. Participant 6 described the utility of compromise in her marriage:

> There must be compromise. I think compromise is a big factor. Additionally, a balance is sometimes needed if what I need doesn't agree with what he needs, because then there has to be a compromise. Somehow, we have to find a middle ground where we both can be happy and satisfied.

Beyond purely engaging in compromise, Participant 2 highlighted how she has found it important to be content with the outcome of compromise:

> *Interviewer*: It sounds like one point is compromising-
>
> *Participant*: Compromising yep-
>
> *Interviewer*: And settling
>
> *Participant*: Yes.
>
> *Interviewer*: And the other part of it is being happy in that compromise.
>
> *Participant*: That's right, it's an equation.

Marital growth from challenges. With a hindsight perspective, participants described the challenges throughout marriage as providing opportunity for marital growth and deepening of the relationship. Through the trials, couples found ways to improve their relationship, learn from the experience, and apply the knowledge in future situations with a more refined perspective. Instead of turning inward during a challenging time, participants discussed opening up and turning towards their spouse. Participant 1 shared her experience:

> *Participant*: If we would have stayed [in Germany] I don't think we would have been married this way today. When we came to this country we had to depend on

each other and that brought us closer together because we had to talk about everything when it was happening. We were new to the language and all the customs, and sometimes we really didn't know what to do and we had to figure it out together and ask other people.

Interviewer: It sounds like it was a shared journey, a shared challenge, and you were enduring it together.

Participant: Yes. Yes.

Interviewer: It also sounds like you really relied on each.

Participant: Very much so. I don't think we would have relied on each other that much if we would have stayed in Germany. I think it really saved our marriage because we had to rely on each other during the good times and the challenging times.

Additionally, Participant 7 highlighted how his marriage separation and repair process had long-term value and provided an opportunity to set an example for their children of how a marriage can heal and grow from challenge:

And the good part is that we got back together, and we tried to demonstrate to our children that you can get through tough times and come back from it.

Relationship bonding. The third category in this concept is the relationship bonding that arose from shared experiences that occurred in the immediate family or extended family. Participants were consistently able to identify specific moments in their marriage where shared experiences led to a deepening of the emotional bond in their marriage which further solidified the love and commitment in the marriage. Many of the relationship bonding moments that participants described appeared to also occur within

the context of heightened emotional responses (e.g., birth of a child, death of a family member, marriage of a family member). Participant 2 specifically shared her experience related to this idea:

> I think your strong emotions when tragedies happen help bond together. I think that's when you are emotionally bonded because you have somebody's shoulder to cry on.

Immediate family. The majority of participants described the primary relationship bonding moment occurring at the birth of a child. All participants had biological children and described how the experience of bringing a human being into the world that is biologically part of both of them created an experience of strong connection from this shared experience. Participant 4's description of his experience expressively highlights the relational process and heightened emotional element:

> The birth of our daughter was a time where I felt a strong emotional bond with my wife. Being in the delivery room with my wife, observing what takes place, seeing the baby come out of the womb and watching her moving was so incredible. Wow, that's alive! I thought it was an incredible gift!

Extended family. While participants primarily identified moments within the immediate family as bonding moments, many also described the death of a parent or milestone moments of other extended family members as experiences that led to the joint reliance on each other or joint celebration of family milestones that reminded them of their relationship and their commitment to live life together in the joys and trials. Participant 3 shares her experience of emotional bonding with her husband during a time of pain:

> It would be eleven years ago now when my dad died. I called my husband the morning after my dad died and told him that he hadn't made it. I could hear him break down crying, and that was so caring and loving to me.

Relational dynamic. The second relational component that arose as a significant influence on enduring marriage was the concept of relational dynamic. Participants consistently described not only the influence of relational processes but also the interactional processes within their relationship that led to positive developments for an enduring monogamous marriage. Many of the findings within this concept align with previous research within the field on factors that lead to healthy marriages, and they appear to remain valuable as couples are married for more than 40 years (Carstensen, Gottman, & Levenson, 1995; Fung & Carstensen, 2004; Gottman, 1999; Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1993; Sperry & Carlson, 1991). Overall, this concept consists of three categories and seven associated themes.

Table 5

Themes, Categories, and Concepts Related to the Concept Relational Dynamic

Themes	Categories	Concepts
Commitment	Interaction elements	Relational Dynamic
Friendship		
Communication	Behaviors	
Acceptance of individual differences		
Spending time together		
Unconditional love	Love	
Deepening of love over time		

Interaction elements. One of the many commonalities between participants is the value of the interactional elements within the relationship that contribute to enduring

marriage. This interaction category included the primary themes of commitment and friendship as a base of the marriage. From the start of the relationship to a 40-year wedding anniversary, participants emphasized how important the unwavering commitment of both spouses, as well as a solid friendship, was to the marriage. These interaction elements provided a foundation for challenges, change, and joy.

