Factors involved in marital stability

Author: Jana Jeralyn Podbelski

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FACTORS INVOLVED IN MARITAL STABILITY

a dissertation

by

JANA JERALYN PODBELSKI

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

May, 1993
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In the process of completing my dissertation, I was repeatedly struck by the idea that no matter how lonely I felt at times, I was never alone. Family and friends were very understanding of my declined invitations, mood swings, and idiosyncratic ways of dealing with stress, and supported me unconditionally. To all of them I want to express my appreciation.

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I. Factors Involved in Marital Stability

II. Jana Jeralyn Podbelski

III. Dissertation Chairperson: Dr. Bernard O'Brien

IV. Abstract

This study investigated factors underlying marital stability in twelve working class couples who had been married at least twenty years, and whose youngest child was eighteen or older. A qualitative approach was used to elucidate the meaning of each individual's experience of marriage, with a focus on gender differences. Marriage was conceptualized developmentally in three phases: 1) pre-child rearing; 2) child rearing; and 3) post-child rearing. A semi-structured interview was used to elicit information regarding initial attraction, expectations, roles, communication, problem-solving, handling interpersonal differences, child rearing, intimacy, sexuality, relationship variables (understanding, sensitivity, respect, trust) and equity with regard to each phase. The influence of external factors (finances, ethnicity, culture), religion, and participants' families of origin on the marital relationship were discussed as well. Nine salient themes emerged from the data: initial attraction, expectations, marital behavior (including child rearing), relatedness, values, finances, influence of family of origin, marital satisfaction, and change over time. Relatedness was the core category, encompassing eight other themes: positive regard for the relationship, intimacy, relationship variables (understanding, sensitivity, respect, trust), communication, style of handling interpersonal differences, marital conflict, equity, and sexuality.
Although marriages began as traditional, greater gender role flexibility developed over time. Men incorporated more expressive aspects into their marital role, becoming more affiliative throughout their marriage. Men also became more understanding and confrontive in dealing with conflict and differences through marriage. Couples reported an increase in relatedness, physical and emotional intimacy, equity, communication, and marital satisfaction over the course of their marriage. Values, finances, and their parents' marriage were important influences on the marital relationship. Implications for theory and practice were discussed, with suggestions for future research.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Marriage as an institution appears to be changing in form over time as it is influenced by social phenomena, including the women's movement, economic conditions, employment trends, mobility patterns, and mass communication (Altrocchi, 1988; Bjorksten & Stewart, 1984; Bowman & Spanier, 1978). Marital styles have become more diverse in recent decades, with an increase in dual-income marriages, divorce, remarriage following divorce, and couples without children (Bjorksten & Stewart, 1984).

Bjorksten & Stewart (1984) identified several trends that affect marriage. With the change in function of marriage as an institution for personal fulfillment rather than procreation, and the changing role of women and marital roles, there is more diversity in marital style and fewer role models for a particular type of marriage. Shared child rearing practices and a variety of parenting and child-care arrangements influence the marital relationship as well. Another trend is the increase in external pressures which impinge on couples and families, such as work demands, social and leisure activities, and extended families. This is especially difficult for couples trying to attain the goal of intimacy and high-quality communication, which are critical issues in the research, popular literature, and mass media (Bjorksten & Stewart, 1984).

Given these trends, the study of marital stability and quality has
become important. Marital stability refers to the intactness of a marriage, while marital quality refers to characteristics of the dynamics of a couple's relationship, including marital satisfaction. According to Bowman & Spanier (1978), "high marital quality indicates good adjustment, adequate communication, a high level of happiness with the marriage, and a high degree of satisfaction with the relationship" (p. 222). They stated that couples with high marital adjustment had little conflict or tension in the relationship, and an adequate amount of cohesion. In the past, it has been assumed that marital stability and satisfaction were interdependent; that is, satisfaction leads to stability and dissatisfaction leads to instability. There is evidence that instability leads to unhappiness, but there is also data suggesting that stability may not be as dependent on marital satisfaction as previously thought (Hicks & Platt, 1970).

There are other factors that contribute to the stability of marriage. Some of these factors include attitudes and values, marital expectations, social factors, level of development, and aspects of personality, many of which are present before the marriage (Lewis & Spanier, 1979). In their 1970 review of the literature from the 1960's, Hicks & Platt challenged future research to provide the descriptive material necessary to develop comprehensive theories of marital happiness and stability.

The general interest in gender differences in the literature is reflected in the study of marriage, particularly with regard to communication and marital satisfaction. There is a growing interest in the study of female development as different from male development (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1986; Surrey, 1984), and how
this impacts relationships between women and men, especially in marriage. Much of the research focuses on how couples negotiate roles, tasks, and expectations in their marriage. The little research conducted with the working class population reveals that marriages are traditional in nature despite various social changes and trends (Komarovsky, 1962; Rubin, 1976). Since the latest study of this sample occurred in 1976, it is important to determine if this trend persists in the 1990's.

Although research shows that gender differences persist throughout the lifecycle, men and women experience some degree of role reversal in older age (McGee & Wells, 1982; O'Neil, Fishman, & Kinsella-Shaw, 1987; Zube, 1982). If this is true in working class couples, it would have implications for adaptation to the marital relationship. Little research has been done using aging married couples (Moore, 1980). Rather, the focus has been on mate selection and early marital adjustment (Streib & Beck, 1980).

**Statement of the Problem**

The investigation of marital relationships has become an important area of research in psychology and the social sciences (Altrocchi, 1988). An understanding of factors which hold marriages together is of great concern, especially given the increasingly high divorce rates in the United States. This study investigated the changing nature of marital relationships with a homogeneous group of twelve couples from a working class background who were married for no less than twenty years, and the youngest child was at least 18 years old. The purpose of this study was to understand the factors that kept couples together as they progressed
through three stages of marriage, which were conceptualized as 1) pre-child rearing, 2) child rearing, and 3) post-child rearing. Marriage was examined from a self and object relations perspective, focusing on marital interaction in terms of communication, roles and tasks, equity of the relationship, and gender differences.

A qualitative approach was used to explore the phenomenology of the marriage dyad because it gave a comprehensive view, often with intricate details, of the nature of a participant's experience of marriage, which may have been missed through quantitative methods. In-depth, structured interviews were conducted with husbands and wives separately. The interview covered various aspects of the marital relationship as it developed over time, including role expectations in the marriage, perceptions about marital communication, decision-making and problem-solving styles, marital intimacy, equity, and child rearing practices. The influence of each participant's parents' marriage on the marital relationship was explored in the interview, as were external factors such as religion, finances, extended families, and ethnicity. The results of this study were intended to improve the general understanding of marriage. The data was systematically analyzed to generate salient themes and factors involved in marital stability.

**Strengths and Limitations of the Study**

The amount of detailed and rich information obtained from this study was a major strength. Qualitative methodology allowed for a meaningful exploration of material which was usually inaccessible through strictly quantitative measures, such as rating scales and paper-and-pencil
questionnaires. This data adds richness to the understanding of marital quality and stability obtained from quantitative research, such as the studies conducted by Lewis and Spanier (1979), Thomas and Kleber (1981), and Green and Sporakowski (1983). The grounded theory method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), in which concepts and theory emerge from the data, provided a thorough approach to analyzing the data. Strauss and Corbin (1990) noted the reciprocal relationship between data collection, analysis, and theory, stating that "One does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge." (p. 23). The emphasis in qualitative methodology on obtaining information from the individual's unique perspective was also considered to be a strength. This approach provided an understanding of complex material from each subject's point of view, conveying perceptions of the world as seen by each couple.

