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An Examination of Love and Marital Satisfaction in Long-term Marriages

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A Dissertation

Presented to

the Morgridge College of Education

University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Rebeca Isabel Estrada

November 2009

Advisors: Cynthia McRae, Ph.D. and Nicholas Cutforth, Ph.D.

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Title: An Examination of Love and Marital Satisfaction in Long-term Marriages

Advisors: Cynthia McRae, Ph.D. and Nicholas Cutforth, Ph.D.

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### **Abstract**

There has been little marital research that focuses on contributing factors to successful long-term marriage and even less focus on the role that love plays in long-term marriage. As a means of furthering this research, the purpose of the current study was to examine levels of satisfaction in couples in long-term marriages and to identify contributing factors to an enduring marriage. This study also examined the significance of love and changes in love after 35+ years of marriage. Through the use of qualitative methodology, five couples who were self-identified as “happy” in their marriage and who had been married at least 35 years were interviewed. Each couple was first interviewed together and then each spouse was interviewed separately. As might have been expected, couples defined happiness in their marriage in ways that are similar to what they identified as being the “key” to their marriage. Compromise, faith/religion, forgiveness, communication (ability to talk things through and resolve conflict), spending time together, and sharing common interests were common themes identified among the couples as being the “key” to their enduring marriage. Other aspects of positive marital experience that were mentioned, but not as frequently, were sharing the same values, maintaining romance, being tenacious, being considerate of each other, showing appreciation, trust, and patience, limiting arguments/disagreements, and respecting one another. Each spouse identified love as being an important aspect of their marriage and stated that it was why they stayed in their marriage. However, none of them identified love as being the “key” to their enduring marriage. All of the spouses mentioned a

change in love over the course of their marriage, whether it was the type of love, meaning of love, feeling of love, or development of love. This study has implications for couples therapy and has contributed to research in love and happiness in long-term marriage and positive psychology.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

In my first year as a graduate student at Gonzaga University, I was taking my first research course that required me to pick a topic of interest. After thinking about it for a while, I thought that the area of marriage seemed like an interesting topic. Of course, when telling my professor about this, it was much too vague of a topic and he asked that we work on narrowing down the area. In looking at the research in the area of marriage, I was eventually led to the aspects of divorce and the dissolution of marriage, and the pre-marital preparations that couples make as means of preventing divorce, as this was where most of the literature was focused.

My interest in this area only grew during my two years as a Masters student, as I began working at my practicum site and had the opportunity to work with couples in therapy. I was fortunate enough to share this interest with my supervisors not only at my practicum site, but with my practicum professor. They were able to share their expertise with me by helping me understand the complexities of marital therapy, as well as facilitating my knowledge of the literature in marriage and divorce.

Throughout my Masters program, I knew that I was going to continue my education in a doctoral program and that this would include a dissertation. So when I began my first quarter at the University of Denver, and was asked to pick a topic for my



“Nature and Methods” research course, I knew exactly what it was that I would be researching for the rest of the quarter.

Through this course, my interest in marital research evolved. As I continued to read literature on divorce and pre-marital preparations, I began wondering about couples that had been married for long periods of time. This led me to look at research on long-term marriages that were continuing to work, and this is the topic that has continued to interest me. As the research in this area was somewhat limited and not nearly as vast as that of divorce, my interest was piqued and grew.

Over the next few years, my area of interest became more refined as I continued to take other courses. I used these opportunities to do further research and write about marital satisfaction in long-term marriages. During one of these opportunities, I began to look at the aspect of love in marriage and the role that love plays in a long-term marriage. In doing so, I found that little research had been done in this area and that researchers suggested that this be an area where further study would be helpful. It was somewhat surprising to me that love wasn't something that had been included as a major area of research in relation to marriage, especially given the importance that our culture places on love in a relationship.

In this chapter, I will first discuss the concept of love and the role it plays in marriage. Then I present the research that has been done related to marital satisfaction and longevity. The next area of discussion will relate to other researchers' suggestions for research in this area, which will then lead to my research questions.

## **The Concept of Love in Marriage**

In American culture, it often seems as though the search for love is everywhere. It is in our cinema, in that most movies have a love story that develops during the film. The genre of the movie doesn't even seem to matter as love appears in horror films, during a suspenseful murder mystery, in an action packed story with chase scenes and gunfire, and even in cartoons two animated forest creatures often find love.

This concept of romantic love appears in our daily life as we watch television, or listen to the radio. Whether you are watching the six o'clock news or your favorite game show, there is bound to be a commercial advertising some product related to attracting a partner or a match making service that promises companionship and a meaningful relationship with a significant someone. And of course, who could forget the press? Love is often the cover story of women's magazines, whether it's an article on how to find love, or an article discussing the love life of someone else. There are pages of personal advertisements in the newspaper and more pages of couples announcing their engagements for marriage.

Love is everywhere, and research has shown that it plays an integral role in marital relationships. Love and display of affection were identified by Burgess, Wallin, and Schultz (1953) as factors that contributed to marital success. Roberts (1979) also identified love as an important criterion of couples who were married for 55.5 years or more. Goedecke (1982) also identified a "high degree of love" as an important factor for couples who have been married for 20 years or more. Gottman (1994), professor at the University of Washington and marital researcher, viewed love as one of the basic ingredients of a marriage.

While investigating quality and stability in marriages, Riehl-Emde, Thomas, and Willi (2003) found that love was ranked as the single most important factor related to couples' overall well-being. Love was also identified as the couples' pre-eminent reason for staying together.

Riehl-Emde et al. (2003) said that many people commit to a relationship because they are in love with each other. Love has frequently been considered to be the only justifiable basis for marriage (Westermarck, 1936). While love has been identified as an important aspect in the beginnings of marriage, feelings of love change during the course of a long-term relationship. They may decrease or totally disappear; they may deepen or redevelop (Riehl-Emde et al., 2003).

### **Long-term Marital Satisfaction**

The prevalence of divorce in our society has resulted in a tremendous amount of research on the dissolution of marriage. These studies have attempted to comprehend divorce trends by examining factors contributing to the breakup of marriages and the subsequent consequences resulting from divorce (Bachand & Caron, 2001). Despite the fact that many marriages last for decades, most of the marital research in psychology has focused on relatively young couples and has been concerned with marriages that dissolve rather than with marriages that stay together (Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1993). It has only been in recent years that researchers have begun to focus on the marriages that remain intact.

Canary, Semic, and Stafford (2002) discussed the importance of resilience in marriage. This is related to the manner in which spouses are able to maintain their relationships in the face of day-to-day tasks and normative stressors. Marital resilience

implies a process in which people purposefully engage in maintenance activities; activities to repair, sustain and thereby continue relationships in ways they want them to be (Canary, et al 2002).

Fenell (1993) investigated the characteristics of couples who had been married for 20 years or more. Through survey methods, numerous characteristics were identified as being important in the success of their long-term marriage. The 10 most important characteristics were (1) lifetime commitment to marriage, (2) loyalty to spouse, (3) strong moral values, (4) respect for spouse as best friend, (5) commitment to sexual fidelity, (6) desire to be a good parent, (7) faith in God and spiritual commitment, (8) desire to please and support spouse, (9) good companion to spouse, and (10) willingness to forgive and be forgiven.

Goodman (1999), a professor of Social Work at California State University, conducted a study with 80 couples who had been married for at least 25 years. The couples were asked to fill out questionnaires about intimacy and autonomy. He found that intimacy, defined as sharing problems, enjoyment, and good times and wanting to please the other proved to be the most important positive predictor of marital satisfaction. His findings also showed that autonomy (defined as accepting individual decisions and interests and respecting and considering individual viewpoints) was not a predictor of marital satisfaction.

Bachand et al. (2001) conducted a qualitative study in which they interviewed couples who had been happily married for at least 38 years. The sample consisted of 15 couples; each spouse was interviewed separately. The focus was to seek the perspective of those involved in happy, long-term marriages to determine what they felt contributed

to their successful marriage. They also hoped to identify any gender differences in the couples' perceptions of the factors contributing to their long-term marriage. While they found some of the contributing factors to longevity were unique to each couple, friendship, love, and similar backgrounds or interests were common factors among the couples. Within each particular marital dyad, spouses tended to give similar responses, so gender differences were not a factor.

Research in long-term marriages has also been conducted in other countries and specific cultures. In Sweden, Kaslow, Hansson, and Lundblad (1994) studied 95 couples who had been married for 20 years or more. The findings showed that marital satisfaction within the couples was dependent on leisure time interests, sex, philosophy of life, and frequency of quarrels. Gender differences were evident in that women's marital satisfaction was contingent on the satisfaction of the men. In a study conducted with Israeli couples who had been married for 25-40 years, there were no significant differences between husbands' and wives' responses. The most important factors of marital satisfaction cited by these couples were mutual trust, support, appreciation, respect, loyalty, fidelity, love, mutual decision-making, and reliability (Sharlin, 1996).

Rapkin (1999) took a qualitative approach to investigate the variables contributing to stability in long-term marriages among Quaker couples who had been married for at least 20 years. In her analyses, she found that 10 themes emerged from the data. The first theme was premarital variables which included initial attraction and certainty about their spouse prior to marriage. Relationship themes were gender equity, communication, conflict, roles, relatedness, decision making, intimacy, and satisfaction with the relationship. The final theme involved the influence of external factors on the marriage.

While religion and culture were identified as important, they were not found to be as significant.

### **Research Questions**

As a means of furthering this research, the purpose of the current study is to examine levels of satisfaction in couples in long-term marriages and to identify contributing factors to an enduring marriage. This study will also examine the significance of love after 35+ years of marriage.

By conducting this study, there are several questions that were answered. These included, but were not limited to: What were the premarital conceptions of love in marriage and how have they changed? How does the couple define love and happiness in their marriage? What have been some of the problems encountered during their marriage, and how were they able to overcome them? In the couple's opinion, what has made their marriage successful?

It was hypothesized that the inquiry of these questions would lead to further understanding of how couples form and maintain high levels of marital satisfaction, as well as to identify problems that occur in marriage and describe how long-term couples have been able to overcome them. With this understanding, it may be possible for therapists to help their clients raise their levels of satisfaction with their spouses, especially those in marital therapy. It might also be beneficial to those entering marriage, as they may have a better understanding of what tools are necessary for an enduring and satisfying relationship. Finally, it is intended that this research will begin to shed light on the significance of love in an enduring marriage.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

While marital satisfaction is of importance in our society, it has not always been a necessary aspect in marriage. Views of marriage have changed over time and continue to change. After thousands of years, the idea of love in a relationship has become the purpose for marriage for most people in Western society. As there have been many changes in marriage over the past couple of centuries, marriage has become an important topic of research. There are numerous areas of research that focus on the complexities of marriage.

In this chapter, I will discuss several aspects of marriage. First, I will provide a historical view of love and marriage which will include the meaning and origin of marriage. I will then discuss the changes that have occurred in marriage over the course of time and how love has become an essential element of marriage. This will then lead to the discussion of the predictors of marital satisfaction, and lastly, the significance of the current research study.

#### **Meaning and Origin of Marriage**

Goodsell (1934), professor at Columbia University and sociologist, defined marriage as the union of the male and female which does not cease with the act of procreation but persists after the birth of offspring until the young are capable of supplying their own essential needs. The term “marriage” may also be defined as a social

institution which involves the relationship of one or more men to one or more women that is recognized by custom or law, and involves certain rights and duties in both the case of the parties entering the union and the case of the children born of it (Westermarck, 1936).

Goodsell (1934) suggested that marriage probably originated as a means of maintaining newborn survival. The man was able to provide protection and food for the woman and the child. It was a form of natural selection, as the males who did not stay were likely to not have their offspring survive. So it seems that marriage began by the focus on family and the survival of the family.

Westermarck (1937), anthropologist, proposed that the institution of marriage was developed out of primeval habit. In primitive times it was habit for a man and a woman, or several women, to live together, to have sexual relations with each other, and to rear offspring together. The man would be the guardian of the family and the woman was there to help him and to nurture the children. This habit was sanctioned by custom, and afterwards by law, and was thus transformed into a social institution. Westermarck (1937) also suggested that men are induced by instinct to remain with and care for the woman with whom he has had sexual relations and who has born his offspring.

### **Changes in Marriage**

In prehistoric times, it is thought that primitive men placed no value on romantic love, chastity of a woman, or fatherhood. The primitive sexual instinct demanded variety and was polygamous (Mueller-Lyer, 1930). The value of a wife was not that of someone to love, but of a worker. The cultural marriage was based on an economic relationship in which the wife was a slave and a valuable piece of a husband's property.



Marriage among the ancient Greeks was held in high esteem and looked upon as a sacred ceremony in which the union of the family was perpetuated, the inheritance of property was provided for and the worship of ancestral spirits continued. Celibacy was considered to be a serious offense, such that a law was enacted in Athens directing the first magistrate in the city to see to it that no family became extinct (Goodsell, 1934).

Marriage in ancient Rome was only allowed when the parties to a marriage were of equal social rank. Marriage was contracted between the parties and the wife came under her husband's power. Like all ancient peoples, the Romans looked upon marriage as a sacred and important act and stamped celibacy with public disapproval. Celibacy was disadvantageous to the State, which needed supporters, and to the family which needed sons to continue its domestic worship (Goodsell, 1934). The importance of marriage was based in part on the continued connection to a higher power, and not on the relationship that the couple had with each other.

During the Roman period, changes in marriage and family customs began to occur. For example, the wife was able to maintain her ties with her family of origin and was no longer considered the property of her husband. With this social phenomenon, women gained increased wealth and prestige, which in turn, accounted for an increase in celibacy.

From 1 A.D. - 500 A.D., Christianity began to influence ideas of marriage in the Roman Empire. During the first three centuries the Christian Church did not interfere with the betrothal and marriage customs then in vogue in the Empire. In fact, the Church was accepting of the Roman idea of betrothal as an engagement and not as a contract. Marriage rested upon the free consent of the contracting parties. From the origination of

the Church, a declaration of purity and lifelong union of one man and one woman was made. The Church also began to establish regulations which one had to follow if they were to be married (Goodsell, 1934), one of them being consanguinity, which meant that a two people of blood relation were not allowed to marry.

Changes in marriage continued to occur during the Middle Ages. The father had complete control and power over the household. Until the eleventh century the Anglo-Saxon father might bestow his young daughter in marriage with no regard to her wishes (Goodsell, 1934). Wife capture and wife purchase were common customs during this time period. The contracting of marriage continued, but it was not necessarily a consensual contract between the parties. The contract was between the father and the suitor, in which the suitor would receive the girl in exchange for stipulated valuables, such as cattle, arms or money.

Even though the topic of Platonic love emerged in the Renaissance period, the idea of romantic love was still unassociated with marriage. Thus, women continued to be treated as property. Parents would haggle over the matter of dowry and girls were regarded as eligible mates in proportion to the size of dowry they could bring to their husband (Goodsell, 1934).

Little change occurred during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The conception of marriage was fundamentally a contract to secure social and economic benefits. As in previous times, the contract was usually arranged by the parents. During this timeframe came the emergence of marriage licenses and registers were kept to record marriages.

It was not until the 19<sup>th</sup> century that romantic love became an aspect of marriage in Western cultures. The concept of courtly love emerged and became an idealized part of marriage. In today's American culture, romantic love is an integral aspect of marriage.

### **Conceptualizing Love**

In present Western society views, love is frequently considered to be the only justifiable basis for marriage (Westermarck, 1936). Riehl-Emde et al. (2003) found that love was identified by couples as being the decisive factor for quality and stability in their marriage. While some have defended that love as the only factor that can prevent modern marriage from turning into an impersonal offshoot of socioeconomic determinants, some investigators have linked the increasing divorce rate and frequency of family disintegration to the unrealistic assumption that romantic love can last beyond a brief period of discovery and initial excitement (Singer, 1984).

While love had been an unimportant aspect of marriage until the past two centuries, we now have an understanding that love is not the only aspect that is important in a successful marriage. Compatibility, communication, ability to resolve problems, and honesty are just a few of the aspects needed in order to maintain marital satisfaction.

### *Philosophical Views on Love*

The concept of love is one that has been discussed for centuries. Philosophers and theorists have sought to define and identify the purpose of love in a relationship. In his description of love, Plato described feelings of frenzy or delirium, and by the inspiration of heaven, as "enthusiasm." Platonic love is "a divine delirium," a transport of the soul, a madness and supreme sanity in both. The Platonic concept of Eros is that of complete desire, luminous aspiration, the primitive religious soaring carried to its loftiest

pitch, to the extreme exigency of purity which is also the extreme exigency of unity (DeReougemont, 1940).

Voltaire and Diderot defined love as primarily an impulse to enjoy another person's sexuality. Jean-Jacques Rousseau disagreed with those who believed that love was based on sexual impulses and tended to minimize the value of sexual satisfaction. He advocated purification of passion and a sense of communal oneness (Singer, 1984).

Kant's philosophy had similar elements to that of Rousseau's. They both considered sexuality as an appetite that reduces other persons to the status of material objects. Kant defined love as "good-will, affection, promoting happiness of others and finding joy in their happiness." Kant concluded that sexual impulse and love can only be combined in a monogamous marriage (Singer, 1984).