Commitment. Of all the relational dynamic themes, commitment was the theme that was highlighted most frequently across the data. Challenges can create uncertainty, but the underlying commitment to prioritize the marriage and find a way to work together was essential in creating an enduring marriage. Participant 4 highlights how marriage has challenges but at the foundation is an unwavering commitment:

> I think that in the challenges of marriage, there are times when you may not be sure you love someone anymore. Or at least, 'I love you, but I don't like you right now.' I think there's various stages in a relationship, but for me it's always a long-term commitment.

Additionally, Participant 2 highlighted the long-term nature of a marriage commitment:

> Long-term marriage is an endurance test.

Furthermore, many participants expressed concern regarding future generations recognizing the importance of commitment and not walking out on a relationship after a challenge. As the culture has shifted over the years, participants acknowledged that commitment may be more challenging in a culture with more instant gratification and increased access to other people through technology. Participant 3 described her thoughts related to commitment and future generations of couples:

Interviewer: What do you think may be important for couples in future generations to develop happy and satisfied long-term marriages?

Participant: [pause] The first word that comes to my mind is commitment. Commitment through thick and thin. I think it's too easy these days to give up on things. I'm not sure how you teach this value, but I think it would have to be in your system of thinking by the time you get to marriageable age. I don't think it's something that could be created at that age, so, it would need to start early. It's a commitment to your beliefs and to whatever is at hand. Also, the capacity to care.

Participant 7 also shared his perspective:

Interviewer: What do you think are the qualities that lead to an enduring marriage?

Participant: Well, respect and commitment. That you've endured so much together, good and bad, and that you can't think in any other way other than continuing on for the long-run as long as it can be everything with this person that you've shared so much with.

Friendship. In addition to commitment, friendship arose as a primary theme contributing to enduring marriage. Friendship often started during the dating relationship as shared interests and stage of life brought commonalities together, but all participants highlighted that friendship remains a core relational foundation of their marriage. Participant 1 describes this experience further:

Well you know we started out as friends and he always stays my friend. I will see him to the end.

Participant 1 further shared why she thought being friends in marriage was beneficial:

> *Participant*: First of all, I think it is important to have the intention of staying married and battling it out because nothing goes right. There's always something will interfere in the marriage. And they definitely have to be friends in order to get through all these upheavals.
>
> *Interviewer*: What do you think it is about being friends that's really helpful in the process?
>
> *Participant*: Being friends means that you can talk to your spouse about everything. Sometimes we will have different opinions about the right next step, but being able to hear each other, talk it out, and admit when it's best to go with your spouse's perspective is an important thing.

Participant 6 shared about how their friendship followed enjoying similar activities:

> We are very good friends and have been all along. We spend a fair amount of time together doing hobbies together, but we also are very comfortable spending time doing our own thing.

Not only did friendship include shared interests, but participants highlighted how friendship involved the process of enjoying living life with their spouse during the highs and the lows. Participant 5 described how he knew that no matter what part of the country he and his wife moved to, they would always have someone they knew and enjoyed in that new city:

> We actually did relocate quite a bit. That had a real impact on our marriage because every time we went to a new city, the most important body we had was each other. So, I mean, we're very good friends, and we enjoy each other's company.

Behaviors. In discussing the relational dynamic, participants universally discussed specific behaviors that were beneficial for enduring marriage. Many of the behaviors highlighted align with current knowledge regarding the factors that lead to healthy and satisfying marriages; therefore, this research suggests the continued utility of these findings in long-term marriages (Carstensen, Gottman, & Levenson, 1995; Fung & Carstensen, 2004; Gottman, 1999; Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1993; Sperry & Carlson, 1991).

Communication. In many domains of the interviews, participants shared the value of communication as a tool to enhance sharing, create connection, and engage in conflict resolution. Many participants shared about the value of having time weekly or daily to debrief and share about recent experiences. Participant 3 explained the process she has with her husband during retirement:

> As little things come up during the day we talk about them.

Participant 7 explains how he and his wife would often go out to eat in the evening and use that time to share with each other:

> So we'd find ourselves at a restaurant in the evening after a long day, and we would use the time to debrief about how the day went, what things were going well, where we'd been, where we are, and where we're going.

While communication was frequently highlighted as an essential behavior in marriages, some participants shared about how communication improved over time and was not always something that was conducted in a healthy manner earlier in the relationship. Participant 6 shared the limitations in their communication early on and how it evolved over time through personal growth:

> Communication is extremely important, and I say that even though our communication wasn't that good at earlier times in our marriage. I learned that you've got to say what you need. My mantra for this year is: Ask for what I need. So, I think you just got to let your wishes be known.