Qualitative research has often been labelled "unsystematic" or "impressionistic" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Strauss and Corbin (1990) discussed some limitations inherent in qualitative methodology. They stated that the standards used to judge quantitative studies (significance, theory-observation compatibility, consistency, reproducibility, precision, verification, and generalizability) "should be retained but require redefinition in order to fit the realities of qualitative research, and the complexities of social phenomena that we seek to understand" (p. 250). They suggested instead that qualitative studies be judged by the detailed components of the strategies used for collecting, coding, analyzing, and presenting data. These standards need
to be considered, but "undue emphasis on being 'scientific' is simply not reasonable" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.234) since the primary task is exploration and discovery of emerging concepts in phenomena that often undergo considerable changes. In qualitative studies there are limitations of the researcher to accurately observe events, although care is taken in considering his/her biases. In this study, data was coded and analyzed by a team of researchers, which addressed the issue of reliability and contributed to the development of a shared conceptual analysis of the material (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Collection of data through intensive interviews is time-consuming, and transcription of the material can be costly. Replication is a problem as well (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), for it is difficult to set up new situations with conditions that match the original study exactly, although major conditions can usually be reproduced.

Given the relative homogeneity of the population studied and the small sample size, the results of this study were not generalizable to the total population; the goal of grounded theory methodology is to generate hypotheses and not to generalize. This sample was comprised of primarily white, working class couples who were married more than twenty years, and whose children were at least eighteen years of age. The findings are valuable to researchers and clinicians however, in that similar couples can be compared to those in this study to build on generalizability, which Barlow, Hayes, & Nelson (1984) define as the process of "logical generalization". In addition, other homogeneous samples determined by social class, race, and ethnicity can be analyzed to see if similar themes arise.
Significance of the Study

This study was designed to elucidate the factors underlying marital stability. It contributed to a broader understanding of how spouses adapt to the changing nature of marriage in maintaining a commitment to the marital relationship for an extended period of time (at least twenty years). A qualitative approach provided a comprehensive and clear picture of reasons certain marriages last as long as they do, which could be further explored quantitatively.

It is important to highlight the significance of findings regarding marriages of middle-aged, working class couples. This study contributed to a better understanding of the meaning of marriage to these understudied groups, providing a picture of factors that influence marital stability. These findings will be valuable in developing a theory of marital stability, and have important implications for clinical practice.

Altrocchi (1988) noted that there has been a tendency for researchers studying marriage to focus on what goes wrong. He and Wilcoxon (1985) stressed the need to explore successful marital functioning for use in both theory and practice. An understanding of healthy and effective marital relationships is important in prevention, assessment, and clinical intervention. The factors that were found to contribute to marital stability could possibly be used as goals in marital therapy. This study focused on adaptive family relationships, with participants being selected from a non-clinical population. This focus on wellness factors is critical in both the education and counseling of couples, as well as for future research.

Most of the marital theory and research conceptualizes marriage as
progressing through stages with relevant tasks (Bentler & Newcomb, 1978; O'Neil, et al., 1987). Storaasli and Markman (1988) highlighted the importance of taking developmental stages into account when designing prevention programs and therapy for couples. Married couples could benefit from knowledge of how other couples experience marriage and cope with various issues at different stages of marriage. Counselors can also utilize a developmental understanding of marriage in planning interventions to address issues and tasks relevant to the stage of marriage of the couple. This study explored marital relationships through the course of three phases, focusing on the developmental process involved in marriage.

Despite the limitations of this study, professionals can utilize the findings with clients who share similar demographic characteristics. The sample represents a population neglected in marital research and in the marital theory literature. There are a number of areas in which clinicians can make comparisons, including roles and tasks, communication, problem-solving, equity, gender differences, and family of origin. Further study of different subgroups of marriages will provide additional information and add to generalizability.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Marriage has been conceptualized as a dynamic, changing relationship which continually evolves as each individual progresses through developmental stages (Bentler & Newcomb, 1978; Bowman & Spanier, 1978; Nadelson, Polonsky, & Mathews, 1984; O'Neil, et al., 1987; Zube, 1982). It is a complex interaction involving many factors, including each person's personality and background, cultural factors, and social or situational characteristics. In their review of the literature, Storaasli & Markman (1990) found that most couples faced common problems over the course of their marriage, including finances, communication, leisure activities, friends, sex & affection, children, and jealousy. The marital relationship is influenced by the feelings and experiences gained by each partner in their family of origin (Barry, 1970; Berkowitz, 1984; Calogeras, 1985; Demment, 1991; Nichols, 1978; Scarf, 1986; St. Clair, 1986), by cultural factors such as social class, race, and gender, and by patterns of communication (Markman, 1981; Noller, 1984; Yahraes, 1980; Yelsma, 1984). Recent studies have examined gender differences in communication and their effect on marital interaction as well (Barnes & Buss, 1985; Noller, 1984; Yelsma & Brown, 1984).

Historically, marriages have been assessed according to two dimensions, marital stability and marital quality (Hicks & Platt, 1970; Kelly & Conley, 1987; Lewis & Spanier, 1979; Spanier & Lewis, 1980). Marital stability refers to whether a marriage is intact, while marital
quality is a subjective evaluation of the marital relationship. The concepts "marital satisfaction," "marital happiness," and "marital adjustment" have been used to describe the quality of marriage. Problems in defining marital quality or satisfaction have arisen due to the subjective nature of this phenomenon. Several authors also highlight the lack of a theoretical framework and consistent measurement devices in the marital satisfaction literature (Hicks & Platt, 1970; Kelly & Conley, 1987). There is also controversy over the use of marital stability or satisfaction in assessing the success of marriage (Barry, 1970; Lewis & Spanier, 1979). Although it has been suggested that marital stability and quality are related (Lewis & Spanier, 1979), there has been no empirical evidence supporting or challenging this theory. Some marriages of high quality end in divorce, while some of low quality remain intact (Albrecht & Kunz, 1980; Lenthall, 1977; Lewis & Spanier, 1979; Spanier & Lewis, 1980). This study explored possible explanations for that paradox, focusing on the intactness of the relationship. No assumptions were made regarding the quality of the marriage, although information regarding marital satisfaction was elicited and will be discussed in Chapters four and five.

Marital Stability

Lewis & Spanier (1979) proposed a general theory of the relationship between marital quality and stability. They argued that the quality of a marriage was the primary determinant of whether it would remain intact. Marital quality is mediated by seven threshold variables:

1. Marital expectations
2. Commitment to the marriage and its associated obligations
3. Tolerance for conflict and disharmony
4. Religious doctrine and commitment
5. External pressures and amenability to social stigma
6. Divorce law and availability of legal aid
7. Real and perceived alternatives. (p. 273)

While they viewed the quality of the marriage as the best predictor of marital stability, they posited that its relative influence increased or decreased based on the presence or absence of two conditions which were external to the marital relationship. These variables are the level of a partner's attractions to alternative relationships (such as different sexual partners) and the amount of external pressure to remain married (such as religious identification and neighborhood embeddedness). According to Lewis & Spanier (1979), "Marriages of high quality tend to have high stability. This relationship is mitigated at times by more attractive alternatives, but conversely, it may be strengthened by external pressures to remain married, such as normative and institutional constraints" (p. 290). This theory implies that alternative attractions decrease the relationship between quality and stability by increasing the chances of termination of the marriage, regardless of the level of marital quality. External pressures to remain married reinforce marital stability. They posited that the number of alternatives to the present relationship and the extent of barriers to divorce weakened the relationship between marital stability and quality. Essentially, they suggested that either a low quality marriage or a large number of appropriate alternatives would lead to marital instability.
Lewis & Spanier (1979) also identified several premarital determinants of marital quality:

1. Personality characteristics of the future marital partners
2. Attitudes, values, and philosophy of life relating to both marital and nonmarital domains
3. Social factors
4. Circumstantial factors
5. Marital expectations of the partners
6. Social maturity level. (p. 273)

They suggested that these variables might have a significant impact on marital quality.