### **Types of Love**

Lee (1973) described the experience of love as six distinct types or styles. These love styles are generally described using their Greek names. Eros is characterized by physical passion and a desire for rapidly escalating romantic involvement. Ludus is characterized by game playing, an aversion to partner dependence, attention to extradyadic others and deception. Storge is characterized by an emphasis on companionship and trust in relationships. Pragma is characterized by a pragmatic or practical approach to romantic relationships. Mania is characterized by an often painful obsession with the love object and alternating experiences of joy and sorrow in the relationship. Finally, agape is characterized by a selfless regard for the well-being of the partner.

In the Triangular Theory of Love, Sternberg (1986) suggested that there are three components: (a) intimacy encompassing the feelings of closeness, connectedness, and bondedness experienced in loving relationships; (b) passion encompassing the drives that lead to romance, physical attraction, and sexual consummation; and (c) decision/commitment encompassing, in the short term, the decision that one loves another, and in the long term, the commitment to maintain that love. In this theory, the amount of love one experiences depends on the absolute strength of the three components, and the kind of love one experiences depends on their strengths relative to each other. The components interact with each other and with the actions that they produce and that produce them so as to form a number of different kinds of loving experiences. Sternburg (2004) described eight possible subsets of the various components of love. The first is *Nonlove*, which is the absence of all three components of love. *Nonlove* characterizes the large majority of personal relationships, which are simply casual interactions that do not partake of love at all. *Liking* is when one experiences only the intimacy component of love in the absence of passion and decision/commitment. In this subset, one feels closeness, bondedness, and warmth toward the other, without feelings of intense passion or long-term commitment.

*Infatuated love*, or simply, infatuation, results from the experiencing of passionate arousal in the absence of the intimacy and decision/commitment components of love. *Empty love* is defined as love that emanates from the decision that one loves another and has commitment to that love in the absence of both the intimacy and passion components of love. It is the kind of love one sometimes finds in stagnant relationships that have

been going on for years but that have lost both the mutual emotional involvement and physical attraction that once characterized them.

*Romantic love* derives from a combination of the intimacy and passion components of love. Romantic lovers are not only drawn physically to each other but are also bonded emotionally. *Companionate love* evolves from a combination of the intimacy and decision/commitment components of love. It is essentially described as a long-term, committed friendship; the kind that frequently occurs in marriages in which the physical attraction (a major source of passion) has died down.

*Fatuous love* results from the combination of the passion and decision/commitment components in the absence of the intimacy component. In this type of love, a commitment is made on the basis of passion without the stabilizing element of intimate involvement. Finally, *consummate*, or complete, love results from the full combination of the three components. This is considered to be the kind of love that most people strive for, especially in romantic relationships.

### **Love as Relationship Development**

Adams' (1979) view on love was that it is the result of a couple's development of an interpersonal relationship. He suggested that there are five stages of this relationship development. In Stage One, Contact (strangers), the couple meets and begins a simple contact-type relationship in which they begin to share common interests. If this communication is successful and the couple begins to date, they move into Stage Two, Link (acquaintances). A link-type relationship, while stronger than a contact-type, only needs occasional meetings of recurrence to maintain it at the same level. Once the couple has formed a common respect for each other, they progress to Stage Three, Tie (friends).

In order to maintain this stage of the relationship, the couple must communicate effectively, interact as frequently as reasonably possible, and maintain their level of respect for one another.

Once the couple has moved to Stage Four, Association (confidant), they have begun to formulate a level of trust between them. This is the stage at which the couple may begin to discuss their more intimate feelings for each other. In order for couples to reach Stage Five, Bond (intimates), the partners must have a considerable amount of knowledge about their mate. This is knowledge that would be gained from the time that has been invested in the relationship, the activities shared between them, and the development of future plans together.

### **Theorists' Views on Love and Marriage**

#### *Freud on Love and Marriage*

Freud's first thoughts on marriage were related to the need for self-preservation and "sexual instinct" (Singer, 1984). He believed that "Eros," the unity between the ego and sexual instincts, was the instinct for life. Freud discussed four different senses of Liebe, or love: Love as the fusion of sexuality and tenderness; love as libidinal energy, both aim-inhibited and aim-uninhibited; love as Eros, the drive or instinct of life which attached individuals to each other and ultimately unifies mankind; and love as the mixture and dynamic interfusion of Eros with "man's natural aggressive instinct, which is inseparable from it."

In Freud's writings, he discussed sexual intercourse between married couples and the dissolution of passionate love that results. He felt that due to the cultural restrictions of sexual intercourse before marriage, the couple may face a lack of satisfying sex after

being married for only five years. This is because of the inhibitions towards enjoyment that have been engrained. The couple, especially the woman, becomes fearful of the consequences, and in turn, brings the married couple's physical affection to an end (Sander, 1978). Once this occurs, it puts a stop to their sympathy for each other and their passionate love diminishes.

### *Adler's View on Marriage*

Adler believed that the marriage relationship is interpersonal. He viewed marriage as a system in which input from each partner either improves the relationship or stimulates dissonance and conflict (Carlson & Dinkmeyer, 1987). While communication is important in the couple's interactions with each other, their actions are more revealing.

Within the marriage each person has the capacity to make his or her own decisions. Each person is responsible for his or her own behavior and no one is to blame. If change needs to be made in the relationship, it needs to be made within the self and not with the partner. Behavior, beliefs, and feelings are all the result of subjective perception. Behavior is a function of one's perception or of what experiences mean to a person (Carlson et al., 1987).

The couple's marital happiness is said to be based on each individual's self-esteem, his/her capacity to give and take (social interest), and sense of humor. The combination of the three components are the ingredients of a happy marriage. This is based on the equation  $MH = SE + SI + SH$ , which means that marital happiness is the result of self-esteem + social interest + sense of humor (Carlson et al., 1987).



## **Beginning Research on Marriage**

In 1938, the first book on marital research was published. Terman, Butterwieser, Ferguson, Johnson, and Wilson began to look at the differences between happily and unhappily married couples (Gottman & Notarius, 2002). Research in the area of marriage began by looking at personality traits. In the early days of marital research, investigators believed that self-report methods for measuring personality traits were adequate, and were not concerned with methodological issues. It was not until the mid-1950s that researchers began developing standardized measures for assessment of marital concerns.

Once researchers had developed more reliable means of data collection, they found two phenomena in the area of marital research, which were termed the positive and negative halo effects. The halo phenomena suggest that in unhappy marriages, people tend to endorse almost any negative item about their partner and in happy marriages, people tend to endorse almost any positive item about their partner (Gottman et al., 2002). Thus, the early research on personality found that it was not necessarily the person's personality, but the partner's perception of the other's personality that was related to marital satisfaction. This was significant in that when it was replicated in the 1980s, the same phenomenon was found.

While marital research can be traced back to the 1930s, it was not until the mid-1950s that researchers switched their focus from a personality perspective to that of an interactional perspective. This shift then required the need for observational methods and a focus on process. At the same time there was a change in social psychology that emphasized interaction patterns. Thus, in the late 1960s, researchers began to study

dysfunction in interactive behavior and social cognition in relationships. By the mid-1970s, researchers began looking at new approaches that examined relationships using interactive behavior and social cognitions to better understand the interactions between couples. During this time, behavioral psychologists entered the field of marriage research with new observational systems that made it possible to measure marital interaction patterns.

In the 1970s and 1980s, research began on emotions and the importance of affect in marriage. New work on the physiology of affect and relationships expanded the focus on marital satisfaction and stability to the functioning of the autonomic nervous system, the endocrine, and immune systems. This research led to the investigation study of other measures, such as health and longevity (Gottman et al., 2002). Research on domestic violence also emerged and nontraditional and single parent families began to be recognized and studied.

Theoretically based research emerged in the 1980s, as well as an increasing awareness of male and female roles in marriage. Marital quality continued to be a topic of study and research on marital communication became more detailed. Increasing numbers of studies were done on marital dissolution and remarriage, and the effects of divorce on children.

In the 1990s, researchers continued to refine their topics of study. They began studying divorce prediction, pre-marital problem solving, newlywed happiness and stability. Studies that had been conducted in the previous decades were now longitudinal studies. After 30 years of hypotheses, evidence finally emerged on how the psychosocial

quality of marriage is linked to mortality and morbidity. Research also began to show that marital conflict and distress were also associated with problematic children.

Gottman et al. (2002) suggested that although the direction of cause and effect between marital interaction and spousal or child well-being is often unclear, the strength and importance of these relations will likely continue to be pursued in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For example, topics such as depression, violence, chronic physical pain, hostility and Type-A personality, and alcohol/drug abuse in marriage became areas of interest for researchers in the 1980's and 1990's, and continue to be important.

While research in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was extensive, Gottman et al. (2002) proposed areas of research that need to be extended. Some of these research agendas related to marriage include the need for more observation in naturalistic settings, continued focus on sequences or patterns of interaction, recognition of the importance of positive affect, revisiting personality, management of stress spill over into marriage, and to extension of marital research to representative and international samples.

### **Beginnings of Marriage Therapy**

Gurman and Fraenkel (2002) discussed four phases in the theoretical and clinical history of couple therapy. Phase I occurred during 1930-1963, and has been termed Atheoretical Marriage Counseling Formation, or the "Pioneer" stage. This phase includes the pioneers of marriage counseling in which practitioners tended to be cleryman, doctors, social workers, educators, and so on. Their clients were engaged, newlyweds, and married couples seeking guidance about the everyday facets of marriage and family life (Gurman et al., 2002). This was the time at which marriage counseling was established.

Phase II, Psychoanalytic Experimentation, occurred from 1931-1966. A small number of psychoanalytic clinicians were growing impatient with the ineffectiveness of treating clients with primary marital complaints, and the sluggish pace of success when it did occur (Gurman et al., 2002), so they began to experiment with marital therapy. They began seeing couples conjointly and by only one therapist. During this time, the American Association of Marriage Counselors (AAMC) was formed. This stage also marked the beginning of professional literature.

In the late 1950's and early 1960's, other psychoanalytic experimenters started to look at alternative formats for therapy. Collaborative therapy involved partners who were being seen by separate therapists who would collaborate with each other to help maintain the couple's marriage. Combined therapy involved combinations of family therapy, group therapy, individual, concurrent, and conjoint sessions as a means of helping couples work through their difficulties.

In Phase III, Family Incorporation (1963-1985), family therapy was developed (Gurman et al., 2002). Therapists began to look at a systematic approach to treatment. Don D. Jackson's cornerstone concept of "quid pro quo," the equality of each spouse in the marriage, became a central concept in the development of behavioral marital therapy (Gurman et al., 2002). Phase III was the point at which distinctions between couples therapy and family therapy began to fade.

In 1986, Phase IV, Refinement, Extension, Diversification, and Integration, began. This phase has included the increasing amount of research, modification of approaches, and conceptual and technical refinement of marital therapy. Therapies such as Behavioral Marital Therapy (BMT), Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy (EFCT),

and Insight-Oriented Marital Therapy emerged, and Psychodynamic Couple Therapy made a reappearance. Therapy extended to treating psychiatric disorders within couple therapy. The diversity of clients became an important aspect when looking at how to treat the couple. The integration of treatments provided flexibility and an increase of treatment applicability for clients.

### **Beginnings of Marital Therapy Research**

Gurman et al. (2002) provided a three-phase history of marital therapy research. In Phase I: A Technique in Search of Some Data (1930-1974), the need for research on marital therapy began. From the late 1960s through the mid-1970s little empirical research was done on marital counseling.

In the middle to late 1970s, Phase II: Irrational Exuberance (1975-1992), there was a turning point in marital therapy research. A large accumulation of empirical studies of treatment outcome came about and the data seemed to have implications for clinical practice. This data provided credibility in the field of couple and family therapy in both professional, psychotherapeutic circles and in governmental policy-making circles (Gurman et al., 2002). In the mid-1980s, a meaningful amount of research was done primarily with three models of couple therapy, Behavioral, Emotionally-Focused and Psychodynamic/Insight Oriented Therapy.

In Phase III: Caution and Extension (1993-present), researchers began to focus on specific research questions to discuss the effectiveness of couple therapy for relationship problems, effectiveness of different couple therapies, prediction in the responsiveness of treatment, and whether couple therapy can be helpful for individual problems (Gurman et al., 2002).

## **Predictors of Marital Satisfaction**

Most research in the 1980s and 1990s has examined the ability of couple interactional processes to predict later marital satisfaction and stability (Holman & Larson, 1994). Couples who lack relationship skills, particularly problem-solving abilities, will begin to experience a significant amount of marital disharmony. They engage in frequent arguments punctuated by a lack of resolution of differences (Haefner, Notarius, & Pellegrini, 1991).

Previous research has shown that similarity between marital partners, based on personality traits (Myers & Diener, 1995) measured at the beginning of marriage, was substantially higher for couples who remained together after 4 years than couples who decided to end their marriage within that period of time (Bentler & Newcomb, 1978). Similarity of attitudes, values, and beliefs were also related to marital quality and stability (Holman & Larson, 1994).

Crawford, Houts, Huston, and George (2002) proposed that compatibility in leisure activities plays a role in marital satisfaction. This was a longitudinal study in which they started with couples who had just married, and followed-up with them 13 years later. Their findings showed that although it is important for couples to do activities together which they both enjoy, it is also important for each to do independent leisure activities. However, over time, involvement in leisure liked by husbands but disliked by wives, whether as a couple or by husbands alone, is both a cause and a consequence of wives' dissatisfaction.

Stroup and Wood (1990) suggested that the role of the individual in their family system is another possible predictor of marital satisfaction. They say that couples can be

helped to explore and understand their life experiences as a means of shaping their expectations and assumptions in their new relationship through premarital counseling.

### *Marital Preparations*

Couples use the engagement period as a prelude before marriage to discuss problems in their relationship and to make adjustments and work on compromises (Burgess & Wallin, 1953). Research shows that premarital preparation six to 12 months prior to marriage is much more likely to succeed than preparation one month before a wedding. This allows for the possibility of re-evaluation of the relationship, since the decision to delay or cancel the wedding diminishes with increasing proximity to the wedding date (Giblin, 1994).

It is reported that engaged individuals generally believe that most couples benefit from marriage preparation programs (Williams, 1992). Some of the specific needs that engaged individuals considered to be most important learning aspects of these programs included: dealing with stress from work; the effect of children on marriage; how to keep romance alive in marriage; how to deal with anger or silence; learning how to resolve differences; and identifying trouble signs in marriage (1992).

### *Premarital Assessment Instruments*

There are instruments premarital counselors can utilize to assist individuals doubting their readiness to marry. The PREP-M (Preparation for Marriage) questionnaire and the PREPARE (PREmarital Personal and Relationship Evaluation) instrument measure individual and couple perceived readiness for marriage and compare these degrees of readiness to national norms as well as the person's marital role expectations (Larson, 1992). The PREP-M also provides the premarital counselor with information

about the historical, social, and physical context of a relationship by assessing factors that are shown to be related to later satisfaction and stability (Harmer, Holman, & Larson, 1994).

In a study done by Harmer et al. (1994), PREP-M scores distinguished a significant difference between those individuals whose marriages were most satisfying and stable, and those individuals whose marriages were least satisfying and stable one year into marriage.

The Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program, otherwise known as PREP, is an intervention program in which the goal is to modify or enhance dimensions of couples' relationship linked to effective marital functioning by research and theory. Some of these dimensions include satisfaction, communication, romanticism and love (idealization), and problem areas (Floyd, Jamieson, & Markman, 1983).

A followup study of PREP found support for the possibility of preventing destructive marital discord through short-term intervention focused on building skills in effective communication and conflict management (Clements, Floyd, Markman, Renick, & Stanley, 1993).

#### *Premarital Counseling*

Barlow (1999) stated that a preventative measure which seems to be overlooked in today's churches is premarital counseling. Implementing premarital counseling programs in the church could be a positive step for churches to take and might be an important role in helping prevent divorces. Research has been done by Leber, Markman, St. Peters, and Stanley (1995) in which religious leaders were trained to administer PREP



in their settings with their couples. They reported that religious leaders were enthusiastic about implementing preventive programs in their churches.

Unlike treatment, prevention intervenes with couples before any symptoms of relationship distress develop. Prevention programs also intend to enhance the relationships of couples who are already experiencing relatively high levels of relationship satisfaction. This activity is directed toward the goal of preventing future problems (Markman, Floyd, Stanley, & Lewis, 1986).

### **Furthering Research of Love and Marital Satisfaction in Long-term Marriages**

The complexities of marriage are vast and we are only beginning to attempt to understand them. The intentions and reasons for marriage have made a tremendous change over the years. It has only been in the past two centuries that love has been recognized as an important and necessary aspect of marriage in Western cultures. Within that time views of love have also changed. While love is an important aspect of marriage, it is only one of many that are necessary in a satisfying marriage.

With increasing divorce rates, research is being conducted on marriage in an attempt to not only lower divorce rates, but also to increase the marital satisfaction between couples. It is hopeful that the current research will provide further insight into the contributing factors that promote happiness and longevity in a marriage.