Acceptance of individual differences. Many participants also highlighted the need to not change your spouse and instead accept and recognize the value of the individual differences. Part of this behavior revolves around the appreciation of a spouse's uniqueness and how the combination of two unique individuals creates a marital unit. Participant 6 describes this within her marriage:

> Let the other person be that person. Don't try to tell them or steer them in the direction you think they should be going if their perspective doesn't agree with what you think. Have respect for one another.

Spending time together. Spending time together as a couple was another behavior that all participants described as important for an enduring marriage. Oftentimes this revolved around engaging in a shared hobby or interest. Many participants highlighted how spending time together helped build their relationship early on and then during retirement the prioritization of spending time together facilitated greater connection. Participant 4 articulated how their shared interests promoted an increase in spending time together:

> We thoroughly enjoyed being together. We had a good time together going camping, going out, going on long walks, and cooking. We also were very extroverted, so we would be with a lot of other people much of the time too. We

> made a lot of friends, and some of those people we met in the first year of marriage are still close friends today.

Participant 2 shares her and her husband's joint preference in spending time together over being alone or with others and how that has facilitated greater understanding of her husband and how he viewed the world:

> We would rather be just the two of us now rather than going out with other people. We get along well with each other, and at this time in our marriage I'll be able to finish his sentence and he'll finish mine.

Furthermore, spending time together not only involved engagement in shared interests but also participating in activities that bring joy to the spouse. Participant 3 shared the shift in her perspective later in life:

> As I got older I realized that there was more to life than what I was doing and doing some things that were really important to him could take more of a priority.

Love. The third category within the relational dynamic concept is love. All participants highlighted the importance of love with their enduring marriage, and love with these participants' experiences appeared to consist of two primary themes, including unconditional love and deepening of love over time. While love was present for all couples at the start of the relationship, these love themes were described as unique experiences of love that continually evolved throughout the relationship and were essential to their enduring marriage.

Unconditional love. The specific quality of unconditional love and the prioritization of the spouse over the self was continually highlighted as an important

quality of love. Love did not revolve around getting personal needs met. Instead, the focus was on caring for the other person. Participant 5 explained his definition of love:

> I would define love as caring for someone more than you care for yourself.

Participant 4 described a self-emptying, sacrificial type of love:

> Love means to me a full commitment of myself. A self-emptying. I think love is both sacramental and sacrificial. When sacrificing, it's really giving away – self emptying – giving away something I may not want to give up. But it's to not do it selfishly but for the sake of the other. This is something that we both do too. Sacramentally, it's not sacrificing something up, but it's giving oneself totally to the other person. I think that the sacramental part has been more evident in the later years of our marriage. I think the sacrificial was more in the early years because there were times that I had to remind her that I was sacrificing. Sacramentally, you don't do that. Instead, you do it for the sake of the other.

Other participants described how during marriage conflict, love was consistent but sometimes hard to recognize. Specifically, Participant 7 discussed how after some marriage challenges, he and his wife focused on their daily commitment to choose to love each day:

> Every day starts off with something we learned in a marriage class 40 years ago. I look at her and I say, "I choose to love you today." So, she has a reassurance and she says it to me too. Love is a choice. I can choose to love you or not love you.

The emphasis of loving even during times of conflict and making a commitment to love each day was described as providing a trusting and respectful relational dynamic.

Deepening of love over time. Participants reported that love did not remain the same throughout the marriage; instead there was a deepening of love over time. Many highlighted that they thought they knew how much they loved their spouse when they got married, but after 40 or more years of marriage they now see how young and naïve the relationship was earlier. Participant 7 describes this process:

> I think when you are in your 20's and 30's you only think you're in love, but that's probably more of a physical driven type of love. Whereas as you get older, you start to develop the deeper emotional ties that start to express the deeper love that everybody older tells you about, but you don't know what the heck it means until you experience it yourself. It's not an unhealthy codependency thing but just a genuine love. A belief that 'I don't want to live without you because I've shared so much with you and all my other friends have died, so I'd rather be with you.' That kind of a love that is so deep that it's difficult to express.

Participant 3 highlights the greater depth of love in her marriage over time:

> *Interviewer*: How has love played a role in your marriage? And how has love remained the same or changed over the years?
>
> *Participant*: It's been very important all the way through. It certainly has changed in that I think so much of the beginning of it was attraction. Physical attraction and the excitement of all of that. And over the years it has become a quality of cherishing that has developed. Cherishing has grown in importance over the physical part.
>
> *Interviewer*: How would you describe 'cherish' in terms of your marriage?

Participant: Putting the other person's welfare first and being thoughtful and caring for the other person.