Thomas & Kleber (1981) proposed that alternative attractions and external pressures to remain married influenced the relationship between marital stability and quality in opposite directions than those proposed by Lewis & Spanier (1979). They suggested that the relationship between marital quality and stability would be higher in marriages with high levels of alternative attractions as compared to those with low levels, because the decision to divorce was influenced more by the quality of the relationship under these conditions. They also argued that the relationship between marital quality and stability would be lower for couples having many external pressures to remain married as opposed to those with few pressures, because under such conditions the influence of the quality of the marriage would be minimized.

Green & Sporakowski (1983) examined the relationship between marital stability and quality by assessing how alternative attractions and external pressures to remain married affected the strength of this
relationship. They found that marital quality was the most potent predictor of marital stability in their sample, and that it was more important for women than for men. Although their findings supported Lewis & Spanier's (1979) propositions for men, the conditions of alternative attractions and external pressures to remain married did not have a significant influence on the relationship between stability and quality for women. Their data provide qualified support for the theory of a positive relationship between marital stability and quality, as well as suggest differences in the way men and women experience marriage and choose to remain married. Further research is needed to validate the influence of marital quality on marital stability, as well as to elucidate the factors mediating this relationship.

Marital Satisfaction

Given the potential relationship between marital stability and marital satisfaction, some discussion of the marital satisfaction literature is warranted. The emphasis of researchers in the 1960's and 1970's has been to identify small groups of variables related to marital satisfaction, such as affectional rewards, role specifications, demographic factors (age, education, income, religion), sexual enjoyment, expressiveness, power, and companionship (Hicks & Platt, 1970; Spanier & Lewis, 1980). Research of the sixties generally established a positive relationship between 1) marital happiness and higher occupational status, income, and educational levels for husbands; 2) similarities of husband and wife with regard to socioeconomic status, age, and religion; and 3) affectional rewards such as esteem for spouse
(Hicks & Platt, 1970). Research in the seventies corroborated these relationships with one exception: evidence did not support socio-economic variables as strong predictors of marital satisfaction (Spanier & Lewis, 1980).

In their review of the literature on marital satisfaction throughout the life cycle, O'Neil et al. (1987) found a curvilinear relationship between marital satisfaction and stages in the life cycle. Marital satisfaction was initially high for young couples, decreased after the birth of the first child and continued to decrease through child rearing, then increased when child rearing ended.

Marital Types

Hicks & Platt (1970) discussed two basic marital types present in the United States: the instrumental/traditional and companionship marriages. Instrumental behaviors are typically associated with more social and economic functions such as cooking and household tasks, while affective behaviors (associated with companionship marriages) influence interpersonal attraction between partners by conveying affection, approval, and acceptance. The instrumental type of marriage is more traditional, with relatively fixed gender roles. The authority of God and/or husband tends to be emphasized in these marriages (Altrocchi, 1988). The husband role is more task-oriented or instrumental, while the role of the wife is more expressive or integrative. Variables described as important for marital happiness include “higher occupational statuses, income, and educational levels for husbands; husband-wife similarities in socio-economic status, age and religion; and religiosity” (Hicks & Platt, 1970, p. 555).
The companionship marriage places more emphasis on affective aspects of the relationship and personality interaction. This marital type emphasizes more flexible gender roles, equality in partnership, openness in communication, and a conception that marriages need to be worked on to be successful (Altrocchi, 1988). Marital happiness is a function of the expressive aspects of the relationship. Hicks & Platt (1970) described factors such as "estee m or affection for spouse, sexual enjoyment, companionship, and communication" (p. 555) as important to marital happiness.

Altrocchi & Crosby (1989) discussed some drawbacks involved with using the terms traditional and companionship to describe marital types. Each descriptor has either positive or negative value connotations, depending on the person's point of view. In addition, the term companionship may not be the best choice because companionship is important in any successful marriage (Altrocchi, 1988; Klagsbrun, 1985). Thus the terms traditional and egalitarian are often used in the literature. Marriages do not fit exactly into one of these types, but one type tends to predominate.

Wills, Weiss, & Patterson (1974) found that global ratings of marital satisfaction were based on particular spouse behavior. A sex difference was found for pleasurable behaviors, with husbands emphasizing instrumental and wives emphasizing affectional behavior from their spouses, which were the opposite of societal role expectations.

**Communication**

The importance of the relationship between communication and marital satisfaction is prevalent in the literature. Research on marital
communication suggests that there are differences between the way husbands and wives communicate in happy versus unhappy marriages. Noller (1984) suggested that an interrelationship between the amount, types, accuracy, awareness, and effectiveness of communication affected marital satisfaction. The amount of communication is not by itself a major factor in determining marital satisfaction, but it has been found that the amount of communication will decrease if partners engage in ineffective or punishing types of behavior. Behaviors associated with improving marital satisfaction include self-disclosure, being sensitive to each other's feelings, listening and responding, confirmation, and expressing respect and esteem, while those that lead to ineffective communication include lack of communication, responsiveness and listening, faulty behavior change operations, and criticism, arguing and nagging (Noller, 1984).

Various conceptualizations of communication have appeared in the literature. Some researchers focused on the role of disclosure patterns in marital interaction (Chelune, Rosenfeld, & Waring, 1985; Rosenfeld & Welsh, 1985), investigating the clarity and equity of self-disclosure as it related to marital satisfaction. Others studied communication in terms of conflict resolution (Barry, 1970; Birchler & Webb, 1977; Billings, 1979; Yahraes, 1980), examining the influence of the effectiveness of conflict resolution on marital satisfaction. Communication has also been discussed as related to intimacy. Rubin (1983) defined intimacy as "some kind of reciprocal expression of feeling and thought, not out of fear or dependent need, but out of a wish to know another's inner life and to be able to share one's own" (p. 90). White, Speisman, Jackson, Bartis, &
Costos (1986) suggested that communication was a dimension of intimacy. Demment's (1992) results supported a broad definition of communication which included understanding, respect, and trust. An increase in the quality of communication was found to be a factor in the overall improvement of the relationship through the course of marriage.

Communication is a two-way process in that messages usually have a sender and a receiver. The impact a message will have on the marital relationship depends on the extent to which spouses send messages to each other clearly, and understand these messages. Nonverbal communication is important in accuracy of sending and receiving messages in that misunderstanding may occur due to failure by the sender or receiver to take nonverbal aspects into account. Research indicates that couples with low marital adjustment have a higher rate of misunderstanding one another's messages than other couples (Gottman, Markman, & Notarius, 1977; Kahn, 1970). Greater misunderstanding seems to be related to sending (encoding) than to receiving (decoding) messages (Noller, 1984), and marital adjustment is more highly related to husbands' ability to send and receive messages than to that of wives, with high adjustment husbands making fewer errors in both sending and receiving communication than lower marital adjustment husbands (Gottman & Porterfield, 1981; Noller, 1984). It seems, then, that low marital satisfaction may lead to problems in communication, and problems in communication may lead to differences in marital satisfaction.

Several studies suggest that effective conflict resolution in interactions is critical for marital satisfaction (Barry, 1970; Billings,
According to Barry (1970), in happy marriages conflicts are handled more easily due to the husband's security with his male identity, which allows him to be supportive and conciliatory and thus meet the wife's needs for support. Birchler & Webb (1977) suggested that distressed (versus nondistressed) couples had a higher number of unresolved conflicts. Billings (1979) found that distressed couples made a significantly greater number of negative, and fewer positive, cognitive and problem-solving acts as compared to nondistressed couples.