Love has been an area of interest for discussion for centuries and in recent years, researchers have become more interested in the marital satisfaction of long-term marriages. An important consideration in the literature that seems to be missing is the relationship between the two. It's surprising that in 1967 Kephart stated that "in a society in which romantic love presumably serves as the basis for marriage, that love itself has

been largely rejected as a topic for serious study.” It appears that after four decades, not much has changed. The purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between love and marital satisfaction after a couple has spent nearly a lifetime together.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Method**

In this chapter, I will explain my choice of a qualitative methodology and then more specifically, the method of phenomenology. I will discuss the selection of my participants, the method for collecting data, and the analysis of data that was collected during interviews.

#### **Using a Qualitative Method**

Throughout the majority of my education, I was familiarized with statistics, experimental designs and techniques, and measures that could quantify data. Numbers were everywhere, and seemed to be the most important aspect of research. The quantitative method seemed to be the only manner in which research was done. But in the first year of my doctoral program, qualitative methodology was introduced to me. I was immediately drawn to this methodology and was excited to begin looking at my research topic through the lens of qualitative methods. As a therapist, the qualitative method appealed to me because it seems to personalize the research experience. Through this method, one is able to identify what numbers don't tell you, the human experience from those who have lived it.

Qualitative, interpretive research is useful for describing or answering questions about particular, localized occurrences, or contexts and the perspectives of a participant group toward events, beliefs or practices. It is useful for exploring a complex research

area about which little is known. Qualitative research is exceptionally suited for exploration, for beginning to understand a group or phenomenon, and these explorations often lead to the developments of new theories (Gay & Airasian, 1996).

As the area of love in long-term marriages has not been the focus of a great deal of research, the qualitative method will provide an excellent starting point. By conducting this research using qualitative methods, I will be able to illuminate a better understanding of what the contributing factors to an enduring marriage are and what the significance of love after 35+ years of marriage is.

### **Characteristics of Qualitative Research**

Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) defined qualitative research as studies that investigate the quality of relationships, activities, situations, or materials. The emphasis is on a holistic description, in that the researcher describes in detail all of what goes on in a particular activity or situation rather than on comparing the effects of a particular treatment (as in experimental research), or on describing the attitudes or behaviors of people (as in survey research).

While there are many different qualitative methodologies, there are several general features that characterize qualitative research studies. The first, and probably most obvious characteristic, is that qualitative research is conducted in the natural setting. The researcher will often go to the site (home, office) of the participant to conduct the research. This enables the researcher to develop a level of detail about the individual or place and to be highly involved in actual experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2003).

Qualitative data are collected in the form of words or pictures rather than numbers as researchers seek to portray what they have observed and recorded in all of its richness.

The kinds of data collected in qualitative research can include interview transcripts, field notes, photographs, audio recordings, videotapes, diaries, personal comments, memos, official records, textbook passages, and anything else that can convey the actual words or actions of people (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998).

The qualitative research process is seen as being emergent, rather than prefigured. The research questions may change and become more refined as the researcher gains a better understanding of what it is that he or she is studying. A theory or general pattern will emerge beginning with initial codes, which then develops into broad themes, and then coalesce into a grounded theory or broad interpretation (Creswell, 2003).

The qualitative researcher makes their own interpretation of the data. This includes developing a description of the individual or setting, analyzing data for themes or categories, and finally making an interpretation or drawing conclusions about its meaning personally and theoretically, stating the lessons learned, and offering further questions to be asked (Wolcott, 1994). Since the researcher is the sole interpreter of the data, it is important to systematically reflect on who he or she is in the inquiry and to be sensitive to his or her personal biography and how it shapes the study (Creswell, 2003).

### **A Phenomenological Approach**

From my introduction to qualitative methodology, I knew immediately that I would be looking at my research topic from a phenomenological approach. Phenomenological studies investigate the meaning of the lived experience of a small group of people from the standpoint of a concept or phenomenon (Schram, 2003). If one looks at the high rates of divorce in the American culture, a marriage that not only lasts over 35 years, but one that is identified as “happy,” is truly a phenomenon.

Van Manen (1990) described phenomenology as the systematic attempt to uncover and describe the internal meaning structures of lived experience. It is the study of lived or existential meanings; it attempts to describe and interpret these meanings to a certain degree of depth and richness. In this focus upon meaning, phenomenology differs from some other social or human sciences in that it does not focus on statistical relationships among variables, but instead, it attempts to explain the meanings as we live them in our everyday existence, our life-world.

Phenomenological researchers focus on what an experience means for persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. The underlying assumption is that dialogue and reflection can reveal the essence – the essential, invariant structure or central underlying meaning – of some aspect of shared experience (Schram, 2003).

### **Process of Phenomenology**

As with any methodology, several processes are involved in phenomenological research. Van Manen (1990) discussed six research activities that he considered to be part of the methodological structure: (1) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world; (2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it; (3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon; (4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting; (5) maintaining a strong and oriented relation to the phenomenon; and (6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole.

Moustakas (1994) described four processes in phenomenology; the Epoche process, Phenomenological Reduction, Imaginative Variation, and Synthesis of Meanings

and Essences. In the Epoche, the researcher sets aside any prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things. He describes this as a preparation for deriving new knowledge but also as an experience in itself, a process of setting aside predilections, prejudices, predispositions, and allowing things, events and people to enter anew into consciousness, and to look and see them again for the first time.

In Phenomenological Reduction, the task is that of describing in textural language just what one sees, not only in terms of the external object but also the internal act of consciousness, the experience as such, the rhythm and relationship between phenomenon and self. This is a process of self-reflection of the phenomenon and the written description of what is seen.

The next step in the research process is that of Imaginative Variation. The task of this process is to seek possible meanings through the utilization of imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing the polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles, or functions. During this process, the researcher attempts to understand the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced. The steps of Imaginative Variation include:

1. Systematic varying of the possible structural meanings that underlie the textural meanings
2. Recognizing the underlying themes or contexts that account for the emergence of the phenomenon

3. Considering the universal structures that precipitate feelings and thoughts with reference to the phenomenon, such as the structure of time, space, bodily concerns, materiality, causality, relation to self, or relation to others
4. Searching for exemplifications that vividly illustrate the invariant structural themes and facilitate the development of a structural description of the phenomenon

The final step of the phenomenological process is that of Synthesis of Meanings and Essences. This is the intuitive integration of the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole.

Through phenomenology, a significant methodology is developed for investigating human experience and for deriving knowledge from a state of pure consciousness. One learns to see naively and freshly again, to value conscious experience, to respect the evidence of one's senses, and to move toward an intersubjective knowing of things, people and everyday experiences (Moustakas, 1994). So through the method of phenomenology, I will use these processes to help gain a better understanding of love, marital satisfaction, and longevity in marriage.

#### Procedure

##### *Participants*

In order to gain access to participants, I relied on referrals. The referrals were from colleagues, friends, and in one instance, from a participating couple. Each couple self-identified themselves as being "happy" in their marriage. The sample included five heterosexual couples who had been married for at least 35 years. There were no



limitations on ethnicity, socio-economic status, employment, or whether or not they had children. Each couple was contacted after being referred and was given a brief description of the research so that the couple could decide if they wished to participate.

### *Interview Process*

As a means of collecting data, a total of three (and in one case four) interviews were conducted for each couple. The first meeting with each couple included both spouses. During this time, couples were told how the interviews were to be conducted and the process of the research. A disclosure statement and consent form was given to them as a means of providing a full understanding of the process. This was intended as an introductory interview, in which background information was obtained, such as how the couple met, the length of courtship prior to marriage, whether or not the couple had children, etc (refer to interview guide in Appendix A). This introduction allowed the couple to become more comfortable with me as the researcher and to provide the opportunity for rapport to develop between us. The duration of this interview varied between 30 to 120 minutes, which was dependent on each couple.

Once the initial meeting was conducted, separate interviews were set up for each spouse. Prior to the spousal interviews, I transcribed the first interview that was done as a couple. Each of the spouses had the opportunity to review the transcript and make any comments and/or clarifications.

After the couple had the opportunity to review the transcripts, they were interviewed separately. As with the first interview, the separate interviews took 30-60 minutes. This was dependent on how much each participant wanted to share. The purpose of the separate interview was to allow each spouse to make comments about their

marriage freely and without the influence of their partner. Separate interviews also allowed each spouse to provide the most open and honest account of their marriage. Although this method was timely, it was useful in gaining different perspectives of the couple's relationship. After the conduction of each of the interviews, I transcribed the interviews. Again, each spouse had the opportunity to view the transcript of their interview, and be allowed to make any changes and/or to provide feedback they felt was necessary.

All of the interviews were tape recorded so that accurate transcripts could be made. Transcribing was completed through a voice recognition system, so as to provide a faster means of transcription.

#### *Research site*

Once the couples were chosen, each couple had an opportunity to decide on the location of the interviews. All of the couples were open to conducting the interviews in their home, so this is where they were completed. One of the participants chose to conduct her individual interview at her place of employment. It was hoped that this would assist in providing an environment in which they felt comfortable, thus allowing them to be more open in their responses.

#### *Data Analysis*

As I conducted all of the interviews, I also transcribed the interviews and coded all of my data. After each interview, I recorded observational notes and/or any themes that seemed to be developing. The main themes that were identified and coded are those of love, happiness, communication, compatibility, and religion. However, other themes

emerged throughout the interview process and were be added to the list, which included but was not limited to forgiveness, compromise, trust, and patience.

### *Writing*

Once the data was collected, coded, and analyzed, the final writing process began. I separated the data into themes and presented them as such in the final dissertation. I first wrote each couples narrative and then wrote each spouses narrative. I then summarized all of the narratives for each couples. The themes were presented through the participants verbatim accounts. I relied on the observations made during the interviews, as well as the interviews themselves, to discuss the relevant findings. After the narratives were presented, I discussed the participant's results in relation to the research questions.

### *Reliability*

As a means of ensuring the reliability of the data, several measures were taken. First, tape recordings were done during each of the interviews. This provided assurance that the transcriptions were verbatim, as opposed to merely taking notes during the interviews. Upon completion of each interview, I wrote down notes about the interview so that any impressions and observational comments were as accurate as possible. Prior to conducting the second (individual) interviews for each couple and after the completion of the individual spousal interviews, a transcript of the interview was completed. Each couple and spouse was given a copy of the transcript from their respective interviews and asked to provide feedback about it. They were given the opportunity to clarify or make any changes to their comments made during the interview, so that they had the chance to

make sure that their statements were made in the manner in which they were intended.

None of the couples identified any changes that they wanted to make to their transcripts.

Each couple was also given the opportunity to read their narrative and make any changes or comments. All of the couples responded to the opportunity to read their narrative and four of the five couples stated that they wanted minor changes to be made. These included small alterations and additions to quotations, change in spelling of pseudonym, and clarification of stated age.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

As a first time researcher, I was fortunate to have five couples invite me into their homes. They not only gave me the privilege of hearing their stories, but allowed me to share them with others as a result of this study. In this chapter, I provide a brief description of each couple, discuss the individual interviews, and then provide a summary of the similarities and differences within each couple.

#### **Chris and Marie**

As with all of the couples, Chris and Marie welcomed me into their home. Marie cleared off the décor from the dining room table and we all sat down. Marie asked some general questions about the study, which I gladly answered, and we quickly began the interview. When I met with them, Chris and Marie were just a few months shy of their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

In March of 1968, Chris and Marie had each been skiing with friends in Montana. After being on the slopes, they went to a local bar. A friend of Marie's knew a friend of Chris's and they were introduced. Marie said "The next day...I saw him at lunchtime and then we skied the rest of the afternoon." They dated for a few months, but in the summer after they met, Marie was asked by her mother to return home to help with the family business and take care of her ill father. Despite the distance between them, Chris and Marie stayed in contact through letters and phone calls. Marie said that "with the

letter writing and being apart...I guess it kind of...made me think that maybe this was the right guy,” to which Chris replied that it “cemented the relationship.” And so, eleven months after they met, they were married. When asked why they decided to get married, they stated, almost simultaneously, “because we loved each other.”

While they had some common interests like skiing and other outdoor activities, they said that they didn't have many commonalities. Chris was born and raised on a farm and Marie grew up in a city environment, which Chris felt was a pretty big contrast between them. There was also a significant age difference between them, with Chris being 32 and Marie being 23 at the time they married. Chris said that they “adapted” to each other's interests and they both felt as though their common Lutheran religion was something that helped in building their relationship.

Marie and Chris have two children, a 33-year old daughter and a 30-year old son. Throughout their marriage, Marie was a teacher and Chris worked for Boeing. They have since retired and each have hobbies and activities that they enjoy.

### *Chris*

While Chris is in his early seventies, he appears younger than his age. He is a soft spoken gentleman who seemed to be somewhat shy, but open to the interview process. His answers were typically short and to the point, so I really appreciated the instances in which he elaborated further.

### *Defining Happiness*

Chris stated that he felt happiness in his marriage with Marie was “being able to share things and give each other their own space.” He said that trust has been an important aspect of happiness in their relationship. He stated that he does not get

concerned with where Marie is or what she is doing because he has complete trust in her. They are able to spend time apart doing things with friends and have been able to do this because they are secure in their relationship with each other.

#### *The Key to Long Lasting Marriage*

“Having total trust in the other person” was what Chris first mentioned as being the key to an enduring marriage and because of this, he said that the relationship was “easy to make it work.” Chris said that they get along well together and very rarely get upset with one another. The sharing of a common faith between them has also been an important factor. Chris said that as far as he is concerned, they have a “complete relationship.”

#### *Defining Love*

In defining love in his marriage with Marie, he talked about their first meeting. He said that he had not really had any “deep relationships” growing up and that he had been really shy. So when they met, he was sitting down with her and their friends for lunch and felt as though it was a different experience for them. He found something in her that he hadn’t found in other relationships. He said that their relationship “evolved” and felt like they “were a fit.”

#### *Significance of Love*

The love in Chris’s marriage has provided him with “fulfillment” in his life. He was single until his early thirties and said that it has been “satisfying” for him to be with Marie. Chris said that love has been an important aspect in their marriage, but did not elaborate.

### *Changes in Love*

Over the course of their marriage, Chris did not believe the meaning of love had changed. However, he talked about having a different kind of love for Marie now than he did when they were first together. Initially, he said that it was “more of an infatuation thing” that he was “overwhelmed with,” whereas now, he described it as a “staying thing.” It’s something that’s “still there” and he is not concerned that “it is going to go away.” In the earlier part of their relationship, he wasn’t as assured that it was going to be long lasting, but now, he feels a sense of security that they will continue to build a life together.

### *Problems in Marriage*

Chris said that the only problems he and Marie have had have been “little petty things,” minor things that she does that irritate him. When there have been disagreements between them, he said that he tends to be quiet and stay to himself for a while. Sometimes they discuss the issue and other times he just focuses on being accepting of Marie. It is important for him to accept Marie the way she is instead of trying to change her. He stated that it causes more problems to try to change someone and that you have to let the person be who they are.

### *Parents’ Marriage*

Chris grew up in a farming community with both of his parents and ten siblings. He described his parents as having a “stable marriage” and said that they were good parents. He felt as though there was a good amount of stress on his parents, especially his mother “because of the number of children and all of the work involved” in caring for



them. His parents were married for nearly 40 years when his father passed away. He said that they were never very affectionate and didn't display their emotions, but that they were good parents.

His parents' stability and "devotion to one another" impacted Chris and his marriage. He said that this was something he carried over to his marriage and has seen the value in making a lifelong commitment to his family and making things work. Even though his parents had a stressful life, they maintained their commitment to their marriage and Chris respected their ability and willingness to do this.

#### *Advice for Newlyweds*

Chris's advice would be for a couple to get to know one another and to not base the relationship on an attraction to one another. He said that it is important for a couple to communicate their commitment to each other and make sure that they both have the same level of commitment to one another.

#### *Marie*

Marie is a Caucasian woman in her early sixties. I met with her immediately after interviewing her husband and soon recognized how similarly they spoke. While she was more elaborative in her answers, her speech and verbiage was similar to Chris's. She presented as a confident woman and seemed to be able to comfortably with the interview process.

#### *Defining Happiness*

For Marie, there is contentment being in Chris's company which she described as being "fun and interesting." While she enjoys their time together, "it's also okay to be apart." For instance, she will go to a Broncos game with one her friends and Chris does

volunteer work at their church. Because they do different activities, they have “something to talk about at dinner.” She said that the way they think and react to things is similar, and because of this, she said that their relationship is “comfortable” and there is a sense of peace and joy to it.

### *Key to Long Lasting Marriage*

Marie said that she and Chris “balance” each other. They are “pretty good at talking things through” and “see things...in a similar way.” She believes that having a similar background was also key. They came from the same religious background and both of their parents had had long lasting marriages. She said that it didn’t cross either of their minds that the relationship would not work. They were able to work through their “tough times” and she said that looking back on their struggles, the times were “kind of fun.”

### *Defining Love*

Marie defined love as “wanting to be with that person, feeling very comfortable with that person, [and] wanting to share a lot of things with that other person.” It is also “wanting to be there...for the other person” to support them.

### *Significance of Love*

Love is a “big part of why you stay together,” along with wanting to be there for the other person and please them. Physical affection has been an important part of their marriage and love.