Participant 2 explains how the deepening of the love seems to resemble more of a partnership:

> But it's a different kind of love now. This is a partnership. Before it was fun! We were in love, I had a boyfriend, I had a husband, I got a family, and we were buying a new house. You know everything was new, new, new. Well now it is [sigh] [laughs] old, old, old.

Community. The fourth and final concept is community which arose from participants' consistent emphasis on the value of community in enduring marriage. The community influences the marriage through two primary categories: provision of social support as well as a medium for engagement.

Table 6

Themes, Categories, and Concepts Related to the Concept Community

Themes	Categories	Concepts
Personal support	Social Support	Community
Marital support		
Individual community engagement	Community engagement	
Joint community engagement		

Social support. Participants emphasized that their marriage did not occur independent of community influence. Specifically, participants often turned towards their community for support throughout various life stages. The themes of personal support and marital support were discussed separately, as participants shared about different relationships or people fulfilling these roles.

Personal support. Many participants discussed having friends in whom they confided for social support. The personal social support became a means to decrease loneliness and positively cope with marital stresses. Participants discussed their social support being supportive of their marriage and allowed for a space to work through personal thoughts related to conflict and have more productive conflict resolution conversations. Furthermore, personal social support was a space where the normalization of marriage challenges also became apparent as participants witnessed friends experiencing similar struggles. This personal social support often provided a new perspective and led to greater connection with their spouse. Participant 2 shared how being around her friends who were at a similar life stage often provided the support she needed:

> All of us women were in the same boat together in the same stage of life. We would get together and share our complaints about things and have similar experiences. We all got married young.

Marital support. Not only did participants discuss receiving personal social support from their community, but they also highlighted the value of marital support received from their community. Along with having a marriage with a foundation in a friendship, many participants described having a joint social group that provided support for their marriage. Oftentimes, these were peers who were at a similar life stage and provided moments of connection for the marriage outside of the relationship dynamic. Participants described learning lessons from other married friends or receiving guidance when going through a challenging time. Participant 6 shared about their friends who became so supportive that they are considered family:

> We have three other couples whom we've been friends with for a long time and now we've become a family. We're really like a family. We're now into our third generation. Our kids were raised together and now the grandkids know each other, and I don't even know how many of us there are now. It's kind of a unique relationship that not a lot of other people understand. This friend group is almost more like a family than our real family. I mean if I had to go to these people for anything, they'd be there in a second and they'd help me with whatever. I'd probably go to them before I'd go to some of my family members. This friend group has probably impacted us more than I can even think, because they all have fairly strong marriages. I mean they've also had some ups and downs too, but they've all been married the same amount of time that we have and gone through some of the same trials. So, I think it's probably helped us too.

Participant 5 shared how he and his wife met a shared group of friends through joining community groups together:

> *Interviewer*: How would you say that being involved in those different community organizations throughout the years has impacted your marriage?
>
> *Participant*: I guess primarily the network of people that we have. Even though we may not see all of them on a regular basis, we know we have a strong network of support.

Community engagement. In addition to receiving social support from the community, participants highlighted individual and joint community engagement as a factor that was prominent in enduring marriage. One unique aspect is that oftentimes participants discussed the presence of this involvement increasingly during the years of

retirement when they had more time to devote to volunteer work. Participants highlighted that involvement within the community tended to provide a broader perspective on their purpose in life both personally and as a couple.

Individual community engagement. Most participants discussed engaging in community organizations through church, local nonprofit organizations or hobby groups. Especially during retirement, participants discussed days often involving going separate directions to individually engage in the community and then reconvening later in the evening. Participant 7 shared this routine in his marriage:

> My wife does volunteer work and I do volunteer work, so we go our separate ways during the day, do our health exercise, and then get together in the evening to share about what we did during the day.

In addition to the personal benefits that arise, participants highlighted how engaging in the community on their own provided a medium to converse with their spouse about community needs, personal interests, and topics that they are passionate about. Participant 6 illustrates this further:

> We share what we've learned through our books, and we have way more spiritual conversations or religious type conversations about what we talked about in our separate church groups. I think we both really enjoy that, so that's kind of fun. We have two different groups that we participate in individually, but we share what we are learning with each other.

Joint community engagement. While not all participants described engaging within the community along with their partner, some participants discussed the positive influence of joint community involvement. At times this included involvement in the

same community group with different roles and other times this involved participating in a spouse's community group as a means to support the spouse's passion. Participant 3 articulated how a shared value and passion to contribute to society brought about the opportunity to engage in the community with her spouse:

> Working on the environment is very important to us now and we both share that passion.

Participant 7 shared how their individual engagement in organizations evolved into joint participation due to their tendency to find themselves supporting their spouse in his/her community organizations:

> We often will find each other involved in each other's volunteer work.