Snyder (1979) found that a couple's ability to express their feelings to each other and their ability to discuss problems effectively were the best indicators of marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction appears to be positively related to behaviors such as sharing feelings in a clear manner, being empathic, expressing sensitivity to the spouse's feelings, confirming the partner, and expressing respect and esteem for the spouse (Noller, 1984).

The majority of studies have found gender differences in communication patterns (Barnes & Buss, 1985). The themes emerging from this literature are that males tend to be more instrumental while females tend to be more expressive in communication. Yelsma & Brown (1985) found gender role classifications to be more effective in explaining communication differences than biological sex classifications. They suggested that those with masculine traits and the positive feelings of androgynous people handle husband-wife conflict more effectively. Those who can access both masculine and feminine schema are better able to handle conflict management.
Adult Development

Freud is credited as the first theorist to emphasize the importance of childhood experience in later adult development. Freud explained development in instinctual terms, seeing optimal development as occurring when adults integrated early instincts into their sexuality. If this was achieved, the individual could then establish relationships with whole objects. The concept of an object began as part of Freud's theory. The object served as the target of a libidinal or aggressive drive, and was not necessarily a person (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983).

While the oedipal crisis was central in understanding object relations for Freud, object relations theorists examined developmental processes and relationships in the pre-oedipal period. Successful development is related to satisfying early human relationships rather than gratification of instincts. Object relations theorists investigate the formation and differentiation of inner psychological structures (images of self and the other, the object) and how these structures are manifested in interpersonal relationships (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983). They focus on the relationships in early life that leave a lasting impression on individuals and their relationships with others. In building upon traditional Freudian theory, object relations theory examines the influence of external objects, the parents and significant people in the child's world, on the development of the internal psychic organization. Personality develops through internalization, a process in which a person transforms interactions and characteristics of his/her environment into inner structures. There are two frames of reference: the external world containing observable objects, and the internal psychic world of mental
representations of objects. The object relations model examines the psychological representations of relationships, past and present, and how early experiences influence current psychic and social functioning.

Erikson (1950) provided a perspective on development which incorporated many of Freud's ideas. His theory is both psychosocial and psychoanalytic in orientation, and is based on the premise that psychological development is the result of an interaction between the individual's biological needs and the social forces encountered in everyday life. According to Erikson (1950), development proceeds through eight stages over the entire lifespan. At each stage, the individual is confronted with a basic crisis, which can be resolved in one of two ways. These include: trust vs. mistrust (age 0-2); autonomy vs. shame and doubt (2-4); initiative vs. guilt (4-6); industry vs. inferiority (7-11); identity vs. diffusion (12-18); intimacy vs. isolation (18-30); generativity vs. stagnation (30-60); and integrity vs. despair (60 and above). Successful development occurs through resolution of each crisis, which results in the progression to the next developmental stage.

Most studies of development have focused on the experience of men (Surrey, 1984). Probably the most well-known is Levinson's (1978) study of adult male development. His sample included 40 men between the ages of 35 and 45, with different social class backgrounds, educational levels, and racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. They were divided into four occupational groups. The key concept in Levinson's (1978) model is the "life structure", which is the "basic pattern or design of a person's life at any given time" (p. 41). The life structure evolves through a sequence of periods throughout the adult years. This sequence "consists of a series of
alternating stable (structure-building) periods and transitional (structure-changing) periods” (Levinson, 1978, p.49). This theory was influenced by Erikson and included mastery of age-related developmental tasks at each stage.

Another study of adult male development was conducted by Vaillant (1977). His research followed a sample of 268 Harvard freshmen longitudinally over a 30-year period, and was based on Erikson's (1950) stage model. Vaillant (1977) developed a hierarchy of ego defenses, or adaptive mechanisms, that “[could] be used to predict adult growth and to define mental health” (p. 370).

While both Levinson (1978) and Vaillant (1977) recognized the importance of interpersonal relationships in the process of development of men, their focus was more on career development. These, as do most developmental theories, emphasize the importance of the achievement of a separate and autonomous identity or sense of self, which stresses separation from early relationships. Mahler, for example, thought that an infant was originally in a state of psychological fusion with the mother, and worked toward a gradual process of separation and individuation throughout development (Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975).

Although to date there is no well-known longitudinal study of female adult development, several theorists posit a different course of development for women (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1986; Surrey, 1984). For those studying women's experience, an “inner sense of connection to others is a central organizing feature of women's development” (Miller, 1988, p. 2). Miller (1988) summarized this popular current view, stating that “woman's sense of self and worth is grounded
in the ability to make and maintain relationships" (p. 2).

Chodorow (1978) used an object relations orientation to explain gender development and differences. She asserted that women's personality development was related to identification processes and changes in the ego's internal object relations. Situations occur differently for girls and boys due to the differences in the nature of the early mother-child relationships for each. From infancy, the process of development includes forming attachments, internalization of external representations, and identification with significant people. The mother, who is traditionally the primary caretaker, is the object of an infant's first major attachment. The first identification for both girls and boys is with the mother as well.

According to Chodorow (1978), the idea that females are similar to the primary love object (mother), while males are different, leads both to have different pre-oedipal experiences. The female enters the conflict with a definition of self as similar to mother, so does not have to forfeit her in resolution of the conflict, thus the self is less exclusive and can develop closer bonds. The male, however, enters the conflict with a definition of self as different from mother, and develops a self through rejection of the primary love object. Thus, males and females develop different relational capacities. Girls define and experience themselves as continuous with others, with more flexible ego boundaries. Boys, on the other hand, define themselves as separate and distinct, with more rigid ego boundaries and differentiation. Males repress their more nurturant capacities. The basic feminine sense of self, then, is connected to the world of human relationships, while the basic masculine sense of
self is separate.

Connection and separation then become recurring themes throughout the life cycle. When one enters an intimate relationship such as marriage, "the conflict between wanting to be one with another and the desire for an independent, autonomous self" (Rubin, 1983, p. 52) resurfaces. How women and men negotiate this struggle in relating with one another becomes an issue in marriage.

Chodorow (1978) discussed her theory in terms of roles in the family. Women's roles are concerned with personal affective ties and are basically familial. In contrast, men's roles, as defined by society, are basically not familial. Although men assume the roles of husband and father, ideas about masculinity come primarily from their nonfamilial roles. Women's relatedness defines them as embedded in social interactions and relationships in ways that men are not, given their denial of relation. Thus, early development prepares men for their less affective role in marital and family relationships, as well as for participation in the impersonal world of work.

Self-in-Relation Theory (Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1986; Surrey, 1984) "makes an important shift in emphasis from separation to relationship as the basis for self-experience and development" (Surrey, 1984, p. 2). This theory explores the early mother-daughter relationship as the model for the development of empathy in women. According to Surrey (1984), "the assumption is that the self is organized and developed through practice in relationships where the goal is the increasing development of mutually empathic relationships" (p. 3).

Gilligan (1982) used a relational perspective to explain gender
development. In discussing how relationships are experienced differently by men and women, she also viewed masculinity as defined through separation and femininity as defined through attachment. Given this, "male gender identity is threatened by intimacy, while female gender identity is threatened by separation. Thus, males tend to have difficulty with relationships, while females tend to have problems with individuation." (Gilligan, 1987, p. 449).