### *Changes in Love*

Marie thinks that their marriage has “become probably stronger, because...as you live with a person and get to know them better, they know all your faults and of course,

you see theirs too, but I think a lot of it is that you accept them just the way they are because you're not going to change them anyway.” When they were first together, there was a good amount of physical attraction. While this is still in their marriage, it is no longer the most important thing.

### *Problems in Marriage*

“I guess one of the harder times was when I was going to school, grad school, and he had kind of a part-time job, so money was pretty darn tight,” Marie explained, “but where we lived, we were all grad students, so we were all in the same predicament.” She said that they would get together and play cards and have barbecues. They didn’t have much, but she has fond memories when she looks back on these times.

When talking about some of the smaller issues in their marriage, she said that the understanding between them and ability to discuss the situation has been an important aspect. They have typically been able to come to a solution together in a calm manner by “the time the day was done.” Her mother used to tell her “we’re not arguing, we’re discussing,” and she believes this to be true in her relationship with Chris. “Give and take” has also been an important aspect in their problem resolution.

### *Parents’ Marriage*

Marie’s parents eloped and she thinks that her father’s mother hoped that he would have married someone else. Her father traveled quite a bit throughout her childhood and was usually gone Monday through Friday. She said that for the most part, her parents got along well and set a good example of a marriage and “how you need to work together...in a marriage.” Marie said that her father went through a “midlife crisis” in his late 40’s and had “someone else in his life.” Her mother found out about his

infidelity just prior to his passing, so Marie said that she is not sure how this would have affected their marriage had her father lived.

She learned a great deal from her parents' marriage about compromise. She said that you need to "discuss and make concessions" for the other person. In her parents' marriage, her mother's concession was that her husband was out of town regularly and she had to be the one in the "authoritative role."

#### *Advice for Newlyweds*

"First of all you need to go into marriage with the idea that it's not disposable, that it is something...to keep preserved and have grow." Marie continued, "...it's not easy. There are hard times but you have to talk through those and you know, if you need counseling or something like that, a third party, go get it." She also said that she doesn't believe that a "soul mate" is found and believes that two people "develop into soul mates [by] just growing and going through things" together.

#### *Summarizing Chris and Marie*

In their interview together, Chris and Marie both said that they married each other because they "loved each other" which was not common among all the couples. She mentioned that she felt he was the "right guy" and Chris said that they "were a fit." They stated that they did not have many common interests between them, but that they "adapted" to each other's interests.

Both Chris and Marie defined happiness in their marriage as being able to spend time apart from each other. While they enjoy spending time together, it has been important for them to be able to have time away from each other to participate in activities that the other may not enjoy. Chris said that this was due to them having a

trusting relationship. They also felt that their faith was a key aspect to their long-lasting marriage. Both had parents who had long-lasting marriages and felt as though it helped set an example for them in their marriage. Marie even felt that this was one of the factors to their enduring marriage.

They also similarly described the change in the type of love that they currently have in their marriage. They described the physical attraction and “infatuation” that they experienced in their early years together, but that this has grown to become “stronger” and more secure.

Neither discussed any major problems in their marriage and both said that they are good at resolving any disagreements. Marie said that they “give and take” in their relationship which has helped them avoid significant issues. However, Marie talked about financial struggles during their marriage that Chris did not mention. She did not describe these struggles as causing problems in their marriage, but more as being a characteristic of being a young graduate with little income.

When discussing love, Chris and Marie had somewhat different views on defining love and its significance their marriage. Chris described his love for Marie as being different from anything he had experienced in the past. Marie spoke more generally about how love meant wanting to be together, sharing things, and wanting to be supportive of the other. While Chris said that the significance of love in his marriage is that it brought “fulfillment” to his life, Marie felt that love is why you stay together in a marriage.

## **Paul and Yvonne**

Paul and Yvonne were sitting on their porch as I arrived. They invited me into their living room where we conducted the interview. They sat together on one couch while I sat across from them on another. Paul and Yvonne were eager to participate in the interview process and they began telling me about their marriage before I was able to start taping!

At the time of their interview, Paul and Yvonne were a few months short of their 36<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Paul described when they first met, “I used to be a bouncer...and I got out of work one night at about two and I'm sitting in the car with a friend of mine...they'd come by...in the car and they'd come out to talk to us...I guess they liked the car.” Yvonne was quick to correct him and said, “I liked him,” then turned to him and stated, “No, I liked you. I liked what I saw.” Yvonne had been out with her friends for an early birthday celebration. He continued, “So we talked a little and I asked her for her phone number...I started calling her and then we started dating. We dated about a year before we got married.” Yvonne followed up by stating that they got married a year to the day after they met.

Yvonne said that she had never wanted to get married. She had dated other men, but when she met Paul, she found something different in him than she had in others and told herself “That’s it.” Interestingly, she was the one who proposed and Paul said that he really didn’t want to get married. However, he stated that he got to the point where he realized that it was time for him to settle down. Working as a bouncer, he said that he “got tired of partying” and wanted to settle down before he “got in trouble.” He said that

he was “attracting a lot of enemies” because he was throwing a lot of people out of the bar that he worked in and saw that this could lead to problems.

Even though they only dated for a year, they said that it seemed like much longer because they did everything together. They spent quite a bit of time fishing and getting to know each other. Paul said, “I wanted to really find out what she liked.” While Yvonne admitted that she was 22 when they married, Paul was more reticent to admit his age and merely stated that he was “older.” He said that it always seemed as though a man should be older than the woman, as this had traditionally been what he had seen in the relationships around him. Yvonne said that their age difference didn’t really matter “except he was more mature [than]... the guys my own age, so that was a big plus.”

About a year after they married, Yvonne got pregnant. Sadly, their son was born premature. Paul said, “He lived about 36 hours. He wanted to live but he was in an incubator. He didn’t make it.” Yvonne had to go through a cesarean section and it was suggested by doctors that they not try to have any more children. As they talked about it, both of them said at one point that having children “wasn’t meant to be.”

For much of their marriage, Paul worked in sales at a steel company. After retiring from the steel company, he worked in the research department at the Veterans Administration. After taking some time off from work, he started working part-time at a race track, which he continues to do. Yvonne has been working in administration at one of the local hospitals since before she met Paul.

### ***Paul***

Paul is a man of Hispanic and Greek descent. He was talkative and very open during the interview. At the end of the interview, he even stated that he enjoyed the

process. While there were questions he struggled to answer, he attempted to respond as best he could.

### *Defining Happiness*

Paul defined happiness in his marriage as “just being agreeable with everything.” While they might not agree on everything, compromise has been an important aspect in his marriage to Yvonne. He said that they “help each other out” with things. For instance, he said that he does not mind cooking and doing housework because he understands that they both work and they need to be able to help each other.

### *Key to Long Lasting Marriage*

Paul said, “Getting along [and] limiting our arguments” has been the key to his marriage lasting for 36 years. It has been important for them to not just limit their arguments, but to resolve them quickly and forgive each other. They also spend a great deal of time together. He said, “Everything we do, we do together.” They attend church together and enjoy similar activities such as watching sporting events.

### *Defining Love*

Paul had difficulty defining love in his marriage. After further prompts he said, “I don’t know how to describe that, because we’ve been in love ever since we first met.”

### *Significance of Love*

When asked what the significance of love is in his marriage, Paul simply stated, “If you don’t love someone, why stay married?”

### *Changes in Love*

Since the beginning of their relationship, their love has “gotten better” over the course of their marriage. He said “I love her more now than I did when I first married



her.” Paul stated that their love has grown gradually over the years and their “marriage gets stronger and stronger all of the time.”

### *Problems in Marriage*

Paul said that they have struggled with money. He lost his job due to his arthritis and they decided to move to Las Vegas because they thought the heat would help alleviate his pain. Paul struggled with the move because he didn't like the area and didn't feel as though he got along with the people there so they decided to move back to the Denver area. He said that when they were financially strained they put themselves on a budget and stopped spending money on unnecessary items. They always discussed the issue and came to a resolution together.

Paul stated, “I'm somewhat controlling and I don't think Yvonne likes that too much.” He went on to say, “I'm the type of person who likes to see everything in its place. If it's out of place, I'll let somebody know about it, and that's the way I am with her. If she doesn't do something right, I tell her.” He will sometimes tell her how to do it the “right” way and “a lot of times she'll do it, a lot of times she won't.” He said that he has tried to be better about this and tries not to be too controlling.

### *Parents' Marriage*

Although Paul's parents divorced when he was 17 years old, they got along better than when they were married and became friends. Paul's father drank regularly which caused problems in their marriage. When his dad got intoxicated, he would become verbally abusive and Paul recalled that it got to the point where his mother couldn't take it anymore. “[When] they divorced, they talked to each other, they were friends, [and] neither one of them remarried again. Maybe that taught me something too. They never

went out partying. I never [saw] them with anyone after they divorced, neither one of them. They always tended to their kids.” His Catholic upbringing instilled the belief that couples should not divorce and this is something that he has carried into his marriage.

#### *Advice for Newlyweds*

“The advice I would give them is to talk about everything, talk over everything before you end up in a big ‘ole argument or something. Talk it over and see what's what [and] meet each other halfway...Be agreeable with each other...If two people can't agree, then you can't be together.”

#### *Yvonne*

Unlike the other individual interviews, I met with Yvonne at her place of employment during her lunch hour. She is a woman of Hispanic and Indian descent in her late fifties who is soft spoken, but surprised me with her talkative nature. She was thoughtful with her answers in that she would take time to ponder the question before answering it. I appreciated her honesty and candidness when talking about her marriage.

#### *Defining Happiness*

“Happiness is being able to compromise.” Yvonne said that sometimes it takes some time to agree on things, but that it is worthwhile for them to do so.

#### *Key to Long Lasting Marriage*

Yvonne felt that the key to her enduring marriage is the same thing that has brought happiness to their marriage. She also said that a “little bit of fear of what would happen if you were by yourself...makes you want to compromise a little more so.” Since

she has been with Paul for more than half of her life, she “wouldn’t even contemplate leaving.”

### *Defining Love*

Yvonne defines love in her marriage as “loving someone so much that you don’t want to be apart for very long. [You] always wonder where that person is, if they’re safe, and you know if you’re always thinking of a person that much, you know that you love them.” She also said that it’s wanting to do things for the other person and “trying to help out as much” as possible.

### *Significance of Love*

If you don’t love your spouse, “you couldn’t stay together.” Yvonne said that because everyone has their good and bad aspects and if you don’t love them, “there is no way you can survive” in the relationship and that it is a “truly significant” aspect of marriage. There are often things that can irritate her about Paul and she believes that if she didn’t love him, those things would “drive [her] nuts.” An example of this is her irritation with having to repeat things to Paul. He is hard of hearing, but she gets frustrated when he asks her to repeat something and he answers even before she has had a chance to repeat herself, which insinuates to her that he heard her in the first place.

### *Changes in Love*

“When you are first married you may love that person, but it just grows stronger.” She said that in the first years of marriage, one may be more apt to walk away from a marriage because your tolerance of the other person may not be as high. As she has been with Paul for so many years, she has been able to remain patient during difficult moments.

### *Problems in Marriage*

“When you're first married you go through a lot.” Yvonne was the one who proposed to Paul and looking back on it she said that “he wasn't quite ready...and his way of showing that for the longest time was he would still act like he was single and stop at bars with his buddies and I was home, and...it was driving me crazy.” She actually left twice because since they didn't have any children, she did not feel as though there was anything to keep her there. She didn't leave for more than a couple of days and said that Paul “begged” her back and stopped his behaviors once he realized how it was affecting Yvonne.

Another one of their “biggest hurdles [has been] dealing with family members because you tend to be very sensitive and protective of your family and you don't want anybody to say anything or do anything negative to your family.” She said that being protective of her family members has caused some problems in their marriage, and while they may argue about it, they have been able to talk through it and work through the problem.

Yvonne also talked about the difficulty she has had with Paul in his being “very controlling” and “very protective.” She said “he's just so concerned and that's okay but sometimes he goes a little over the edge. That's caused some problems...and that's hard to deal with. Especially this day and age, women want to be a little more assertive, a little bit more independent. He doesn't see that he is from the old-school and I understand it...For many, many, many years [he] was very untrusting because he had a bad relationship and as a result he thought all women were that way... It's taken years for him to finally trust, and those are some really hard issues that you have to deal with.”

Compromise has been a significant aspect of their relationship. When they have an argument, they take some time apart from each other, but then come back together, come to a compromise, apologize, forgive each other and then hug and kiss.

### *Parents' Marriage*

Yvonne's parents were married for about 34 years before her mother passed away. She said that her parents' marriage "wasn't happy" and thinks that they only stayed together for the sake of the children and because they were from the era where couples stayed married. Throughout her life, none of her family members have gotten divorced and she thinks that many of them have just tolerated their spouse. She said that her mother would let her and her siblings know that she didn't love her father. "But unlike my mom and dad, I love my husband." Yvonne went on to say "I did not want to be like my mom. I wanted to make the right choice. I wanted to make sure the man I married, I loved."

Even though her parents didn't have a very happy marriage, she said that they were loving parents and were even loving towards each other. While she did not see happiness in her parents' marriage, she did see other family members who had good marriages, so she "knew what it should be."

### *Advice for Newlyweds*

Yvonne stated that it's important to have patience and be willing to give in to each other. She said, "It's natural to have disagreements because you can't agree on everything anytime, I don't care who you are. But, you really have to want to make that marriage work and you have to realize, you have to remember what brought you together,

especially at the beginning. What did you see in that person, why did you want to be with them? Is it worth...walking away from? Is it worth fighting for?"

She continued, "Don't be so easy to give up on something. I just think its way too easy for people to walk away from relationships anymore, and it's sad because they don't give themselves enough time. I made a mistake when I was young; it's not that I didn't love him and I left. It was just that he made me believe that I wasn't needed or wanted. So, that's why I left. But I was willing to come back because it is what I wanted." She said that "you don't know what you have sometimes" and shouldn't be so willing to leave the relationship.

### ***Summarizing Paul and Yvonne***

In their interview together, Yvonne mentioned that she felt as though she found something in Paul that she had not found in others and realized that he was the person that she wanted to be with. They were very similar in many of their responses. For example, both felt that happiness was defined by their willingness to compromise and Paul added that it also meant helping each other.

Yvonne defined love as "not wanting to be apart" from Paul. While Paul had difficulty defining love, both said that the significance of love in a marriage is that they did not believe that one should stay in a marriage without it. They also both felt that their love had grown stronger over the years.

They had different views on what they felt was the key to their enduring marriage. Yvonne believed that it was their ability to compromise and Paul stated that it was limiting their arguments, resolving issues quickly and forgiving each other and spending significant amounts of time together. They also differed on what problems they

encountered during their marriage. Yvonne talked about leaving on two occasions early in the marriage and also dealing with family issues that caused some difficulty in their relationship, while Paul did not mention either issue. However, both discussed Paul's "controlling" behavior and how this had been an issue at points during their marriage.

### **Bob and Julia**

In meeting with Bob and Julia, one may find it hard to believe that they had been married for 37 years because it seemed as though they were still newlyweds. I met with them in their living room and they sat next to each other on the couch. When they spoke to each other, it was with adoring eyes and sweet adolescent grins, and sometimes was playful in nature. Their affection for each other was obvious as they would gently pat each other on their knee or shoulder.

They both grew up in upstate New York and met in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Julia told a story about how they had to take a baby picture of themselves to school for their teachers birthday party. They played a game in which the teacher was supposed to match the baby picture to each student. The teacher looked at Julia's baby picture and thought that it was Bob's picture. In looking back at this, Julia said, "we were destined to be together."

Because their last names were close together alphabetically they were seated close to each other for many of their classes through high school. Even though Julia said that she had thought that he was "so darn cute" and liked him since the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, they never dated. It was not until four years after high school that they ran into each other at a night spot. Julia was out with a friend and Bob was out with a date. Julia's friend recognized Bob and took her over to talk to him. They began dating and a year and a half later they were married. Bob and Julia were only engaged for about two months and decided to get

married during a weekend when Bob's family was going to be in town for a reunion. When I asked them what made them decide to get married, Julia first responded with "because we loved each other," and Bob responded with the same answer within seconds.

Two years after they got married they had their first child, a son and thirteen months later they had their daughter. Throughout their marriage, Bob worked for Kodak. Julia was working full-time as a licensed practical nurse when they got married, but then decided to stay home with the children after she got pregnant. As the children got older, she worked part-time, which allowed her to spend time with the children when they were not in school. Bob and Julia are now both retired. Julia said that she enjoys being a homemaker and Bob now does volunteer work with Habitat for Humanity.

### ***Bob***

Bob is a Caucasian gentleman in his early sixties. He presented himself as a kind and confident individual. He seemed to be open to talking about his feelings and thoughts on his marriage to Julia and even appeared to be comfortable doing so.

### *Defining Happiness*

Bob defined happiness in his marriage as loving being around Julia. He said that she makes him "feel good" and that "she is very caring and giving and loving and that makes [him] happy." They enjoy spending time together. He said "we don't do too many things apart other than a few things I do to keep me busy during the day."