A shared marriage value of contributing to the community and being involved in offering personal skills and abilities to benefit others seemed to provide an avenue for couples to maintain connection, identify purpose, and build curiosity for conversation in their relationship, particularly in the later stages of the marriage.

Chronosystem. Building upon the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and contextual factors identified during data analysis, the factor of the chronosystem intersects with all four systemic concepts to represent the continual influence of social change over time and developmental change over time. The continual influence of change over time in the human, relationship, and culture shapes the enduring marriage through providing new opportunities for interaction and reciprocal influence. The chronosystem demonstrates the interactive nature of this model and the dynamic connections between all of the systemic levels. At various points in time the focus on instrumental or intrinsic values is

more prominent. Overall, the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and contextual levels reciprocally influence each other throughout the experience of a enduring marriage.

Overall, 21 themes, nine categories, and four concepts emerged from the data and represent the experiences of seven men and women who have been married to their spouse for over 40 years. An ecosystemic framework helps to better understand enduring marriage and the factors that contribute to the success and maintenance of these relationships in the long-term.

CHAPTER IV

Discussion

Discussion of Findings

Analyzing the factors that contribute to enduring marriage further elucidates the current conceptualization of marriage. The results of this study are consistent with previous research (Carstensen, Gottman, & Levenson, 1995; Cherlin, 2005; Gottman, 1999; Sperry & Carlson, 1991) on factors that contribute to healthy marriage in couples who have been married under 35 years and expands upon the previous knowledge of marriage to further define the concept of enduring marriage. The consistency of findings suggests that many of the factors that have been identified as important in the first 10 years of marriage can be extended to enduring marriages, and additionally, the analysis of the data provides a novel understanding of enduring marriage in several fundamental ways. The results provide support for a theoretical model of enduring marriage that follows an ecosystemic framework.

While one definition of enduring marriage has not been established, the field has drawn on the current understanding of monogamy, serial monogamy, and long-term marriage to describe enduring marriage as a monogamous pair bond characterized by a continuous, long-term relationship with one partner (Bachand & Caron, 2001). As family systems theory claims (Bowen, 1966), couples are emotionally connected and interdependent wherein a change in the functioning of one person is followed by reciprocal changes in the functioning of the other. Therefore, conceptualizing enduring marriage within an ecosystemic framework captures the interactional nature inherent in marriage.

Ecosystemic approach to marriage. Application of an ecosystemic framework for enduring marriage refers to the interconnected and nested environmental systems that individuals interact with during their development. Individuals interact with the influences from the microsystem of the individual to the mesosystem of the family and the macrosystem of the community and culture (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Stanton; 2009). Application of this framework to marriage emphasizes the structure of an ecology of relationships that married individuals exist within, including their intrapersonal life, interpersonal relationships, and a greater context that involves culture and community (Thoburn & Sexton, 2016). Therefore, as participants share about their experience with enduring marriage, they are sharing about their experience within this ecological system.

An ecosystemic framework highlights the principle of reciprocity as each member of a system is influenced by others in the nested system (Stanton & Welsh, 2012). Within this study, a spouse is influenced by internal processes that shape his or her thoughts, emotions, and behaviors which are furthermore shaped by interpersonal interactions. Parent-child relationships develop attachment processes and emotional processing frameworks that are reinforced or challenged by a spouse, family members, friends, and others within the community. Lastly, the spouse's intrapersonal and interpersonal life are also impacted by contextual influences (e.g., local community, society, culture) that are in the individual's life. Analyzing enduring marriage utilizing an ecosystemic framework evaluates the concept by exploring the reciprocal processes of these three nested systems within the context of enduring marriage. Using this ecosystemic framework as a lens through which to view the participant data, we will

discuss the conceptual themes and patterns of reciprocal influence that emerged at each systemic level as well as the implications of these themes and patterns.

Intrapersonal. At the intrapersonal level, participants consistently highlighted the value of maintaining individuality within marriage as well as engaging in personal growth processes to make positive change while maintaining a pro-marriage focus. Participants highlighted that marriage was not only a way to experience the relational components of friendship, love, and companionship, but it provided a unique and valuable way to explore and enhance personal well-being through being a spouse, as is highlighted when discussing the intrinsic value of monogamy (Hazan & Diamond, 2000; Sternberg, 1997; Wood & Robert, 2006). Participants in an enduring marriage felt the safety and security to embark on the potentially challenging journey of personal growth and work towards becoming their authentic self. The presence of a secure attachment in the marriage (Fraley & Davis, 1997; Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Zeifman & Hazan, 1997) seemed to create a trusting space to explore personal development because the unconditional love in the marriage was present and a fear of rejection or approval was not present. Utilizing a systems approach to understanding this factor is valuable because it highlights the component that within a marriage the individual and relationship can have a reciprocal influence on each other, in this case oftentimes for the better. As participants were able to make space for focusing on their personal goals and desires, they were able to enhance their role as a spouse and ultimately positively influence their long-term marriage, similar to how certain roles or activities in society may be catalysts for personality development (Helson, Kwan, John, & Jones, 2002). Participants in this study often displayed an internalized message of personal value as the spousal support for