Miller (1986) also focused on differences between men and women, and viewed gender development in terms of dominance and subordination. According to Miller,

Women have been in a subservient position... thus, it is necessary to look first at women as "unequals" or subordinates. But it is immediately apparent, too, that women's position cannot be understood solely in terms of inequality... Women have played a specific role in male-lead society in ways no other suppressed groups have done. They have been entwined with men in intimate and intense relationships, creating the milieu - the family - in which the human mind as we know it has been formed. (p. 1)

Miller, like Chodorow and Gilligan, asserted that the parameters of male and female development were different. According to Miller (1986), men and women begin life attached to others, but men are encouraged to move out of this state of affiliation to focus on other factors, such as power or skills, while women are encouraged to remain in this state. Men are pulled toward other people both emotionally and sexually, but have developed barriers against this pull. Miller suggested that men pulled back out of a false fear that they would lose their status of manhood.
"This threat... is the deeper one that equality poses, for it is perceived erroneously not as equality only but as a total stripping of the person" (Miller, 1986, p. 23).

Early training and experience are both important factors in the development of gender-role identification. Sex-role development thus involves biological and psychological factors, in addition to socialization processes. Historically there has been a tendency to employ sexual stereotypes for both males and females, with men being self-sufficient, independent, and aggressive, and women being nurturing, dependent, and expressive of emotion. Thus men have been identified as better suited for certain tasks such as being the provider, than women, who have been identified as housekeepers and childbearers. Stereotypically, men have been identified with the work role and women with the ability to love.

Bem (1987) developed a theory of androgyny in the 1970's which proposed that masculinity and femininity were two different dimensions rather than opposite ends of the same dimension. Androgyny refers to people who are high in both feminine and masculine traits. She hypothesized that an individual with both masculine and feminine traits would be able to function more flexibly than sex-stereotyped individuals, which would be the ideal. In the late 1980's, she revised her theory, agreeing with critics who pointed out that masculinity and femininity were not independent variables. In her work on gender schema theory, Bem (1987) argued that these traits were the product of a belief system that organized the world into feminine and masculine components. Sex typing derives from gender-schematic processing, a "generalized readiness on the part of the child to encode and to organize information,
including information about the self, according to the culture's definitions of maleness and femaleness" (Bem, 1987, p. 231). According to this theory, gender has become a primary cognitive schema or category because culture has made it so. Gender schema theory proposes that society should de-emphasize the importance of the gender dichotomy, no longer linking human behaviors and personality characteristics with gender. Thus, gender would be defined only in biological terms; femaleness and maleness would be attributed to genitalia.

It is generally accepted in the literature that gender differences between men and women continue throughout the lifespan (McGee & Wells, 1982; O'Neil et al., 1987; Zube, 1982). Interestingly, there is evidence that men become more affiliative and less mastery-oriented in old age, while older women become more assertive and interested in self-fulfillment (Hyde & Phillips, 1979; McGee & Wells, 1982; Zube, 1982). As men face retirement and work is no longer central for them, ambition and accomplishment are no longer the focus, and men move toward interpersonal commitment and the maintenance of a comfortable lifestyle with their wives. Conversely, the older woman's focus may turn away from the family at the same time the husband turns toward it, as child rearing ends and her role as mother is not a prominent focus. The older woman desires to develop commitments outside the family and become involved with activities to foster personal growth (Zube, 1982). Although the reasons underlying these changes were unclear, Zube offered a few explanations. One possibility is that the change is part of the normal aging process and the environmental circumstances which occur. Another explanation is that "sex-linked trait changes are adaptive and that sex-
role flexibility is associated with a more general flexibility and adaptability and with successful aging" (Zube, 1982, p. 150). A last possibility is that as people age, they adhere less to the cultural norms that dictate male and female traits, and more to "survival oriented traits" (Zube, 1982, p. 150), which may conflict with these norms.

**Marital Roles and Equity**

Prochaska & Prochaska (1978) attributed problems that arise in couples' trying to gain a more egalitarian marriage to female and male role training. Women do not get effective training in assertiveness and negotiation to prepare them for the role of a wife. Similarly, intense intimate communication skills are not typically reinforced in the male socialization process.

Research suggests that principles of equity theory operate in marital and other intimate relationships (Schaefer & Keith, 1981). This theory states that in determining equity, each person evaluates his/her contributions (inputs) and/or consequences (outcomes) in the relationship. Inequity is the result of an individual's outcomes being either higher or lower than the partner's. To become an equitable relationship, one can increase or decrease his/her own or the spouse's inputs or outcomes (Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978).

Gray-Little & Burks (1983) reported that research supports the idea that power relations are an important aspect of marital satisfaction. In their examination of the literature, they found that egalitarian marriages had the highest levels of marital satisfaction, while the least marital satisfaction appeared in couples where the wife seemed to be dominant.
While factors such as needs, attitudes about the spouse and the marriage, decision-making, and sex-role expectations affect partners' perception of equity in the relationship, further research is needed to determine how these factors interact and influence marital stability and satisfaction.

Research shows that women and men have different role expectations in marriage, with men tending to have more traditional expectations (Komarovsky, 1973; Mason & Bumpass, 1975; Osmond & Martin, 1975; Rubin, 1976). Hiller & Philliber (1986) examined the marital role expectations and perceptions of the spouse's role expectations with regard to household tasks, childcare, money management, and earning income in a dual-career, middle class sample. They were particularly interested in determining whether spouses actually held different expectations, or they believed that they had different expectations than their spouses. They found that contemporary marriages are still heavily influenced by traditional expectations about role responsibilities. Their results indicated that 1) although husbands and wives were interested in expanding their marital roles to include non-traditional activities, they did not want to give up their own traditional gender roles; 2) accurate perception of spouse's expectations occurred approximately fifty percent of the time, with husbands being more accurate than wives; 3) marriage partners believed that they held more responsibility for household tasks than their spouses thought they did; 4) spouses' views of their partners' expectations significantly influenced their behavior; and 5) husbands' perceptions had a significantly larger impact on gender role performance. These researchers identified equity in the distribution of costs and rewards
within the relationship as the underlying issue for each partner. Although they stated that differences in role expectations were critical to couples' ability to negotiate roles and ultimately to their marital stability, they failed to elaborate how this occurred.

Schafer & Keith (1981) suggested that equity might be related to marital adjustment. Their data indicated that perceived equity in roles for husbands and wives increased throughout the life cycle, while inequity decreased. When it was considered to be inequitable, most spouses regarded their marriage to be imbalanced in their favor. They also found that marital satisfaction and adjustment were greater in marriages perceived as equitable. Again, the idea that perceived equity is a factor in marital stability needs empirical support.

Marital Development

Marriage, given its social nature, can be viewed from an object relations perspective. Each individual develops a self through relationships within his/her family of origin and in turn relates to others in a characteristic way. Individuals use objects in intimate interpersonal relationships in an attempt to resolve and master internal intrapsychic issues that develop from early relationships within their families of origin (Berkowitz, 1984).

Ego development in marriage is influenced by the ego development of each partner. Mackey (1985) stated:

The meaning and value of a marriage will vary according to the developmental needs of each person and how these needs are met through the symmetrical and complementary valencies within their
relationship ... The more complete the internalization process and the higher the level of ego organization, the more equipped are individuals to psychologically form and maintain a mutually empathic and symmetrical relationship. (p. 117)

Moore (1980) stated that ego development was related to the quality of marital interaction, and the type of relationship that grew from the marriage was a function of each partner's level of ego development throughout the marriage. Marriage, as a developmental process, can provide the opportunity to work through earlier developmental issues to achieve a higher level of integration. Conversely, marriage can also be the vehicle to re-enact maladaptive themes from early significant interactions, maintaining unresolved internal difficulties.

Marital development is often seen as paralleling family development; marital patterns occur within family structure. Theories of family development posit a series of stages families go through, involving developmental changes that occur with life events such as marriage, parenthood, the last child leaving home, and retirement (Storaasli & Markman, 1990). How spouses deal with these transitions has implications for the marital relationship, in terms of factors previously identified (communication, tasks and responsibilities, roles).