### *Key to Long Lasting Marriage*

"Patience, compromise, give-and-take, I think those are keys, just keeping the spark alive, having romantic evenings, being together. I think there's a Christian faith in us that keeps us going too that helps us." They have been going to the same church for



35 years, and this is something that they enjoy sharing with each other. He also talked about taking time to think before he says something to Julia, so as to be considerate of her feelings. He said, “Sometimes you just know it’s not time to say something” and that there are questions that you have to be cautious when answering. He gave the example of Julia asking him how she looks in a particular outfit and how he doesn’t answer the question without thinking about it first.

#### *Defining Love*

“I think just being happy and wanting to be with her is love in my book.” Bob talked about his appreciation for Julia making his lunches for the 30 years that he worked at Kodak and how she still packs him sandwiches on the days that he does volunteer work. She would even stamp the bread with a heart shaped stamp. He said that it has been the little things that have made such a difference and that they “just keep adding up.”

#### *Significance of Love*

According to Bob, the significance of love in his marriage has been “37 years of bliss.” He went on to say that “what we have gotten out of our marriage has transferred into [our children’s] lives and that’s rewarding to us.” Both his son and daughter have told him and Julia that they are a “tough act to follow” which he felt was very complimentary.

#### *Changes in Love*

Bob feels as though their love has “gotten tighter and tighter” and that he “just can’t imagine being without her.” He said that he had a friend who lost his wife and “just can’t imagine not coming home and hearing someone’s voice, sleeping next to a person...

I just don't know what I'd do.” When they first got married, he stated that they weren't as connected, but that their connection has grown over the years.

### *Problems in Marriage*

There have been few problems in their marriage, but Bob said that they tend to get into arguments over the computer. When these arguments occur, he will “usually shut up and walk away” and then after a while they will apologize to each other and “always kiss and make up.” While they have had some financial concerns, he said that this did not become an issue in their marriage and was not something that they argued about. They have just found ways to save money like carpooling and taking lunch to work.

He and Julia have talked about hearing that “you have to work at a marriage,” but they have not felt like they have had to do so. He said “We don't feel it's work at all” and that he hasn't had to put any “effort” into their marriage.

### *Parents' Marriage*

Bob said that he thought his parents marriage was “great,” but has been told by his older sister that his perception of their marriage was somewhat distorted because he was the youngest. Nevertheless, he remembers having a good childhood. His father had polio when Bob was a baby, so he required the use of canes. While his father wasn't able to play catch with him, he felt that he was a good provider for the family. His parents were married for 53 years until his mother's passing. He said that they had a “good solid marriage” and believes that they were committed to each other throughout their marriage.

In his upbringing, he felt as though he had a sense of family community. While his family wasn't very big, the closeness of the family was important, and this is something that he carried into his marriage.

### *Advice for Newlyweds*

Bob's first piece of advice was to be patient with each other and to "make up every time you have a fight. Don't go to bed without kissing each other. Don't sweat the small stuff, look at the bigger picture" and communicate with each other regarding finances. It's also important to have mutual respect for each other, which may mean not allowing stereotypical gender roles to get in the way. For example, he talked about a friend whose wife works as an electrical engineer and he is a stay at home dad, and how this works for them because there is no importance placed on who is making the household income.

### *Julia*

Julia is a Caucasian woman in her early sixties. She presented as a kind and caring individual. When interviewed, she discussed things that brought her to laughter and tears. I appreciated her expression of emotion as well as her candor in how she relayed her responses.

I met with Julia for two interviews. She called me a few days after the first interview and said that she had thought further about the questions and wanted to know if she could be interviewed again. With her contemplation of the questions, there came a further richness of information from the second interview that I appreciated having the opportunity to receive. The following is an account of both of the interviews.

### *Defining Happiness*

"I think happiness is appreciating each other and what you've got. I think happiness is the little things, please and thank you...drying dishes, hugs and kisses, all those little things." She also said, "We love each other, we care about each other, we're

friends, we play together. I love coming home to him. I love him coming home to me. I love his sound. I love what he smells like. I love to hear his footsteps...We have respect for one another. We trust each other and it's just happy.”

#### *Key to Long Lasting Marriage*

Julia believes that the keys to her enduring marriage have been respect, trust, communication, sharing, and having things in common. Their Christian faith has also been important. She said that they go to church together and this has been part of their family. “Worship” has been a part of their lives for all of marriage and she believes that it is “an important part of keeping [their] marriage together.” Another key aspect has been “enjoying each other’s company, doing things together, whether it’s going on a vacation or just having a picnic in the park [and] sitting around having a meal together.”

#### *Defining Love*

Julia defined love in her marriage as “a desire to share [her] whole being with Bob,” a feeling of closeness, wanting to be together, and sharing a faith. She also defined love as a gift of marriage that needs to be nourished and appreciated. She said that it’s a feeling that develops from first liking someone and having common interests that turns into something where you know “it’s right.”

#### *Significance of Love*

“You need love in your marriage.” Julia said that there are times when you may not like what your spouse has done or you may get irritated with them, but love can be something that helps get you through those moments. She also stated that “A relationship must feel so alone and empty without love.”

### *Changes in Love*

“My love for Bob hasn’t changed...it may have been deepened or strengthened...but I love Bob the same as I did the day I fell in love with him.” She said that the meaning of love has possibly changed since they were first married, but only because she didn’t really think about what the word “love” meant at the age of 23. The meaning of love developed over the course of her marriage, as they shared life’s experiences with each other.

### *Problems in Marriage*

Julia said that there haven’t been any major problems in their marriage. She talked about one point in their marriage during which Bob was working as an inspector and would often work late and cancel plans with her. Julia began to think that he didn’t love her anymore. She said that she eventually “blew up” at him in frustration. After spending a short time alone, they were able to discuss the issue and came to the conclusion that it was his job that was affecting their relationship. His job as an inspector was to look for things that were wrong. He had started to become more negative around the house and even in his interactions with their friends. After their discussion, Bob talked to his boss about the issues his job was causing in his marriage and was able to be moved to another position.

She also identified recent family stress as a difficult aspect. Her brother is an alcoholic and has dementia. Julia’s parents have not been able to check on him, so she has essentially taken over the responsibility. She said that Bob has been supportive and has been driving her and her parents to go see him. Julia stated, “He has been very patient and kind during this whole process.”

She said that they have instances in which they argue, but they are able to solve problems together. Initially, she stated that she will “clam up” and not talk for a while. They both take some time apart from each other and Julia said that they will go to the other, apologize, and give each other a hug and a kiss.

She also talked about how they have not had to work at their marriage. She described things that may seem like “work” to another couple, such as working through problems together, but they have “never felt that [they] have worked at their marriage.” She talked about going to a Marriage Encounter (a church sponsored retreat for couples) and one of the activities was to hold each other’s hand and give them a kiss. This was somewhat irritating to her because it was something that she and Bob do on a regular basis. It was just something that she had thought everyone did in their marriage.

#### *Parents’ Marriage*

Julia’s parents have been married for 61 years and “they still hold hands and take care of each other and are very concerned about each other...Growing up I don't think consciously I thought about their marriage. It just was. My aunts and uncles were married; my parents’ friends were married. [Marriage was] just something that was long-lasting.”

Her mother was a stay-at-home mom, but she also had a part-time job working in the school cafeteria and her father worked three different shifts at his job. She said that her mom would have dinner made for the family and would pack her father’s lunch everyday. Her father “was always appreciative and complimentary on the meals [and] he still is to this day...They care about each other.”

Julia said that it has been the little things about her parents' marriage that have influenced her the most, such as having dinner together as a family and going to church on Sundays. She remembers her mom and dad kissing before they went out the door and kissing each other when her dad came home from work, which is something that she and Bob have always done in their marriage.

#### *Advice for Newlyweds*

“I think it's important to be prayerful, whether you do it as a couple or individually. For us, that's important. And I think it's important to be playful with one another. I think you need to enjoy each other. Even when days aren't going so good, you can you can always find something good. I think you need to be thankful that you've been given this gift of marriage and the gift of each other, and I think you need to cherish each day.”

Julia said that she learned three things about men early in her marriage. She went on to say that she “learned that they don't want to be yelled at. They want to know that what they do for us is appreciated and that they are taking care of us. So, it's really important to...say thank you to them for...taking out the garbage or anything...The other one is that, they want to know that they satisfy you sexually.” She has always tried to remember that about her husband and thinks that it is important for a new bride to know. She then stated, “We can be wives and mothers and sisters and daughters [and] aunts, but above all we're women first and men like women to be women.”

#### ***Summarizing Bob and Julia***

In their first interview, Bob and Julia said that they got married because they loved each other. They had similar responses but not always to the same question. For

example, Bob defined happiness in his marriage as spending much of their time together and enjoying each other's company, whereas Julia described this as being a key aspect to their enduring marriage. And while Julia partially defined happiness as appreciating each other, this was how Bob partly defined love.

Both identified respect and faith as being a key to their enduring marriage, but each added further responses. Bob added patience, willingness to compromise, and keeping romance in the relationship; while Julia mentioned trust, communication and common interests.

Bob and Julia both defined love as wanting to be together; although Julia further defined it as feeling close to one another, sharing faith, and a desire to "share [her] whole being with Bob." They described the changes in their love similarly. Each said that the love has not changed, but that it has developed and strengthened. Bob said that the connection between them has grown. Julia felt that the meaning of love had developed over the course of their marriage.

While they had many similarities in their responses in their individual interviews there were some differences. For example, Bob described the significance of love as being "37 years of bliss" and how their relationship had made a positive impact on their children. Julia said that love was something that is needed in a marriage.

The main difference in their responses was in their discussion of the problems in their marriage. Julia shared an instance during their marriage in which she questioned whether or not Bob still loved her. While this occurred as a result of Bob's job responsibilities, he did not mention it in his interview as being a problem. Julia also discussed problems they encountered with family stressors. Bob, on the other hand,



mentioned their arguments about the computer as being a problem during their marriage. Even though he acknowledged the presence of financial stressors over the years, he felt it was not something that caused problems in their relationship. Despite their differences in what they discussed as being problems, they both described how they resolved their problems in the same way.

### **Philip and Alice**

Alice met me at the door and invited me into their kitchen where we sat down. Philip joined us only moments later and sat next to Alice. I answered any questions that they had about the process, and we began the interview. They are a very sweet, older couple who have been married for 53 years.

Philip and Alice met at a party for graduate students. Each of them had been “dragged” there by their roommates. Alice said, “Neither of us wanted to be there and...we were looking for someone who would not bother us very much. So we kind of paired off.” Philip continued by stating, “We were looking for the most innocuous people there because our roommates wanted to have a date and we didn’t. But we both had cars and our roommates did not.” So the two people who weren’t looking for a date found one.

They spent quite a bit of time together after meeting. They both had assistantships and were going to school part-time and working as faculty part-time. Alice was working in the university library and Philip was teaching mathematics. She would help him grade papers and they spent hours doing this. While it was an interesting learning experience for Alice, Philip appreciated her help and said that it played a part in their getting to know each other.

Philip and Alice got married two years later on the anniversary of the day they met. While initially Philip joked and said that they got married because of “boredom,” once the laughter had ceased, Alice followed by saying, “...from early in our relationship I felt that this was the person for my life and it was just sort of a sense of like when you try on the right shoe.” Philip said that it was important to have a desirable partner. He explained, “We both had proposals for marriage from other people and I think this helped too. When you get something that is desirable you feel better.”

Philip and Alice were an unconventional couple in their time. When they married he was 32 and she was 26. Alice explained, “Philip had come here from Greece as a student in 1951 and for the preceding 10 years he was fighting in the Greek army and in the underground occupation of Greece by the Germans...so his life was delayed by the war.” Alice was a 26 year old woman who was going to graduate school in 1953, which “was not the normal pattern.” She said that there were people who were feeling sorry for her parents who were going to have an “old maid daughter.” They did not allow this to bother them and Alice commented, “I had just kind of gotten used to that whole thing about the social pressure and had decided that it was irrelevant to me.” They also did not succumb to the pressure to have children. Alice said, “We had children when we wanted to.” Before getting married they decided that they wanted five children. They had their first child a month after their second anniversary and as previously decided, four children that followed.

Throughout their marriage, Philip worked as an engineer and Alice was what we now call a stay-at-home mom until their youngest child began kindergarten. She then worked in the family business for about 10 years and then returned to her profession as a

librarian. Early in their married life they decided to start their own company. They owned two companies based in the electronics field from which they have both retired.

### *Philip*

Philip is in his 80's and was born and raised in Greece. He moved to the United States in 1951 as a student. He is a kind, soft spoken man who was an absolute pleasure to talk to. He was not in the best of health when I interviewed him so I appreciated that he was willing to participate in the interview despite this.

During the interview he not only talked to me about his marriage to Alice, but he shared stories of his life and upbringing in Greece. As with most individuals in their 80's, Philip has a rich history and I am privileged to have had the opportunity to meet with him and that he was kind enough to share his story.

### *Defining Happiness*

Philip defined happiness in his marriage as being “peaceful” and “trying to help each other out.” It has also meant having a good relationship with their children and staying in close contact.

### *Key to Long Lasting Marriage*

Philip said, “I attribute it to the start of our married life, I was very dominant and since then it slowly changed and Alice is fully dominant now. I like it and I depend on her, and for instance, my pills, I don't know what I take, she does...I don't keep track of appointments or anything and I like it.” We discussed this further and how his description of “dominance” is more of a shift in responsibilities and being able to depend on Alice to help take care of his needs.

While they may have shifted roles in terms of who took care of whom, he said that they have always made major decisions together. For instance, they consulted with each other about finances and business investments. He said that they “always arrived at a joint decision.”

#### *Defining Love*

Philip described love in his marriage as “caring for each other [and] being pleased with each other’s presence.”

#### *Significance of Love*

The significance of love in his marriage has been “peace of mind.” While he said that love was a “very important” aspect of marriage, he did not elaborate any further.

#### *Changes in Love*

Initially, Philip said that he didn’t think that the love for Alice had changed and that it has been “steady.” He added that there has been “more affection and respect for each other; tenderness.” He also stated that while “some of the passion is gone” their love remains “very strong.”

#### *Problems in Marriage*

Philip wasn’t able to identify any major struggles in his marriage. He said that there have only been minor “disagreements” between them, but nothing more than that. They have worked through these disagreements by discussing them and compromising. They are generous in taking care of the other’s needs which deters conflict from arising. Also, given the struggles that he had living through a war, any disagreements with Alice were minor in comparison to the problems he experienced in his early adulthood.

### *Parents' Marriage*

While Philip stated that his parents' relationship was "very good," he also said that they were quarreling "all of the time." He attributed this to the war that was going on in Greece. He said, "We went through very difficult times...during [the] war...we had absolutely nothing to eat for months." He continued, "I didn't have anything to eat...and this produced, I think, some discord in my family, which gave me an example of what not to do." Philip said that he learned "to avoid quarreling" from his parents, but that mostly he was influenced by the love that his parents had for each other and for their children, as well as by the sacrifices they made.

### *Advice for Newlyweds*

His advice was very simple, "be tolerant...in manners and in quarrels; the acts of life everyday." For example, he said that there are "very few things" that bother him about Alice. But, when something arises he occasionally expresses his opinion but then ends it there and does "not create trouble out of it."

### *Alice*

Alice is a Caucasian woman in her late 70's. She is an intelligent and delightful woman who said that she believed my research would be "fascinating" and tried to imagine what questions I would be asking. In between interviews she said that she thought quite a bit about how her marriage has endured, so she was very thoughtful in her answers.

On the day that we met for her interview, she told me that she was going to be going to a funeral of a dear friend later in the afternoon. She said that he had died just before his 62<sup>nd</sup> anniversary and this had her reflecting on her own marriage. I truly

appreciated that she took the time to meet with me despite the somber occasion that was to follow later in the day.

### *Defining Happiness*

Alice began by saying that they have a “companionable marriage.” She went on to say “We have a wonderful history together; our children are very dear to us. We’ve shared ups and downs of their rearing.” Alice also described happiness in her marriage as “happiness, contentment, and...the satisfaction of having built something together that we’re proud of.” She and Philip are proud of their children and grandchildren and what they have passed down to them.

### *Key to Long Lasting Marriage*

Alice immediately began by saying “I’ve been thinking about that a lot since we last talked, thinking what I would say if I were writing a dissertation and the real key...is forgiving.” She first described forgiveness as a step of maturity and then in a spiritual way by saying, “We all make mistakes; we are not God and if I can’t forgive other people, then I can’t be forgiven.” Their spirituality has been an important factor and she commented, “Our church and our faith has been an important factor in our lives together.”

She also said that the manner in which they resolve any issues has been key. They take time to discuss things, talk about their feelings, and listen to each other.

### *Defining Love*

Alice defined love as “wanting what’s best for the other person.” She said that this is how she would define love for anybody and not just love in her marriage.

### *Significance of Love*

When asked about the significance of love in her marriage, she said “it’s the essence; I don’t know if I could live without it.” She described it as being as significant as the air in your lungs.

### *Changes in Love*

Alice said that there have been changes in love over the course of her marriage. “When we first met, I was charmed and attracted physically and we had a lot of fun together and we did things together and enjoyed one another’s personalities. But it takes a long time to grow into a more mature kind of love that kind of goes to the core; goes to the center.” While her love for Philip hasn’t changed, she loves him more now than she did when they were young, which she attributes to her becoming more mature over the course of their marriage. She also said that their love is “richer.”