engaging in personal development allowed for the opportunity to become more holistic in living out the many identity roles of their life. Participants valued making personal change because they were aware that it would lead to positive effects in other areas of their life. Therefore, when discussing enduring marriage, the inclusion of the role of individuality appears to capture a crucial element of the structure of a long-term marriage that provides individual and relational value.

Interpersonal. The interpersonal level encompassed the most influential factors that arose for participants in regard to enduring marriage. At the core of enduring marriage is the relationship. The foundation of marriage is the interaction patterns that provide support for the establishment of a healthy or unhealthy relationship. Past research on factors that contribute to healthy or unhealthy marriages identifies friendship, more positive than negative interactions, and quality time as behaviors that positively impact the marital relationship (Carstensen, Gottman, & Levenson, 1995; Fung & Carstensen, 2004; Gottman, 1999; Kaslow & Hammerschmidt, 1992), which was confirmed within narratives of enduring marriage in this study. Participant's experiences echoed this notion that making a choice to show love and interact in a manner that builds a positive, healthy marriage was vital for the development of enduring marriage. Specifically, participants emphasized specific interaction elements and love characteristics as primary factors that fuel the type of relational dynamic that fosters enduring marriage. Sternberg (1986, 1997, 2004) identified love as a primary component of marriage, with intimacy and commitment emphasizing the intrinsic value of a relationship and importance of relational properties between the couple. Furthermore, attachment processes can facilitate the positive manifestation of a balance of the love

components present in romantic relationships (Madey & Rodgers, 2009). Similarly, participants described the evolving role of love in their marriage over time, and the components of love have been found to vary through the life span with different components being more of a focus at different stages of the marriage (Acevedo & Aron, 2009; Seiffge-Krenke, 2003). Lastly, participants chose to incorporate specific interpersonal behaviors into their marriage in order to maintain a strong emotional connection overtime, which became a buffer for situations when challenges arose. These interpersonal factors, therefore, remain essential throughout the relationship. While these findings are not new to the marriage conversation, they elucidate the value in the maintenance of these factors throughout the marriage despite inevitable change, patterns of relating, and struggles that will occur within the marriage.

The most unique contribution to the marriage literature is highlighted within the relational processes concept of the interpersonal level. The specific shared experience of health and aging was paramount for participants in this study. All participants discussed the impact of health and aging on their marriage. Couples who have been married for more than 35 years seem to be impacted by health changes uniquely due to the daily participation in the stage of older adulthood and new experiences that shape their view on life. Research has shown that people who are married are often heathier both physically and emotionally, and marriage is often a buffer for loneliness and stress (Slatcher, 2010). Despite this understanding, less is known regarding how a long-term marriage is impacted when a health change or normative aging processes arise. The average life expectancy in the United States is higher now than at any other time in history (American Psychological Association, 2015; OECD, 2013) and with a longer stage of older

adulthood comes increased likelihood of experiencing health changes and normative aging processes while being married; therefore, understanding the experience of health and aging on the individual as well as the relationship is crucial for understanding enduring marriage. This study's unique look at enduring marriage sheds light on a specific process at the later stage of marriage that seems to profoundly shape interactions at this time. In particular, the intrinsic goals of pair bonding (O'Neill, 1992) seem to be of utmost importance at this stage as couples are choosing to be married despite the normative experience of marital challenges since the relationship is valuable in and of itself, not due to the access it provides to additional resources.

Lastly, a unique finding arose regarding participants' experience of the development of a close emotional bond with their spouse. The majority of participants highlighted the birth of a child as the primary mechanism for the development of a deeper emotional bond in their marriage. In addition, participants highlighted other milestone family events (e.g., marriage in the family, birth of family member, death of family member) as secondary influences on the establishment of a close emotional bond. Johnson (2008, 2013) has discussed extensively the role and importance of a close emotional bond in marriage. The presence of this secure connection communicates a message of safety and trust, which can facilitate the process of individual and relational strength through the experience of unconditional support regardless of circumstances. Additionally, the specific bonding event of the birth of a child aligns with the evolutionary motivation of pair bonding focused on passing along genetics to future generations (Dawkins, 2006). The results of this study highlight the crucial nature of a

child's birth as an interpersonal process that has a lasting impact on the connection within enduring marriage.