**Working Class Marriage**

Komarovsky (1962) and Rubin (1976) conducted the only comprehensive phenomenological studies of the experience of working class families, with a focus on marital relationships. Both researchers sought to explore the nature and quality of life for "ordinary Americans"
(Rubin, 1976, p. 5), those employed in blue-collar jobs and living in stable families, with the underlying assumption that quality of life was related to class position. This population was, and remains, under-represented in the literature.

Following a brief description of each sample, basic conclusions of both studies will be discussed. Komarovsky's (1962) sample consisted of 58 white, primarily Protestant couples, with a high school education or less, who had at least one child and were not over the age of 40. Rubin (1976) studied 50 white couples, all having no more than a high school education, with the husband working in a blue-collar occupation, the wife being under 40 years of age, and the presence of at least one child under the age of twelve. A comparison group of 25 professional middle class couples were also interviewed, differing from the working class group only in education and occupation. These men were all in professional occupations and both the husbands and wives had at least a college education. The case study method was used in both research projects.

Similar themes arose in these studies. The general structure of the working class marriage was traditional in nature, with the husband being the provider and the wife the homemaker. Rubin (1976) attributed this in part to the social structure in that working class families made more rigid sex-role distinctions in early childhood. Boys were discouraged from relating to their expressive side, and girls from their aggressive side. Whether the women worked outside the home was often determined by financial need rather than personal choice, and was mostly dependent on the man's job stability.

The division of labor within the marriage was traditional in nature.
In general, men did the outside work and women did the inside work. When household chores or child rearing was shared, it was usually referred to as the husband helping the wife. Related to this, Rubin (1976) found that decision-making was largely divided among traditional lines as well, with women in charge of most decisions related to household issues and child rearing. Even when issues were mutually discussed, if a difference remained it was the man who made the final decision.

These traditional norms also influenced intimacy and communication in the marriage. Intimacy, companionship, the demand for better communication, and sharing were newer concepts for the working class. While many couples had accepted the goal of companionship in marriage, they lacked the means to achieve it (Komarovsky, 1962). They knew that husbands and wives should talk to each other, but did not know what to say. "Despite the yearning for more, relations between husband and wife are benumbed, filled with silence..." (Rubin, 1976, p. 123). Although working class families were exposed to societal changes such as this, they did not learn adaptive strategies to deal with the changes. As Rubin (1976) pointed out, there were no models of these behaviors and attitudes in the families of these couples growing up. Although there was some sharing and companionship, women reported wanting more in their interactions with their husbands. When the psychological intimacy was not satisfying, some men and many more women turned to friendships outside of the marriage, which sometimes created conflict in the marriage, mostly for men (Komarovsky, 1962). Komarovsky (1962) also found dissatisfaction with marital communication.

Joint social activities played a smaller part in the leisure activities
of the working class than it did with the middle class. In general, leisure
time was mostly spent with the family or in family-related activities
(Rubin, 1976). This may in part have been due to financial limitations.
Rubin (1976) asserted that working class men sought leisure activities
that helped to affirm their identity and sense of worth since their work
did not promote these qualities. Thus, these men tended to be "do-it-
yourselfers" (Rubin, 1976, p. 188), as opposed to middle class men who
were more sports-oriented in leisure. Active participation in community
organizations was rare in both samples, with women being more likely
than men to be involved in such organizations (Komarovsky, 1962).
Women were also more involved socially with their families in both
studies.

Rubin (1976) reported that most of the people in her sample were
ambivalent about the quality of their leisure lives, often longing for
more, but limited by financial and other factors. Social life with friends
decayed with age, and social isolation was noted in older men
(Komarovsky, 1962).

Rubin (1976) dispelled what she termed the myth of affluence of the
working class, stating that "it is the illusion of a society that mistakes
the acquisition of consumer items with a good life" (p. 205). Although
they were able to purchase possessions that made life easier, especially
housework, items were usually bought through credit, and payments
accounted for a large percentage of the family income. Finances were a
consistent burden and preoccupation for her participants.

Komarovsky (1962) included a self-report measure of marital
happiness in her study. The results indicated that although marriages
were stable, slightly less than one-third of the marriages were rated as happy or very happy, slightly over one-third were moderately happy, and approximately one-third were rated as unhappy or very unhappy, with 14 percent of the marriages falling in the "very unhappy" category (Komarovsky, 1962).

The findings of both studies highlight the importance of exploring marriages as they are embedded in social class structure. Working class and middle class families face similar issues of interpersonal relationships, work, leisure activity, and child rearing, but there are differences in how each approach these issues, which are imbedded in class position (Komarovsky, 1962; Rubin, 1976). Rubin (1976) stated:

... the family is a product of its time and place in the hierarchy of social institutions, [and] American families [are] both similar and different - similar in that they share some common experiences, some elements of a common culture by virtue of being part of the same society; different in that class, race, and ethnic differences give a special cast to the shared experience as well as a unique and distinctly different set of experiences. (p. 210)

In general, life in the working class family was seen as constricted. "The less-educated have a less abundant life all around because neither time nor energy is fully used" (Komarovsky, 1962, p. 348). They presented a narrow and somewhat depressive picture of life in the working class family as well, as implied by Rubin's (1976) title - Worlds of Pain. According to Rubin (1976), "in the working class, the process of building a family, of making a living for it, of nurturing and maintaining the individuals in it 'costs worlds of pain'" (p. 215).
Summary

The literature on marital stability, marital satisfaction, communication, adult development, gender differences, and object relations highlights the complex nature of the study of marital interaction. Marital relationships evolve and progress through developmental stages, paralleling individual development but with issues and tasks of its own. The ways in which couples deal with developmental transitions influences the marital relationship itself. Gender differences, especially in terms of adult development, also impact the marriage. Several factors appear to interact in keeping a marriage intact. Communication, gender roles, equity, and marital satisfaction have been identified as important in marital interaction, but the literature lacks a comprehensive exploration of these factors in terms of marital stability. Methodological problems have been identified in the literature as well.

There have been no qualitative studies of the working class marriage since Rubin's attempt in 1976. Both Rubin (1976) and Komarovsky (1962) described these marriages as traditional in most aspects, and largely rooted in class structure.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Choice of the Qualitative Research Methodology

A review of the literature revealed methodological problems in the research on marital stability and relationships. To date, no qualitative studies of marital stability have been published. The purpose of the qualitative method is to describe and understand the meaning of an individual's life experiences in as detailed a manner as possible (Giorgi, 1986; Kvale, 1983). The method focuses on the subjective nature of reality and attempts to capture experience as a whole from each individual's frame of reference. This approach is needed in marital stability research, given its more fragmented and vague history in the literature (Hicks & Platt, 1970; Kelly & Conley, 1987; Rubin, 1976). The qualitative approach seemed the best way to fill in the gaps in the literature, as well as to achieve the goal of understanding an understudied population (middle-aged, working class couples).