### *Problems in Marriage*

Alice said that there was “never anything that was significant enough to threaten the marriage,” but that there have been “interpersonal struggles and decision making struggles.” She said that when they started their business, they had financial stresses that affected them for several years. During these financial struggles, she said that they would cut expenses and she would do things like make their children’s clothes.

When working through other stressors she said, “The things that were external to ourselves we would analyze and discuss and develop a plan and do the plan, sort of like businesses operate.” She continued, “The things that were internal, emotional things, sometimes we’d discuss those with each other; sometimes a prayer is an important factor

for both of us.” Prayer has been an important aspect in her marriage and she will “go to God with a list and...ask for guidance for ourselves and our children.”

### *Parents' Marriage*

Alice said that her parents had a “very good marriage [and] they loved each other very, very much.” She continued, “They were very strongly attached to each other. They worked together and played together and they rarely quarreled.” She said that her parents’ marriage “certainly had an influence because even just observing the way your parents related to each other is how you figure out how to be married.”

Her parents eloped because her mothers’ parents did not approve of them getting married. Because of this she said, “I have this image of the two of them sort of standing back to back against the world and fending off the other guy’s enemies so to speak...Somehow I just have this sense that they’d just clung to each other.” Alice feels similar to this and went on to say, “I just can’t imagine myself without my husband.”

Alice’s parents were married “their whole life” until her mothers’ death. Even though people had told her father to remarry, Alice said that he would tell people that he was already married. So even after her mother’s death, he still clung to her.

### *Advice for Newlyweds*

Alice began by saying, “The best thing you can do for your children is to love each other. The best thing you can do for each other is to love God and pray for one another. And don't bury the things that bother you.” She went on further to say that the most important thing is “to work, to talk over the problems...and to forgive.”



### *Summarizing Philip and Alice*

While Alice didn't specifically mention "love" in their first interview as the reason why they married, she did talk about feeling as though Philip was the "right person" for her. They had many differences in their responses in the individual interviews, but there were also some similarities.

Philip described happiness in their marriage as being "peaceful" and helping each other; and Alice said it was having a "companionable" marriage. Both discussed the relationship with their children and Alice described a feeling of satisfaction that they had built something that has been bestowed to their children and grandchildren.

Alice felt that forgiveness, church, and faith and the way in which they resolved issues was the key to their enduring marriage. For Philip it was the shift in their responsibilities during their marriage and knowing that he could depend on Alice, as well as being able to make decisions together.

Their definition of love in their marriage, the significance of it, and perceived changes in love were different. Philip defined love as caring for each other and enjoying being together and Alice felt that love was wanting what is best for the other person. Even though Philip said that love was very important and gave him "peace of mind," Alice felt that it was the "essence" of their marriage and didn't believe that she could live without it. Philip didn't feel as though his love for Alice had changed but felt that there was more affection, respect, and tenderness. He said that it remains strong. On the other hand, Alice felt as though love had grown into a more mature form and that she loves Philip more now than she did early in their marriage. She said that their love was "richer."

Neither of them identified any major problems in their marriage and each spoke about how they have been able to discuss and resolve any disagreements that have arisen. Compromising with each other has been helpful. Alice mentioned financial stressors but this was not something that caused problems in their marriage.

### **Tom and Jane**

Unlike all of the other couples, I met Tom and Jane prior to my interview with them. I met them during in my doctoral internship while doing my minor rotation in rehabilitation medicine. My supervisor facilitated groups through the rehabilitation unit in the hospital. One of the groups was the “Brain Tumor Support Group” and I was invited to come and observe. The group was for those who had been diagnosed with a brain tumor and their families. Tom and Jane were in attendance at the first group I observed and just prior to the end of my rotation, I spoke with them about my research and asked them if they would be interested in participating. Meeting Tom and Jane outside of the interview process provided me with an opportunity to see them interact with each other in the “real world,” which was one of the reasons I asked them to participate.

Tom and Jane are a fun, talkative, older couple who finish each other’s stories and sentences. Not only did they invite me into their home, but upon my arrival they invited me to have dinner with them. I was appreciative of their offer and we conducted the interview in their kitchen while eating a delicious spaghetti dinner. At the time of their interview, they had been married for 54 years.

They met when Jane was still in high school and Tom was in the Navy. She was 17 and he was 18. When describing how they met, Tom said it was “under the most

unusual circumstances. It was supposed to be a drunken party for sailors” and Jane followed with, “Well I didn’t know that!” Jane’s friend had invited her to the party, but she didn’t know what kind of party it was. She continued, “...neither one of us really liked that party, so he walked me home...2 miles in the rain. That's what really tugged that my heart.” A few weeks after they met, Tom was shipped out to go to electronics school, which was about 45 miles from Chicago where Jane lived. Jane said “He’d come down and see me on the weekend, hitchhike down and hitchhike back.” But when he was out to sea, they would write letters to each other and maintained a long distance relationship.

A year and a half after they met, they were married. Tom said, “The reason for getting married at that point was the fact that the ship was going to dry dock in Philadelphia and so we were going to be there for three months.” Jane continued with, “That was a time that we knew we’d be together.”

Tom and Jane were very open about the difficulties that they experienced in their marriage. One of these difficulties was the topic of children. Jane said, “I was brought up to believe that you had babies at the earliest possible opportunity and here I was, going on 21, and no babies. That just wasn't done because in those days women competed with each other as to how many babies they had.” Tom stated, “Life has never been easy for us and getting married as young as we did and then having kids right after I got out of the service.” Tom was focused on getting a college degree and had wanted to wait until he completed this to have children so this was a bit of a strain for him. Jane said, “I didn't try to get pregnant. In those days, this was before the pill and there really

wasn't an effective method of birth control, except staying apart.” So after their fourth child, they decided that they had as many children as they could handle.

Tom eventually completed his degree and worked in the electronics and communication field for the majority of their marriage. Jane also obtained her degree. They owned a school for a few years while Jane worked as a writer and at the time of the interview had just completed her second book.

Tom and Jane spoke in great detail about how they were raised and the difficult aspects of their childhood. This was something that they were able to relate with each other on. Jane grew up with a father who was an alcoholic and Tom had an abusive mother. Both of them had a parent who was non-nurturing. They talked about how this affected them not only in their adulthood but in their marriage as well. This will be discussed further in their individual interviews.

### ***Tom***

Tom is a Caucasian gentleman in his early seventies. He was very open to the interview process. Even in their couples' interview he restrained himself so that he could discuss certain topics further in his own interview. Tom was very matter of fact and was candid in his responses.

About 10 years ago, he was diagnosed with a brain tumor and was told that he only had 12 weeks to live. Despite this, he was determined to survive, which seems a pervasive theme of his personality. He has had many struggles in his life and he was kind enough to share some of his stories with me as he wanted me to have an understanding of where he has come from. I truly appreciated the fact that he was willing to share so much with me.

### *Defining Happiness*

Tom defined happiness in his marriage as “meeting all of my needs.” He clarified this further by saying, “all of my needs, not all of my wants.” He defined this further and said, “My needs are rather meager but sometimes your needs are putting three meals a day on the table and feeding your kids and having a nice roof over your head.”

### *Key to Long Lasting Marriage*

He said that his “tenacity” has been the key to his enduring marriage. He is a “problem solver” which was helpful during difficult times. This meant that he “made decisions based on Jane’s needs as well as [his] own.”

### *Defining Love*

Tom defined love in his marriage as “trying to spend as much time as I could in my free time with Jane, not running off with the boys and going bowling or something. It would satisfy me but it would leave Jane out of the equation.” He also said that “love meant a fair amount of sex” and they “had a good sex life in all aspects.”

Trust has also been a defining quality of love. He stated, “I think she had a lot of trust in me and I had a lot of trust in her.”

### *Significance of Love*

Tom talked about their sexual intimacy as being an important aspect of their relationship. He related this to his childhood and always seeing his parents fighting. He didn’t witness kindness or affection between his parents. Instead, he saw his “mother throwing a bookcase at my father...or insulting him with words.” He continued, “I didn’t want any of that, I wanted my life and my marriage to be more meaningful than that.” So he saw their intimacy as a way for them to show love for each other.

### *Changes in Love*

Tom didn't talk about having any change in his love for Jane, but said, "I learned that I had to share Jane with society." He discussed the years when Jane owned a preschool and how her much of her time was devoted to this. He had to learn to accept her responsibilities and that this "was what Jane wanted to do and it was meaningful" to her.

### *Problems in Marriage*

Tom stated that they had financial struggles throughout their marriage. For the most part, they were able to overcome these struggles through budgeting. He was able to cut some of their expenses by doing his own repair work and maintaining their vehicles. But the financial stress caused problems in their marriage because he wanted to be able to support his family. He said, "Jane was a dreamer and felt like you can live on love and you don't have to have any money or anything else. I knew better than that."

Early in their marriage, Jane had wanted him to take jobs that their friends were working at, like a brick layer or typesetting printer, because she thought this was a good way to make a living. Tom, on the other hand, saw that this would only allow them to make ends meet and was determined to get his college degree. Problems arose around his desire to continue his education. "We had a conflict with the kids coming along too soon because I didn't get too far in college when all of a sudden we had one and then, oh my God, here's another one!" So even though they had children before he wanted to, Tom remained determined and went to school on the GI Bill and worked full-time.

Tom "moved out on [Jane] twice." He said that she "was so wrapped up in the school" that he was feeling neglected in their marriage. During these difficult times, he

said that he spent a good amount of time writing to her as a way to express his thoughts and feelings. This had more of an impact and it was a way for him to ask questions to help them find a resolution. He takes responsibility for some of the problems in their marriage: “If I had my life to live all over again I think it would still involve Jane but I think I would be less unsure of myself...I'd be willing to speak my mind more so than what I did. I created some of these conflicts myself by feeling like I'm a loser; coming from a loser family you have a tendency to have that rub off.” Because of the family that he grew up in he was able to look at his own marriage and say, “it’s really not all that bad.”

#### *Parents’ Marriage*

Tom stated that his parents “didn’t have any relationship.” They argued frequently and his mother was abusive not only to his father, but also to him and his siblings. His parents were married for over 60 years until his father’s death. He still wonders why his father remained in the marriage and felt as though he should have divorced his mother. However, he said, “...if I didn't have that for a background, in today's world I would have been divorced really early on.” Because of his upbringing, he was able to see what “rough times” really were and during difficult times he could tell himself, “I think we can work things out.”

#### *Advice for Newlyweds*

Tom’s advice for newlyweds is to “talk about all of your wants, put them in writing if you can before you get married and also talk about what your needs are; and if you can't resolve those things, then you don't have any reason to get hitched up.” He continued, “...being single is not the worst thing in the world but being married to the

wrong person can be.” His last statement and piece of wisdom in the interview was, “Life is not all bad or good; it’s a little bit of both and you have to be able to look through the bad and the suffering to see the good.”

### *Jane*

Jane is a Caucasian woman in her early seventies. She is a bright, caring, and funny individual who was open and genuine in her comments. She was elaborative in her responses which I absolutely appreciated. Jane is a strong woman who has overcome many adversities in life, one of them being her battle with Guillain Barre Syndrome, a life-threatening neurological autoimmune disease. Despite the struggles in her life she is joyful and maintains a positive attitude.

### *Defining Happiness*

Jane said, “I think the main thing is that we share the same values...The outside world doesn't mean quite as much to us as it would if you took your happiness from what people think of you, or what things you have. We've always kind of danced to our own drummer [and] fitting in with the crowd is not our goal.” Their values have been their “home, family, [and] giving back” to the world. She also said that “hard work” has been an important value. She explained, “We've never known anything but hard work and to us work is play.”

### *Key to Long Lasting Marriage*

“I think the key is my patience.” She continued, “I think that tenacity and stick-to-it-tive-ness and the idea that it's not going to be all calm seas.”



### *Defining Love*

“I think love is wanting the best for your spouse and hurting when they hurt.”

Jane then talked about the development of love: “Love begins I think when you're young by a sexual attraction because that's the way God made it... But that deepens, that wears off and other things kind of deepen. And a lot of times you have to go through hard, hard times for that to happen.”

### *Significance of Love*

Jane said that love “made us stick through thick and thin.” Since they met when they were still in their teens, she talked about how it was a “magic thing...and its very exciting because you don't know any better” and they didn't take the time to worry about their future. She talked about some of the time that they spent together when they first met and said, “...we have some good memories to look back on and I think that sustains a person through the years.”

### *Changes in Love*

Jane began by saying, “We're more mature, we realize that there have been hard times and one of the things that we frequently say to each other is we are so blessed, because...there are so many things that could have been tragic in our lives that have not [and] that have turned out for the best.” She said that they have gained “more insight [and] more empathy for each other” and become more accepting of each other. Jane talked about how they have recognized “who is good at what and what the person could do” and that they have accepted these qualities in each other. She stated, “We acknowledge each other's strengths. We've learned to do that instead of just ignoring them and taking them for granted.”

She also mentioned her love for Tom became “realistic.” She said that she used to believe that Tom could do anything. But after he was diagnosed with cancer she had to take on many of the responsibilities that he had been doing. It wasn’t that the love for him changed, it was that she was placed in the role of a caregiver and the roles in the relationship changed.

### *Problems in Marriage*

Jane said that money has been a big issue in their marriage. When they were first married, their goals about how and what to spend their money on was different. Tom was focused on getting his education and completing his degree, while she was focused on having children. “He was more into looking solidly at the future which is what attracted me to him in the first place.” She continued, “After the uncertainty and disorder in my childhood I wanted something with order...and stability and I knew I could count on him.” But, despite the stability that she wanted she said, “we went ahead and had babies, which delayed his gratification beyond what he ever thought it was going to be” and this caused problems in the marriage. Jane commented, “He has put up with a lot from me, there is no getting around it.”

There were two instances when Tom left. The first instance was about 15 years into their marriage and the second was after 26 years. Jane spoke about this: “He felt he was not getting enough attention...[and] looking back on it, I see where...he needs more attention than the average man.” She attributed this to his abusive upbringing in that his mother was not attentive or caring. She said, “I think that he needs a whole lot of extra nurturing...He felt overcrowded by the kids” and was overwhelmed by both of their work schedules.

The separations occurred when all but one of the children had left the home. Jane had started going to school at that point and typically maintained a busy schedule, so her attention was divided. Neither of the separations lasted more than a couple of months. The first reconciliation occurred when they were expecting family to come into town and they didn't want them to know about the separations, but the second time they started dating again. Jane said, "...we went back to square one. That was kind of fun."

When they have gone through difficult issues, Jane said that it has been "time" that has gotten them through it and "just plain old toughing it out." She mentioned that adversity has only made them stronger and has strengthened their marriage.

#### *Parents' Marriage*

Jane described her parents' marriage as "My father took and my mother gave." She said that her mother was "very placid [and] very giving" and her father was "self-centered." Jane had a good relationship with her mother, but her father was an alcoholic who would often swear and get into fistfights in the neighborhood. Her father was eight years older than her mother and she was only 18 when they married. With the difference in age Jane said, "He kind of swept her off her feet." They were married for 35 years until her mother's death.

Jane "was brought up to believe that men know everything." So she said what she learned from her parents' marriage was that "marriage is what you do." There was no emphasis on what her options were, because there was only one and that was to get married and have children.

### *Advice for Newlyweds*

“When you’re in trouble, remember to go for help...Counseling nowadays isn’t thought of as a failure.” Jane said that it is important to “ask for help” and that “it’s possible to change.” She also said, “My advice to young people is to build your memories...Our memories fade with time and we only remember the good stuff, which is good. What’s the point of remembering the bad stuff?”

### *Summarizing Tom and Jane*

Tom and Jane were very open and honest about the struggles that they had in their marriage as well as their difficult upbringings. In their individual interviews, they matched each other’s responses when discussing the problems that they encountered during their marriage. They talked about Tom’s leaving and the reasons for this. Each talked about their financial stress and having different plans for how to spend their money early in their marriage. They also discussed the disagreement that they had regarding when to have children and how many.

They had a similar response in regards to the key to their enduring marriage; namely “tenacity.” Tom felt that it was important for him to be a problem solver, while also taking Jane into consideration when making decisions. Jane mentioned patience and awareness of the likelihood of hardships arising in the relationship.

Their other responses were rather different from each other. For example, Tom defined happiness as getting his needs met; and Jane said that it was sharing the same values. In defining love, Jane felt that it meant wanting what is best for your spouse while Tom said that it was spending as much time with Jane as possible, having a good sex life, and having a trusting relationship. The significance of love for Tom was being

able to show each other love through sexual intimacy, but for Jane love helped them stay together through the difficult times.

Tom did not feel as though there was a change in his love for Jane, but he learned that he had to “share her” and that she had other responsibilities that she had to take care of. Jane felt they not only gained “insight and empathy” for each other but that they became more accepting of the other’s qualities. She also said that their love was “more mature” and her love for Tom was “realistic” now.

## **Synthesis**

### **Commonalities and Differences Between Couples**

#### *Happiness and the Key to an Enduring Marriage*

Since many of the factors that couples felt were the key to their enduring marriage were also how they defined happiness in their marriage, I will discuss these issues together. The couple’s ability and willingness to compromise with each other was a common theme that was interchangeable in many of their responses. For example, Yvonne stated that “being able to compromise” was both how she defined happiness as well as what she felt was the key to their marriage.