Contextual. The contextual level of the system suggests that the environment shapes an individual or family's culture which influences political, religious, and social viewpoints. Enduring relationships with a long-term commitment are most often personified in U.S. culture through the institution of marriage (Goldstein & Kenney, 2001; Pinsof, 2002). In earlier societies, pair bonding revolved around instrumental value of communities joining together to support each other through the exchanging of resources and mutual protection (Zelman, 2015). This form of cross-group interaction contributed to trading and technological stimulation which provided a purpose for marriage beyond the value of reproduction, and instead a means of community growth and health. Similar to how earlier societies began to experience community value from pair bonding (Zelman, 2015), participants in this study highlighted the value of context in providing social support as well as a space to engage with others outside of the family system for volunteer or hobby purposes. Throughout the interviews, participants shared how their individual experience of enduring marriage cannot be separated from the cultural context, which provides further evidence for the importance of analyzing enduring marriage from an ecosystemic framework.

The emphasis on community was resoundingly described as positive for the development of enduring marriage. With all participants highlighting the inclusion of these factors as positive influences on their marriage, it appears that the value of remaining connected to the community is of utmost importance as couples age. This is not dissimilar to the widely discussed finding that social engagement has a positive

influence on individual well-being and the aging process (Holt-Lunstad & Smith, 2012). While most research has focused on the individual value of social connection as people age, the results of this study suggest that the value of social engagement can have a positive impact on enduring marriage as well. Since all people live within a community, all marriage naturally exists with contextual influences which can provide opportunities for enhancing an enduring marriage or interfering. Participants in this study shared how their community oftentimes was a primary advocate for their marriage and created space for personal and relational development.

Lastly, participants at times acknowledged the shifting cultural influences on marriage in an ever-evolving society with the increased presence of technology, social media, diverse relationship formation, and varied beliefs regarding the purpose and role of marriage in life. As gender equality (Inglehart & Norris, 2003) and the use of birth control (Goldin & Katz, 2002) promoted a transition to more flexible roles in marriage and increased emphasis on the value of emotional connection within marriage in the 21st century (Cherlin, 2005), it would be likely that marriage will continue to evolve as society progresses. While these new cultural factors were not specifically analyzed through this study, I believe it will be valuable for future research to better understand how these changing contextual factors may shape the creation and maintenance of marriage overtime. Regardless, contextual factors shaped the enduring marriages that participants discussed in this study; therefore, the integration of context within a theoretical development of the concept is necessary.

Clinical Implications

The clinical implications of this study are significant. Findings from this study serve to illustrate key areas of application intrapersonally, interpersonally, and contextually that may be extremely relevant to clinicians and services providers interacting with and providing care to this population. Intrapersonally, the value of individuality and personal growth within a marriage seems to be a primary way that couples navigate the long-term nature of the marriage. Participant's emphasis on how personal growth and change ultimately positively influences the marriage relationship through gaining a sense of individual value and purpose. This finding supports the idea that not only can marriage provide interpersonal value, but it can also provide intrapersonal value to become the most holistic person possible. Clinically, a focus on the individual person as well as the marital relationship is an important factor to consider when providing a systems-based intervention.

Interpersonally, the concept of health and aging and how it impacts enduring marriage is an important finding for many health care fields to be aware of due to the opportunity for possible intervention. As health changes arise, the availability of clinic programs to provide systems-based interventions is important due to the reciprocal influence of changes in an individual on the entire system. Consideration of the spouse during diagnosis, treatment planning, or the recovery process can be valuable because of the opportunity to implement interventions targeted for the individual, spouse, and marriage which may benefit the health outcomes overall.

Contextually, interventions targeted at keeping older adults engaged within the community has been shown to be effective for individual reasons (e.g., physical health,

emotional health), but this study demonstrates how community engagement is also beneficial for relationship health. Being involved in the community can provide personal and marital meaning as well as be a means of receiving support during challenging and joyful times. Continued facilitation and education on the benefits of community engagement may therefore facilitate stronger long-term marriages and ultimately more positive health outcomes for older adults.