Several authors highlight the value of the qualitative approach in research (Giorgi, 1986; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Wertz, 1983), both on its own and in conjunction with quantitative methods. As Glaser & Strauss (1967) stated:

There is no fundamental clash between purposes and capacities of qualitative and quantitative methods or data. What clash there is concerns the primacy of emphasis on verification or generation of theory - to which heated discussions on qualitative versus quantitative data have been linked historically. (p. 17)
The utility of each form of data on its own, as well as the necessity for both on many occasions, is acknowledged in the literature (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Analysis of qualitative data is an ongoing inductive process. Glaser & Strauss (1967) developed a general method of comparative analysis in which theory is systematically obtained from the data. "Generating a theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This approach is termed "grounded theory because of its emphasis on the generation of theory and the data in which that theory is grounded" (Strauss, 1987, p. 22). Further elaboration of this method has emerged since its creation (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The focus of analysis is on organizing the many themes that emerge from the data to produce an integrated theory.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) discussed several broad purposes of grounded theory. First, it was designed to "provide the grounding, build the density, and develop the sensitivity and integration needed to generate a rich, tightly woven, explanatory theory that closely approximates the reality it represents" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 57). Thus this approach builds theory that is faithful to the area of study. It is a rigorous research process, and if its procedures are carried out diligently, it meets the criteria to make the theory "good science" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). These criteria include precision, verification, replication, significance, generalizability, and theory-observation compatibility. This method can help the researcher avoid thinking about
data in a constricted way, as well as examine and overcome the biases often brought to a particular study. It allows for creative exploration and/or clarification of various meanings of ideas and concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Creativity is an important element of the grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Although the method was designed to be rigorous and analytic, creativity is a valuable tool in developing themes and making the kinds of comparisons necessary to produce theory from the data. Grounded theory allows for wandering thoughts, as long as the results are ultimately grounded in the data.

With its focus on process, the qualitative, phenomenological approach lends itself to investigating each partner's experience of the marital relationship at various stages of the marriage, and how each attributes meaning to his/her experience. This approach allows for exploration of the unique experiences of individuals in their marriage, aimed at obtaining as detailed descriptions as possible with the goal of generating themes. Strauss & Corbin (1990) pointed out that certain topics naturally lend themselves to qualitative research. Marriage appears to be one of these areas. A qualitative mode may capture the fullness of the mental experience and the richness of living with another human being.

Statement of Subjectivity

The qualitative interview has many interpersonal aspects, with the interviewer and interviewee influencing each other. Kvale (1983) argued that "the reciprocal influence of interviewer and interviewee on both the
cognitive as well as an emotional level is... not primarily a source of error but a strong point of the qualitative research interview" (p. 178). The researcher attempts to maintain objectivity while recognizing the importance of this interaction and his/her reactions. In an attempt to do so, this researcher maintained a written log of notes following each interview, and incorporated these notes into the data analysis.

Recognition of the subjectivity of the researcher is also important. I grew up in a middle class family, but both of my parents were raised in working class families. I was engaged to be married during the study, and the process of choosing a mate and envisioning our life together added to my interest in formally exploring the process of adaptation to the changing nature of marriage. I suspected that working class marriages were more "traditional" and gender development and roles would play an important part in marital stability. I expected that negotiation and communication patterns would have a major impact on the intactness of a marriage. I also suspected that for some marriages, children would play an important role in keeping the marriage together. The fact that I am a woman pursuing a doctoral degree may have influenced how either women and/or men related to and interacted with me, as well as how I listened to them.

**Research Design and Procedures**

**Participants**

The sample was drawn from the general population, and consisted of twelve couples from a working class background who had been married for at least 20 years and whose youngest child was at least 18 years of
age. Subjects were chosen on the basis of meeting these criteria rather than through random sampling techniques, which is common in qualitative research (Strauss, 1987). Participation was voluntary and solicited through a local labor organization. The initial contact occurred through a letter describing the study and asking each couple to return a written response of agreement or disagreement to participate. Those who did not respond were contacted by the researcher by phone to solicit participation. Ten couples were obtained through these means. The other two couples were recruited through the participants, who were asked if they knew of any couples meeting the criteria who would be interested in participating in the study.

The age range of the 24 individuals who participated in the study was 43 to 72, with a mean of 57. Females ranged in age from 43 to 72, the average being 56, while males were between the ages of 44 and 72, with an average of 58 years. The number of years couples were married ranged between 23 and 47, with a mean of 35 years. Each couple had between one and nine children, the average being four. Eight couples were Catholic and three were Protestant. In one couple, one spouse was Catholic and the other had converted to Catholicism just prior to their marriage. Of the male participants, nine had a high school degree, one had an Associate's degree, one completed the eleventh grade, and one had a Master's degree. This male subject was included in the sample because his job of physical therapist was defined as technical/blue-collar; he belonged to the union organization. Nine of the female subjects had a high school degree, one had an Associate's degree, one had a Bachelor's degree and was working toward her Master's degree, and one was a Registered
Nurse (RN degree). The mean income of these couples was $57,000, ranging between $35,000 and $85,000. All twelve couples lived in the Greater Boston area. Twenty individuals were raised in this area; four individuals grew up outside of Massachusetts, in Virginia, Florida/Georgia, Canada, and Germany. Various ethnic origins were represented in the sample. Sixteen participants were of Anglo-Saxon descent, three were Italian, one was French-Canadian, and four were people of color. Tables 1 and 2 summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample. Couples are identified by husbands and wives having the same first letter of their names.

The Interview Process

All but one of the interviews were conducted in the home of the participant. One subject chose to be interviewed in the researcher's office for the sake of convenience. Husbands and wives were interviewed separately because it was recognized that their perceptions may have differed.

Each interview began with the researcher re-acquainting the participant with the purpose of the study. A brief overview of the interview process was given and written permission to audiotape the sessions was obtained (see Appendix A). Participants were assured of the confidentiality of the information revealed during the interviews both verbally and in writing. The researcher then obtained demographic information in writing (see Appendix B). The interview proceeded, with the researcher using a printed form as a guideline (see Appendix B). Each interview was followed by a phone call a few days later to obtain any further information or reflections. Thank-you notes were sent to each
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*FrCan = French Canadian  
**GRM = Germany  
***Assoc. = Associate’s Degree  
****CAN = Canada
couple. Interviews were conducted over five months.

The researcher's clinical skills and experience as a psychotherapist were important in establishing a safe, non-judgmental environment in which participants could share their experiences. Although it was not anticipated that the interview process would elicit upsetting emotions given the adaptive focus of the study, the researcher was sensitive to this possibility. The interviewer is a skilled clinician, qualified to make clinical judgments regarding the impact of the material discussed in the interview on the individual. The possible need to discuss therapy options and provide appropriate referral information was kept in mind throughout the study.

The Interview Format

A semi-structured interview, developed and pilot-tested by O'Brien and Mackey (Boston College), served as the instrument for this study (see Appendix B). It was designed as a guide to aid the interviewer in obtaining the necessary information while maintaining an open-ended style, which is important in qualitative research (Kvale, 1983). The interview guide consisted of four sections: 1) The Relationship; 2) Socio-economic Influences; 3) Parent's Marriage; and 4) Participant's View of Marriage Over Time and Wrap-up. Marriage was conceptualized developmentally in three phases: 1) pre-child rearing (date of marriage to the birth of the first child); 2) child rearing (birth of first child through youngest child reaching 18 years of age); and 3) post-child rearing (youngest child reaching age 18 to the present). Participants were asked to respond to many questions with reference to each of these phases.
The first section of the interview covered various aspects of the marital relationship, including initial attraction to spouse, the respondent's life circumstances at the time of the marriage, and the subject's family reaction to and support for the choice of spouse. The participant's role expectations for her/himself in the marriage and whether there was an expectation to have to work in the marital relationship were explored. Subjects were asked about their perceptions of marital communication, their own and their spouse's style of decision-making and problem-solving, the presence of intimacy in the marriage, and their personal style of handling interpersonal differences in the marital relationship. The level of marital conflict and perception of fairness in the marriage were investigated, as well as child rearing practices. Finally, participants were asked to describe the amount of respect, sensitivity, understanding, and trust felt toward and from their spouse.

External influences on the marital relationship were explored in the second section of the interview. These factors included religion, extended families, cultural factors, economic factors (including income), the sexual relationship, and values or other moral beliefs.