At least one, if not both, of the spouses from each couple discussed that faith/religion was a key aspect in their relationship. Many of the spouses mentioned that limiting arguments and disagreements were both how they defined happiness and also key to their enduring marriage. While forgiveness was a common theme, it was mainly discussed when spouses were discussing the resolution of arguments or disagreements. Several of the spouses recalled apologizing and forgiving each other, and then giving each other a hug and a kiss. Even though Julia was the only participant who used the

term “communication” as being important, each of the couples discussed the importance of talking through issues, especially during problem resolution.

Several of the couples described how much they enjoyed spending time together and sharing common interests. However, while Chris and Marie enjoyed spending time with each other and sharing common interests, it was also important for them to spend time apart from each. Other common themes were patience, trust, and helping each other. Other themes weren't mentioned so frequently: sharing the same values, maintaining romance, being tenacious, being considerate of each other and showing appreciation, and respecting one another were related to happiness and the keys to enduring marriage.

*Love, its significance, and changes that occur*

The two ways in which most of the couples defined love in their marriage were the desire to be with their spouse and wanting what is best for them. Tom and Jane also included the sexual aspect of love in their definitions. Two of the spouses, Chris and Paul, had some difficulty defining love in their marriages.

Each spouse identified love as being an important aspect of their marriage. Several of the spouses said something to the effect of “it is why you stay together.” Alice described it as being the “essence” of marriage. Philip, Bob, and Chris talked about the significance from more personally. Philip said he gained “peace of mind,” Bob felt that love in his marriage had brought “37 years of bliss,” and Chris stated that had brought him “fulfillment.” Yvonne, Julia, and Jane talked about how love in their marriage had helped them get through difficult times. Yvonne and Julia were even more specific in saying that love had helped them look past some of their spouse's irritating qualities.

While all of the couples identified love as being an important aspect in their marriage none identified it as being a key to their enduring marriage and only Bob and Julia and Chris and Marie stated that it was the reason why they got married. However, either in the couples' interview or in their individual interview, several of the spouses talked about feeling as though they had found the "right" person or someone that was like no other. Alice described this in the couple's interview: "...from early in our relationship I felt that this was the person for my life and it was just sort of a sense of like when you try on the right shoe."

All spouses mentioned some type of change in love over the course of their marriage, whether it was the type of love, meaning of love, feeling of love, or development of love. While many of the couples stated that the feeling of love for their spouse had not changed, they talked about the development of love by saying that the love for their spouse had grown, strengthened, gotten stronger, better, tighter, deepened, gotten richer, or had matured.

Several of the spouses talked about the change in the type of love. They described it in terms of the physical or sexual attraction and "infatuation" that was present initially, but which was no longer assumed such importance in their relationship. Philip talked about how while "some of the passion is gone," his love for Alice has remained "very strong."

Julia was the only participant who discussed the change in the meaning of love over the course of her marriage. Reflecting on when she married at the age of 23 she felt that she probably did not know what the word "love" really meant but that this meaning has developed over the years.

### *Problems during marriage*

Only one of the couples identified the same problems that they encountered during marriage, Tom and Jane both discussed the struggles that arose from having children earlier than Tom had wanted and the resulting problems. They also both mentioned the instances in which they separated and how these were difficult times in their relationship.

While most of the couples denied having any significant problems in their marriage, when minor issues were identified by one spouse, typically they were not mentioned by the other. For example, Julia described a time in her marriage when she felt that Bob did not love her anymore. She shared that after they discussed the issue, they came to realize that Bob's job was affecting their relationship and they were able to resolve the issues through discussion. Julia also identified family stress as a problem. Bob did not mention either of these circumstances as being a problem during their marriage and only stated that they only had arguments about the computer.

As previously mentioned, most of the couples stated that they typically only had minor disagreements during their marriage rather than significant problems. However, even though each couple experienced some type of life changing event, this was not identified as being an issue in their marriage. For example, Paul and Yvonne had a premature baby who did not live and were advised not to try to have any other children. For many couples, this experience that could have damaged the marriage but somehow Paul and Yvonne were able to work through their loss and they did not even identify it as being a problem. Similarly, Tom and Jane both experienced health problems during their marriage. Jane struggled with Guillian Barre Syndrome and Tom became her caregiver;



then only a few years later, Tom was diagnosed with a brain tumor which meant that Jane became Tom's caregiver. For many couples, this would be a tremendous strain on a marriage. But despite the problems that Tom and Jane experienced during other times in their marriage, they did not identify the issue as causing a problem in their relationship.

While both Paul and Yvonne mentioned Paul's "controlling" and "protective" behavior as being a problem in their marriage, Paul made no mention of the other areas that Yvonne discussed. Yvonne discussed problems they encountered when interacting with family members; however, they were not brought up by Paul. However, the fact that he did not mention family issues as being a problem in their marriage does not seem nearly as significant as his omission of the occasions when Yvonne left. Even though these events occurred early on in their marriage, one wonders whether they were significant challenges that they had to work through.

Even though the other couples may not have experienced the loss of a child or were not diagnosed with life threatening illnesses, they too had life changing events such as the loss of a parent or sibling. In some instances, this can cause a rift in relationships, but each of the couples was able to work through these events without it impacting their relationship.

At least one spouse, if not both, from each couple talked about financial stress as being a problem during their marriage. While this was a common theme across couples, it was not something that caused a problem within their relationship. The couples shared how they discussed their financial struggles with each other and figured out how to manage their finances together. Tom and Jane were the exception, however. For many years in their marriage they had different ideas as to how to spend their money which

caused problems between them. However, eventually they were able to work through this by budgeting and discussing expenses with each other.

### *Significance of parents' relationship*

Each couple stated that their parents' marriage influenced them, in some cases positively and in other cases negatively. Within three of the couples, each individual stated they perceived their parents' marriage as "happy" marriage. Philip and Alice, Chris and Marie, and Bob and Julia all talked about the positive influence their parents' marriage had on them. Alice said that by "observing the way your parents related to each other is how you figure out how to be married." She and Philip talked about how their parents loved each other. While Philip witnessed his parents' "quarrelling", which he said he wanted to avoid in his own marriage, he was influenced by the expression of love that they had for each other and their children. Chris also mentioned the stressors that he witnessed his parents go through, but he too was positively influenced by his parents' "devotion to one another." Marie stated that her parents "set a good example" of "how you need to work together...in a marriage" and learned a great deal about the importance of compromise. As she and her mother found out about her fathers' affair just prior to his passing, she was uncertain about how this would have impacted the marriage. But despite this, Marie was still able to focus on the positive aspects of her parents' marriage.

Bob mentioned the difference in his perception of his parents' marriage from his siblings and how he saw them as having a "good, solid marriage." While his sister may have seen things differently, he was positively influenced by his parents and carried the importance of family closeness to his own marriage. Julia was the only individual whose parents were both still alive and married at the time of interview. Because of this, she

was aware of the influence that they continued to have on her. She talked about their continued displays of affection after 61 years of marriage and how this had been something that she and Bob had carried throughout their marriage. She also noticed the importance of being appreciative to Bob along with the “little things” like having family meals together and going to church.

The couples whose parents’ did not have a happy marriage, talked about what they learned from their parents’ marriage, specifically, what not to do. Tom and Jane both spoke in great detail about their parents’ long and unhappy marriages. Tom witnessed constant arguing and grew up with an abusive mother. While this had a negative impact on his life, he was able to compare and contrast problems in his marriage with those of his parents, and realized that it was possible to work through them. Jane grew up with an alcoholic father who was “self-centered” and did not show much consideration for her mother’s needs. She was brought up to believe that she should get married and have children and this belief caused problems in her marriage and was something that took she and Tom many years to work through.

Paul was the only participant whose parents had gotten divorced. Despite this, he witnessed an improvement in his parents’ relationship the divorce and that in some way, they remained devoted to each other because neither of them remarried. This realization, combined with his Catholic upbringing, instilled the belief in Paul that one should not get divorced and that marriage is binding. Yvonne’s mother was open with her and her siblings about her unhappiness and dissatisfaction in her marriage; consequently, Yvonne knew that she did not want to be in an unhappy marriage and that she wanted to marry someone that she loved.

Interestingly, the two couples who each described their parents' marriage as being unhappy were the one's who experienced separations in their own marriages. Even though neither couple talked about the possibility of divorce, they each struggled in their marriages. Perhaps it was easier for the couples who identified their parents' marriage as being "happy." They had experience of seeing what works in a marriage and were not left to decipher not only what not to do, but somehow figure out what to do to have a long lasting "happy" marriage.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

This chapter presents the findings in the context of broader literature and is divided into seven sections. In the first section, Summary of the Study, I outline the study's purpose and procedures. Next, in the section titled, Summary of Findings, I elaborate on the findings of the study. The third section, The Current Study in Relation to the Literature, discusses the current study as it relates to previous research. In the next section, Implications of the Research, the study's implications for couples therapy, contributions to the literature, and positive psychology are discussed. Then I discuss the limitations of the study and make suggestions for future research. I end this chapter with some concluding remarks.

#### **Summary of the Study**

The purpose of this study was two-fold. The first purpose was to examine levels of satisfaction in couples in long-term marriages and to identify what they perceive to be contributing factors to an enduring marriage. The second purpose was to explore the significance of love after 35 years of marriage.

Using a qualitative methodology and a phenomenological approach, I interviewed five couples who had been married for at least 35 years and who identified themselves as happy in their marriage. The length of the marriages varied from 35 to 54 years. Each couple participated in three interviews, first together and then separately. There was one

exception; one spouse asked to be interviewed individually a second time, which added a fourth interview for one of the couples.

Data collection and analysis was a collaborative process with the participants during the interview process as well as afterward, when they were provided with their transcripts. Data analysis included transcribing interviews, reviewing transcriptions, and making observational notations in my research journal throughout the interview and analysis process. I immersed myself in the data by reading all of the transcriptions and my notes. This included coding the data, categorizing the codes, and then identifying emerging themes. I wrote a draft of the couple's narrative, first describing the couple together and then each spouse separately. Once this was completed, each couple was given a copy of the narrative and was asked to make sure that they were comfortable with its accuracy. The couples were satisfied with their narratives and four of the five couples asked that only minor changes be made. These included small changes/additions to quotations and corrections to information (such as their stated age or spelling of their pseudonym). After all of the couples had reviewed their narratives and the minor changes were made, I summarized each couple by integrating the data from all three (and in one case, four) interviews.

### **Summary of the Findings**

#### *Marital Satisfaction and Contributing Factors to an Enduring Marriage*

Upon examining the data when each of the couples discussed their own personal experience in marriage, several themes emerged, including the ability and willingness to compromise, faith/religion, forgiveness, communication, spending time together, and sharing common interests. The couples described these themes in different ways. For

example, even though compromise was a common theme among several of the couples, not all used the term “compromise.” Paul described this as “just being agreeable with everything” and working together to come to an agreement, and while Bob stated that compromise was a key to his enduring marriage, he used the term “give-and-take” in his description.

At least one from each couple discussed the importance of religion or faith. Chris and Marie both mentioned that sharing the same religion was a key to their enduring marriage. Both Bob and Julia stated that their “Christian faith” and how going to church together had been important to them. Bob said that it “keeps [them] going” and Julia believed that it was “an important part of keeping [their] marriage together.” Alice mentioned that church and faith “has been an important factor” in her relationship with Philip.

Forgiveness was also discussed by the couples in different ways. Many of them referred to forgiveness when discussing the resolution of arguments. For example, Paul discussed the importance of limiting his arguments with Yvonne, and that when arguments occurred, they tried to resolve them quickly and forgive each other, which was part of their resolution process. Bob and Julia mentioned that they apologize, forgive, and give each other a hug and a kiss as means of resolving conflict.

While Julia was the only spouse who used the term “communication,” several of the couples referred to this as being an important aspect of their marriage. For example, Marie said that she and Chris are “pretty good at talking things through.” Philip and Alice mentioned the importance of communication when making decisions in their

business. Paul discussed how he and Yvonne talk about their finances together and decide how to spend their money.

Several of the couples discussed the importance of spending time together. Paul said that he and Yvonne do “everything” together and enjoy similar activities. Bob and Julia mentioned that there are few activities that they do apart from each other. Julia said they “enjoy each other’s company [and] doing things together, whether it’s going on a vacation or just having a picnic in the park.” On the other hand, while Chris and Marie stated that they enjoy each others company, they also mentioned the importance of spending time apart.

Other aspects of marital experience that were mentioned, but not as frequently, were sharing the same values; maintaining romance; being tenacious; being considerate of each other; showing appreciation, trust, and patience; limiting arguments and disagreements; and respecting one another.

#### *Love and its Significance after 35+years*

Eight of the ten spouses defined love similarly. Love was defined as the desire to be with their spouse as much as possible and wanting what is best for the other. Paul and Chris were the two spouses whose definitions differed and both had difficulty defining love.

Each spouse identified love as being an important aspect of their marriage and stated that it was why they stayed in their marriage; they also described it in their own unique way. Alice described love as being as important to a marriage as “the air is to your lungs.” Marie said that love is a “big part of why you stay together” and Paul simply stated, “If you don’t love someone, why stay married?” While each spouse



identified love as being an important aspect of their marriage, none of them felt that it was being “the key” to their enduring marriage when specifically asked.

All of the spouses mentioned a change in love over the course of their marriage, whether it was the type of love, meaning of love, feeling of love, or development of love. Several of the spouses discussed the changes in the type of love that they felt for their spouse and most often referred to the decrease or even dissolution of the infatuation that they initially felt at the beginning of the relationship. Chris stated that initially his love for Marie was “more of an infatuation thing” but that it changed to something that he felt as being stable and a “staying thing.” Marie discussed the physical attraction that was initially present in their relationship, but was no longer the most important thing. Philip also mentioned how “some of the passion is gone” from his marriage, but that his love for Alice remains “very strong.”

Only one of the spouses mentioned that there had been a change in the meaning of love. Julia discussed that this meaning has developed over the course of her marriage. She said that she had not really considered what the meaning of love was when she married at the age of 23.

Each spouse described the development of love in a different way. Marie stated that her love for Chris became “stronger.” Paul felt that his and Yvonne’s love had “gotten better.” Alice and Jane discussed the love for their husbands as having matured. Julia said that her love for Bob “deepened” and “strengthened.”

### **The Current Study in Relation to the Literature**

There were many consistencies between this study and the literature. In regard to the significance of love, this study found that love was an important aspect in marriage

and was identified as a reason for staying together. This finding was consistent with Roberts (1979) who found that love was an important aspect in long-term marriages, Goedecke (1982) who identified love as an important factor for couples married for over 20 years, and Riehl-Emde et al. (2003) who found that love was a couple's reason for staying together.

Research by Fenell (1993) identified 10 factors contributing to a successful long-term marriage as (1) lifetime commitment to marriage, (2) loyalty to spouse, (3) strong moral values, (4) respect for spouse as best friend, (5) commitment to sexual fidelity, (6) desire to be a good parent, (7) faith in God and spiritual commitment, (8) desire to please and support spouse, (9) good companion to spouse, and (10) willingness to forgive and be forgiven. Bachand et al. (2001) found that friendship, love and similar backgrounds or interests were contributing factors to longevity and marital satisfaction. Couples from the present study identified similar factors such as faith, forgiveness, similar interests, being helpful and supportive of each other, and trust. While the other factors mentioned by Fenell may have been discussed by a particular spouse in my study, there was less consistency with the other couples. For example, Alice mentioned being proud of what she and Philip have passed down to their children and grandchildren, but similar comments were not made by any of the other spouses. Similarly Jane identified that sharing the same values as Tom was an important aspect of their marriage. Interestingly, none of the spouses identified each other as a best friend or mentioned friendship as being a key to their enduring marriage. Also, none of the couples identified love when asked about what was the key to their enduring marriage.

Goodman (1999) found that intimacy (defined as sharing problems, enjoyment, and good times, and wanting to please the other) proved to be the most important positive predictor of marital satisfaction in couples married for at least 25 years. While this study's findings were similar (such as enjoying time spent together, communication, and wanting to help the other), intimacy, as such, was not defined by the majority of the couples as being the most important aspect of their marital satisfaction. This may have been partly the result of the open-ended nature of the questions and interview process as no questions about intimacy were asked specifically.

Sharlin (1996) identified the most important factors of marital satisfaction as being mutual trust, support, appreciation, respect, loyalty, fidelity, love, mutual decision making, and reliability. In this study, once again, with the exception of love, all of these factors were mentioned by various spouses.

While there were some consistencies in the findings between previous research and this study, there were also some differences. Riehl-Emde et al. (2003) found that love was identified as the single most important factor related to couples' overall well-being in their random sample of 201 married couples; however this was not the case in this study. While couples did identify love as being an important factor in their marriage, none identified it as being a defining aspect of happiness, nor mentioned it as being the key to their enduring marriage. In the individual interviews participants only discussed love when they were specifically asked about it. The discrepancy in results between the study by Riehl-Emde et al. (2003) study and this one may be explained, at least in part, by methodology. Riehl-Emde et al. used a survey method which provided answers for participants to endorse, whereas this study consisted of interviews and open-ended

questions. The Riehl-Emde study also did not specifically focus on couples in long-term marriages. Thus, it is uncertain as to whether the results of the two studies are fully comparable.