Limitations

Although this study provides support for a theoretical model of enduring marriage that follows an ecosystemic framework, there are limitations to these findings. First, the study utilized a small, though sufficient number of participants. While a sample size of seven participants is appropriate for an initial qualitative study focused on theoretical development, the small sample may make it difficult to generalize the results. Future studies may look to further these findings with a larger population using quantitative methodology. Additionally, all participants identified as Caucasian and highly educated. The lack of diversity in the participant sample may limit the generalizability of these results to individuals who have been raised in other countries, cultures, socioeconomic status, or religious backgrounds. While one participant was born in Europe, the marriage relationship existed primarily during their time of living in the United States. Furthermore, the utilization of an ecosystemic approach highlights the role of culture and community in enduring marriage, and while this study did not include a diverse participant sample, research has shown that systemic racism, oppression, and marginalization impacts marriage (Chambers, 2011; Fincham & Beach, 2010). Therefore, further research exploring contextual factors that address the impact of culture

and race on enduring marriage would be relevant. Lastly, all participants had children with their spouse; therefore, these results may not be generalizable to couples who do not have children, particularly related to the establishment of a close emotional bond, since this study demonstrated that the birth of a child was the primary mechanism for the building of that bond.

Future Research

The results of this study provide a robust view of the theoretical model for enduring marriage and opens the door for future research to expand these initial findings. This study purposefully recruited individuals who had been married 35 years or more due to the lack of previous research with this age cohort; however, participants in this study ended up being married between 40 and 60 years. Due to the unique findings related to health and aging, conducting research to understand unique changes that occur during this stage of life (e.g., empty nest stage, retirement, diagnosis of a serious medical condition, coping with the death of a spouse after a life-long marriage) would be valuable to better understand factors relevant at each stage. For example, participants had mostly experienced initial health and aging changes with anticipation of more serious changes in the future, but significant physical or mental conditions were not prominent.

Furthermore, narrative data was collected through self-report of one spouse of the marriage dyad, suggesting that the results may not accurately reflect the holistic picture of the martial relationship. Conducting an interview with both spouses of a marriage dyad individually as well as integrating data from supplementary sources connected with the dyad (e.g., children, family members, close friends) and other physical sources (e.g., artifacts, journals) may enhance the design of the study and strengthen the results.

Oftentimes remembering the early stages of the relationship was difficult for people because it was approximately 50 years ago; therefore, utilization of varied data collection methodology of the earlier stages of the relationship may provide greater accuracy of reporting and richness.

Lastly, to facilitate a more systemic examination of enduring marriage, conducting interviews with adult children whose parents have been married for more than 35 years would allow for an opportunity to examine the experiences of individuals directly impacted by an enduring monogamous marriage. A study with this focus could provide greater understanding of the internalized messages regarding marriage for children who have been directly impacted by enduring marriage. This research would clarify the impact of enduring marriage on the family system and how the presence of long-marriages may specifically impact marriages in future generations. Conducting interviews with a young generation will also likely illuminate the generational influences from society that may be different as culture changes.

Conclusions

While marriage has been discussed extensively in the psychological literature, an aging population and changing cultural context sheds light on the importance of continued knowledge and awareness to be gained from better understanding the complex, yet incredibly meaningful dynamic of marriage. The ever-evolving nature of life and marriage highlights the importance of continued value in relationships for personal and societal well-being. Identifying ways to understand and support individuals who desire to develop marriages that stand the test of time will likely have a positive impact on society as well. There is hope that continued work to understand enduring marriage will

help couples establish and maintain relationships that provide individual, relational and societal meaning.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Demographic Questionnaire

1. How old are you?

2. How do you identify your gender?

3. How do you identify your ethnicity?

4. What is the highest level of school that you have completed?

5. What is the total number of years you have been married?

6. How many times have you been married?

7. What is your parent's marital status?

8. What is your current employment status?

    If currently employed, what is your current vocation?

9. Do you have children?

    If yes, Number of children:

    Age(s) of children:

    Gender(s) of children:

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1) Give me a brief description of your current marital relationship.
2) I would like you to think back to when you first began dating your future spouse. What attracted you to your future spouse? How and when did you realize that you wanted to marry your future spouse?
3) What were the qualities that were important to you:
    a. When you were dating?
    b. When you first got married?
    c. As you raised your children?
    d. After your children left the nest?
    e. During retirement (if applicable)?
4) How have you remained married for [*insert number of years married*] years?
5) What are the qualities you think lead to an enduring marriage?
6) How have you made it through the difficult times in your marriage? Has there ever been a time where you or your spouse seriously considered divorce? If so, please talk about this experience. What has kept you from divorcing your spouse during those difficult times?
7) How has love played a role in your marriage? How has your love remained the same or changed over the years? What does love mean to you?
8) Tell me about a time when you have felt a close emotional bond to your spouse? What do you believe contributes to a strong connection with your spouse?
9) Do you belong to any community organizations? If so, how has your involvement in those roles influenced your marriage? Please describe any specific examples.

10) Have you experienced personal growth and maturity over your lifetime? What role, if any, has your relationship played in your personal development? What factors do you believe have been most relevant?
11) What was important to you in the early years of your marriage and what is important to you now?
12) What do you predict may be important for couples in upcoming generations to develop satisfied, long-term marriages?