One of the biggest differences between this study's findings and the literature was that most of the couples discussed the importance of compromise and "give and take," which was not referred to in previous literature. While the literature discussed mutual decision-making as being an important aspect of marriage, it did not refer to the importance of couples' ability to compromise with each other. Compromise and what several of the spouses referred to as "give-and-take," was one of the main themes that emerged from most of the couples and was what they defined as happiness in their marriage. Compromise was also identified as being a key to their enduring marriage, and as a solution to discussing problems during their marriage. For example, Marie discussed "give-and-take" with Chris as how they "both gave a little bit" during disagreements. Yvonne said, "Happiness is being able to compromise" and she and Paul mentioned that compromise was also a key to their enduring marriage.

Rhoades, Stanley, and Markman (2006) have done research in the area of dedication and marital commitment. Their theory of commitment made the distinction between forces that encourage individuals to form and maintain close relationships and forces that increase the costs of leaving. In Stanley and Markman's (1992) terms these constructs are dedication and constraint commitment. Dedication refers to intrinsic interpersonal commitment and is characterized by a sense of working as a team or as a "we," a desire for a long-term future together, a readiness to give one's partner or the relationship high priority, and a willingness to make personal sacrifices for the good of

one's partner or relationship. Constraint commitment refers to the external pressures for relationship continuance, such as financial considerations (e.g., difficulty supporting oneself without the partner) the perceived low quality of alternative partners or lifestyles, values about divorce, and the difficulty of terminating the relationship. Constraints are believed to help explain why some unhappy couples stay together.

The couples from the present study discussed their commitment for each other. Chris and Marie spoke about this in their advice for newlywed couples. Chris said that couples should talk about their commitment to each other and make sure that their level of commitment is the same. Marie stated that couples "need to go into marriage with the idea that it's not disposable [and] that it is something...to keep preserved and have grow." Yvonne also discussed commitment in her advice for newlyweds. She discussed her personal experience when she briefly left her relationship with Paul and that she regretted that action. She stated that couples should not give up on their relationships, especially in the first years of marriage. Bob and Julia also spoke of commitment in their interview together. They mentioned that when they got married, there was never a thought that their marriage wasn't going to work.

### **Implications of the Research**

#### ***Couples Therapy***

As a therapist who works with couples I have already seen the benefit of this research in my own work and believe it may be helpful to others. I have incorporated into couples therapy my understanding of what has been effective for couples with long-lasting marriages and have discussed some of this information with my clients. Focusing on how a couple can add positive aspects to their marriage instead of focusing on the

problem is an important strategy in couples therapy. This approach is used in Solution-focused Marital Therapy where the primary emphasis is on assisting couples to make better use of their own strengths and competence. It is recognized that how couples conceive their situation will either empower them or cut them off from existing resources (Dattillio, F., 1998). Solution-focused therapy shifts the emphasis as readily as possible onto solutions in the present that will sustain healthier and happier goals in the future (Prochaska, J. & Norcross, J., 2003).

Attending to the positive aspects of their relationship was mentioned when Bob and Julia discussed the importance of appreciating each other in their marriage and taking notice of the “little things” that they do for one another. In therapy I encourage couples to tell each other what they appreciate about the person rather than focus on what the other may be doing that upsets them.

Several of the couples in the current study discussed their ability to talk to each other about their finances and how they came to a solution together. Bob stated that he decided to carpool and that Julia would make him lunches for work to help save money. Paul said that he and Yvonne always have a discussion before purchasing a “big ticket item” and Tom discussed the importance of developing and following a budget. By having a better understanding of how “happy,” enduring married couples managed their financial challenges, perhaps I can provide other couples with ideas about how to do the same. Since finances tend to be a typical stressor in marriages, I have discussed with couples in therapy that this does not have to be something that has to end their marriage and that there are ways to work through these issues. I have not only talked to them

about effective communication but have also focused on how they can do this while practicing “give-and-take.”

### ***Implications for Practice***

When deciding on a topic for my dissertation, I had wanted to make a contribution to marital research and began by delving into the research on divorce. However, this seemed disheartening, so I explored premarital research as I wanted to learn how divorce could be prevented. Through this exploration, I realized that little research had been undertaken with couples in long-term marriage. I believed that much could be learned from couples in a happy long-lasting marriage with benefits for those about to enter marriage.

Couples who are newly married could benefit from the wisdom of the five happily married couples in this study. Several of the couples faced hardships in the first years of their marriages, and it would be helpful for newlyweds to understand that this can be viewed as a normal experience and that hard times can be overcome. It would also be valuable for newlywed couples to recognize that all the couples experienced financial stress, but that this did not result in the dissolution of any of their marriages.

While it is unlikely that newlyweds or couples about to be wed would read about marital research or my dissertation, it is possible that research in this area could contribute to the literature on couples therapy. As researchers begin to focus more on the area of longevity in marriage, research can become more available to couples therapists who can in turn use this information to better serve their clients.

Two of the couples from the current study mentioned that they wanted their children to read this study because they felt that it had the potential to positively impact

their lives. Marriage affects millions of people and, for the most part, the majority of those who enter marriage want it to be long lasting. I have discussed my research with colleagues, friends, family, and even strangers, and many of them have expressed interest in my study and would like to know what makes a marriage not only long-lasting, but filled with love and happiness. While it is hoped that this study will contribute to the theory and practice of marriage and family therapy, more research should be conducted into the factors that contribute to long and happy marriages.

From my own perspective as a single woman who has never been married, this study has been invaluable. Before considering marriage, I will reflect on my study's findings. After all, who better to learn from than couples who have been together for decades, are happy, and still love each other?

### ***Positive Psychology***

Just before I began interviewing couples, my dissertation chair brought to my attention the field of positive psychology and how it related to my research. I was not familiar with this area, but as I gained an understanding of the breadth of positive psychology I realized that my research interests were much aligned with this aspect of psychology.

Gable and Haidt (2005) defined positive psychology as the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions. Seligman and Steen (2005) described it in further detail:

Positive psychology is an umbrella term for the study of positive emotions, positive character traits, and enabling institutions. Research findings from positive psychology are intended to supplement, not remotely replace, what is known about human suffering, weakness, and disorder. The intent is to have a more complete and balanced scientific understanding of the human experience. We believe that a complete science and a complete practice of psychology should



include an understanding of suffering and happiness, as well as their interaction, and validated interventions that both relieve suffering and increase happiness – two separable endeavors.

Psychology is not just the study of pathology, weakness, and damage; it is also the study of strength and virtue (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology grew largely from the recognition of an imbalance in clinical psychology, in which most research focuses on mental illness (Gable, et al. 2005). Much of the research in positive psychology developed from the focus of prevention studies. Prevention researchers have discovered that there are human strengths that act as buffers against mental illness: courage, future-mindedness, optimism, interpersonal skill, faith, work ethic, hope, honesty, perseverance, and the capacity for insight (Seligman, et al. 2000).

This study adds to an area of positive psychology that has not been researched in great depth. Gable et al. (2005) stated that in the field of close relationships, many studies have examined how couples respond to each other's misfortune (e.g., social support) or bad relationship behavior (e.g., criticisms and infidelities), but little is known about how couples respond to each other's triumphs (e.g., savoring positive events) or good relationship behavior (e.g., compliments and displays of affection).

There are researchers who are beginning to focus on how couples can improve their marriage. For many years, John Gottman and his research team have been able to predict in advance which couples will divorce and which will stay together by watching hundreds of couples interact with each other. He then has used this information to design programs that make marriage better. He also is apparently able to accurately predict which marriages will improve over the years (Seligman, 2002).

Gottman and Silver (2000) identified the “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse” to predict a relationship’s failure. These are identified as criticism (global negative statements of your partner’s character or personality); contempt (sarcasm, criticism, name-calling and hostile humor); defensiveness (way of blaming the partner and thus, escalating conflict); and stonewalling (disengaging from the relationship). While these were the areas that predicted failure, Gottman has also identified seven principles that improve a marriage’s chance of success. *Enhancing love maps* is each partner being familiar with others goals, worries, and hopes, while also remembering each others major life events. *Nurturing fondness and admiration* involves feeling that a partner is worthy of honor and respect despite their flaws. *Turning toward each other instead of away* is showing affection, humor, or support as means of maintaining emotional connection. *Letting your partner influence you* is the ability of a couple to share power and decision making. *Solve your solvable problems* is conflict resolution that involves five steps: soften your startup, learn to make and receive repair attempts, soothe yourself and each other, and compromise and be tolerant of each other’s faults. *Overcoming gridlock* involves opening up the dialog between each other. *Creating shared meaning* is a couple’s ability to speak candidly and respectfully about their values and dreams (Gottman, et al. 2000).

My research focused on the positive side of marriage. The intention of the study was to better understand how couples in long term marriages have continued to be happy in their marriage and the significance of love after decades of marriage. It focused on the positive aspects of marriage as opposed to factors that result in the dissolution of marriage. It is hoped that publication of this research will contribute to positive

psychology and encourage further research into factors that contribute to long-lasting marriages and what makes them work.

### **Limitations of this Study**

While results of this study suggest implications for current practice and future research there were also limitations. First, the sample contained only three non-Caucasian participants and all of the couples were in the middle to upper middle class socioeconomic status (SES). It may have been beneficial to have a more culturally and economically diverse sample in order to identify whether culture and SES influence how couples perceive love and happiness in a marriage.

Second, even though each couple had the opportunity to review their transcripts and their summary, it may have been beneficial to have conducted a fourth interview with each couple. This became evident after each couple read their summary and all but one couple asked for changes to be made. While the changes were all minor, it would have been interesting to conduct another interview to enable both spouses to discuss their perception of the other spouse's responses. In the case of one or more couples, an additional interview might also have clarified why they discussed different problems they encountered during their marriage. The best example of this tendency was when Paul did not mention that Yvonne had left twice during the early years of their marriage. An additional interview might have clarified whether or not this omission was significant to Paul, something that he merely forgot, or some other reason.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

All of the couples who participated in this study were in their first marriage. A study of couples in long-term marriages but who had been married previously would

provide a perspective about the differences in happy and unhappy marriages. Research in this area, although retrospective, would also provide a better understanding about feelings of love prior to an unsuccessful marriage versus feelings of love prior to a long lasting happy marriage.

While longitudinal research exists in the area of marital satisfaction, no research has studied changes in love over the course of marriage. In Chapter 2, I discussed the types of love: eros (physical passion and a desire for rapidly escalating romantic involvement), ludus (game playing, an aversion to partner dependence, attention to extradyadic others and deception), storge (emphasis on companionship and trust in relationship), pragma (pragmatic or practical approach to romantic relationships), mania (painful obsession with the love object and alternating experiences of joy and sorrow in the relationship), and agape (selfless regard for the well-being of the partner) (Lee, 1973). I also discussed Adams' (1979) development of an interpersonal relationship and the stages that occur: Stage One, Contact (strangers); Stage Two, Link (acquaintances); Stage Three, Tie (friends); Stage Four, Association (confidant); and Stage Five, Bond (intimates). Several of the couples in my study indicated that their love had grown, strengthened, or matured over the course of their marriage which suggests there are stages of love. It appears that the type of love changed for many of the couples, as many of them described the eros type of love at the beginning of their relationship but then described agape after decades of marriage. However, they mentioned that the love for their spouse had not changed, but that it grew deeper. Future research could study this aspect of love by conducting a longitudinal study in which one could identify the stages

when the type of love changes and the extent to which there is a continuous development and/or deepening of love within marriage.

When analyzing the current data an unexpected theme emerged. Several of the couples described feeling as though they knew their spouse was the “right one” before they married. While I have heard statements like this before, this theme was not something that I anticipated hearing from the couples that I interviewed, mainly because I had thought that it was just a cliché confined to classic films. But after hearing such sentiments from four of the five couples, it seems this might be another avenue of research to pursue among couples in long and happy marriages. For example, one could study how and when each spouse knew their partner was the “right one” and if this trend is present in most long-term marriages.

Future research could also study how the “right one” is perceived by a spouse. Is it merely a feeling or was it discovered through a cognitive process? Researchers could also extend this area of inquiry to divorced individuals to determine whether they identified their spouse as being the “right one” before marriage. If they did not, is this possibly a key indicator of divorce? If a divorcee is remarried, did they identify each spouse as being the “right one,” and if so what was the differentiation between the two?

In this study, many of the couples identified different problems that they encountered during their marriage than their spouses did. Future research could determine whether this is common in most long-term marriages and the extent to which gender differences influence whether the significance of problems during marriage are perceived or interpreted differently by men and women.

Finally, this study's focus on long-term married heterosexual couples could be extended to homosexual couples who are in happy long-term relationships. Homosexual couples may face different challenges in their relationships than heterosexual couples, and it would be helpful to better understand their nature and resolution. Since homosexual marriage is illegal in most states, the research could be focused on monogamous homosexual couples. With the possible changes in marriage laws and regulations regarding civil unions, the time may be ripe for such studies. Research in this area would enhance our understanding about the factors that contribute to long-lasting, happy relationships and thus contribute to the literature in this area of positive psychology.

### **Conclusion**

This study of long-term marriage has provided some intriguing information related to the perceptions of five couples who have been married for a total of 218 years. The purpose of this study was to learn from these veterans some of their accumulated wisdom about the importance of love after decades of marriage and to identify what they felt were the key aspects to their enduring marriage.

When beginning my doctoral program, I was not familiar with qualitative research methodology. However, as soon as I learned more about it, I knew that it was the methodology that I wanted to use in my research. By the use of qualitative methodology through a phenomenological approach, I was not only able to answer my research questions but gain understanding about the area of love and long-term marriages that had not been available previously.

On a personal note, I am grateful for the opportunity to work with the five couples in this study. I learned a tremendous amount about love and happiness in marriage from them. I feel as though this research has given me the knowledge to become a better couples therapist, which in turn has helped the couples that I work with. Should I ever marry, I am hopeful that this research will help me be a better wife, and that I too can have a long-lasting marriage filled with love and happiness.

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## Appendix A Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in a study on marital satisfaction and love in long-term marriages. The study is being conducted to fulfill the dissertation requirement for the doctorate in counseling education at the University of Denver. The study is being conducted by Rebeca Estrada, M.A. The results of the study will be used to learn more about marital satisfaction and love in an enduring marriage. The dissertation chairperson is Cynthia McRae, Ph.D., associate professor at the University of Denver, 80208, (303)871-2475.

Participation includes face-to-face interviews (one as a couple and one individually), to be conducted at an agreed upon place, for approximately 60-90 minutes. Additional contact may include communication around and/or review of drafts related to your individual experience to check accuracy and comprehensiveness. Participation will involve discussing aspects of your marriage and your relationship with your spouse. Your involvement is completely voluntary. You may choose to not answer any question during the interview and are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

All information gathered from this study will be confidential. This means that only the researcher and the dissertation committee will have access to the information that you provide. A code name will be used on all paperwork. Only the researcher will have the list that matches the code with your name, and this list will be kept in a secure setting. While your responses will not be identified by name, it is possible that your responses may be quoted verbatim in the dissertation and possible subsequent publications. The audiotapes of the interviews will be transcribed by the researcher. Audiotapes will be kept in a secure place, and erased at the end of the study.

There are three exceptions to the conditions of confidentiality discussed in the above paragraph. Any information you reveal concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect is required by law to be reported to the proper authorities. In addition, should any information in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena.

The benefits of this study include the opportunity to contribute to the improved understanding of how couples form and maintain high levels of marital satisfaction, as well as to identify problems that occur in marriage and how others may be able to overcome them. You may also enjoy the opportunity to provide information about your own experience. Potential risks of being involved include the possibility that discussing the struggles in your marriage may be upsetting. If this occurs, the researcher will arrange for a referral to a mental health professional.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the research sessions, please contact the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at (303) 871-2121, or write to the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208.

This consent form was approved by the University of Denver's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research on March 11, 2008.

You may keep this page for your records. Please sign the next page if you understand and agree to participate.

I agree to participate in this study, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to be audiotaped.

I do not agree to be audiotaped.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix B**

### **Introductory interview**

- How long have you been married?
- How did you meet?
- What made you decide to get married?
- How long was your courtship?
- How long were you engaged before you got married?
- Do you have any children?

### **Individual interviews**

- What do you feel is the key to your enduring marriage?
- How do you define happiness in your marriage?
- How do you define love in your marriage?
- In your experience, what is the significance of love in your enduring marriage?
- Has the meaning of love changed for you over the course of your marriage? Is it different or the same?
- Has the love for your spouse changed since you first got married?
- What are some of the problems that you have encountered during your marriage?  
How did you overcome them?

**Appendix C**  
**Mental Health Referral Information**

Adams Community Mental Health  
(303)428-7618

Aurora Mental Health Center  
(303)617-2300

Jefferson Center for Mental Health  
(303)232-8391

Mental Health Center of Boulder County  
(303)661-0433

Mental Health Corporation of Denver  
(303)504-1900

Suicide Depression Crisis Line  
(303)860-1200

University of Denver Counseling and Education Services Clinic  
(303)871-2528