The third section focused on the parents' marriage. Participants were asked what they learned about marriage from observing their own parent's marriage, and how their marriage was similar to and different from that of their parents. How the person viewed her/his mother and father in terms of roles, relatedness, and equity was described. The researcher also elicited the participant's view of their parent's communication, as well as their decision-making and problem-solving
abilities.

The final section of the interview involved exploration of how the marriage had changed and remained the same over time, in terms of expectations, relatedness, communication, roles, and equity. Subjects were asked what personal characteristics of their spouses kept them together, as well as what words best described what their spouses meant to them. Subjects explored the factors they perceived were important in keeping the relationship intact. In concluding, participants were asked to add any thoughts or issues not addressed in the interview.

Analysis of the Data

Each taped interview was transcribed, either by the researcher or a hired typist who was appraised of the sensitive and confidential nature of the material. Data was classified and analyzed using the "grounded theory" method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The transcribed data collected from the interviews was coded line by line for key themes and developed into categories. Following the constant comparative method of qualitative analysis, one or more "core" categories emerged, to which all categories and subcategories were related, thus forming a "systematically dense analysis" (Strauss, 1987, p. 81). The analysis began with general coding but became more focused and selective as data was integrated. Initially, four of the couples' transcriptions were coded individually by a research team of four individuals; two doctoral students (including the researcher, who was the only female) and two professors. Notes were kept and categories were generated. A coding sheet (see Appendix C) labelling the categories was developed from these meetings, and used in subsequent coding of topic
areas for the remaining interviews. As new categories arose, previous interviews were re-coded, in keeping with the constant comparative process. The initial four interviews were independently re-coded using the coding sheet as well. The remaining eight interviews were independently coded by the researcher and one of the male professors. Differences in coding were discussed as a team and a consensus was reached for each item, ending with 100% agreement. Having both genders involved added to the strength of the coding, and contributed to the development of a shared conceptual analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The HyperRESEARCH program was used to identify and organize the topic areas that had been previously coded. This program allowed for easy retrieval of coded interview passages and aided in the efficiency of categorizing the material in the analysis phase. Data were analyzed using SPSS software as well. Nonparametric statistics were used for comparison purposes and to identify significant changes in the marital relationship over time.
CHAPTER IV
PRESENTATION OF KEY THEMES

Introduction

This chapter describes the key themes related to marital stability as identified by twelve working class couples who had been married at least 20 years, and whose youngest children were 18 or older. Line by line coding analysis was conducted according to the grounded theory method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), resulting in the themes that follow. Pre-marital issues are presented first, followed by those related to the marriage, which are discussed in relation to the three phases of the marital relationship: pre-parenting, child rearing, post-child rearing (youngest child at least 18 years of age). Direct quotes from the transcribed interviews are provided to elaborate or enhance the meaning of each theme. Husbands and wives have the same first letter of their names to aid in identification of couples.

Pre-Marital Themes

Initial Attraction

Twenty out of twenty-four respondents stated that their initial attraction to their partners was positive. Factors that emerged from the responses included personality, physical attractiveness, and a combination of the two. Half of the couples identified the same factors of attraction.

Ten individuals, including two couples, indicated that they were attracted to their spouses due to personality characteristics. There was no
consensus regarding these factors, although specific characteristics were cited, including sense of humor, thoughtfulness, confidence, and the way the person carried him/herself. For example:

John: I liked the way she made me feel, I liked the way we got along together.

Karen: He had a great personality, an absolutely fabulous sense of humor, and he still does.

Physical attractiveness was identified as a factor of attraction by two couples and two men (n=6).

David: I believe her eyes and her face. That's all I saw at the time.

Ann: You'll think I'm crazy but it was his curly hair! For some reason or other I just loved the curls on his head.

One couple and one man (n=3) considered looks and personality as important, while one man's attraction involved looks and common interests.

Fred: More than anything her gentleness brought me to her and I thought she was pretty. And her caring, she seemed to care very much.

Irene: He was cute. A nice person.

Three women could not highlight any factors of attraction, indicating that it was "something that happened", while one woman was initially not attracted to her husband. The following illustrations reflect these responses:

Barbara: I can't really say anything attracted me. It was through coincidence that we met through a friend of his and just kind of started growing together.
Carol: I don't know, and all of a sudden we found we were in love.
I wasn't attracted to him. I thought he was arrogant and very
forward the first time I met him.

**Family Support of Partner Choice**

Participants' perceptions of their family's approval of their choice
for a marital partner were mixed. Eleven subjects (6 men, 5 women)
reported that their family clearly approved of their mate, three (1 man, 2
women) said they clearly disapproved, and ten (5 men and 5 women)
reported mixed reactions. There was variability within couples, with
only three out of twelve couples answering alike. In two of these
couples, both families disapproved of the choice and one couple reported
mixed feelings on both sides. Some examples follow:

Karen: They loved him, from the very beginning, from the first date,
they just loved him. Because you see, my family we are very, I have
to explain the difference from me and [husband], is that I come from
a family who is not at all political. We were, you know, we just kind
of lived our life. We had our friends and neighbors, but we were
never involved, like my father didn't have a lot of friends, so if
something broke there wasn't anyone to fix it, we'd have to call
somebody. So all of a sudden, this guy comes in, and he's interested
in politics, he's interested, something breaks, he knows somebody
who can fix it or he can fix it himself. So into this quiet,
unassuming family... walks [husband].

Laura: My father was very Irish and [husband] was Italian, and they
had a lot of things like Italian ethnic names... and my mother
thought that he was a lot older than me, and are you sure he's not
already married, and because he just looked so much older and more mature. He’d come in with this big cashmere overcoat and he’d look like a gangster. I was sure that he wasn’t, so I just had to deal with that, but they never gave me any ultimatums ... they learned to like him and they got along fine. And in fact, it got to be a point where, my father drank a lot and he’d be down in the gin mill after work, especially on a Friday night, and [husband] would come to get me and my mother would say do you think [husband] would mind going down and getting your father before you went out.

Expectations of Marriage

Most of the marriages in this study were heavily influenced by traditional expectations about role responsibilities. Men typically anticipated their marital role to include providing for the family and fatherhood, while women defined themselves as supportive wives and caretakers of the family. There was little ambivalence in describing their early marital role expectations, with 21 respondents (10 males, 11 females) seeing themselves in traditional terms. Their responses reflected the gender-related values present at that time. Men expected to assume an instrumental role in the marriage:

Ed: I was still thinking back to the 1900’s where a man said do it and the woman just went. That’s what I was hoping for ... I was gonna run the puzzle. And that’s basically the way I figured marriage was for me. Took over and was the boss. The king. He wants his pipe and slippers when he walks in, wants his meal, wants his beers opened for him, wants his friends entertained when he brings them over.
Ivan: I was the bread winner. That was the culture you grew up in. You were expected to provide and I grew up in a very male-dominated house, as far as the roles were clearly defined that you were to be the bread winner and she was to bring up the children. That was the role you thought you were going to assume when you got married. Women expected to assume an expressive and supportive role in the family:

Eve: I just wanted to be a good wife and mother. That was about the only role that I set out. It was my only goal. Old fashioned, but nice.

Only two men and one woman anticipated less conventional marital roles. The men expected to share both financial and household responsibilities. John recalled:

Probably as provider and as a partner. That it was a partnership all the way... [wife] was mother, partner, and as a nurse she became a provider also.

Carol's expectations included sharing all responsibilities with her husband, and were influenced by the negative model of her mother's role in her marriage:

Equal... because I had seen too many of my friends and my own mother in the circumstances that I was not going to put up with in any way, form, shape, or fashion. And so that was it from day one and he knew it... As far as decision-making and every aspect of what married life, I felt, should entail as far as the husband and wife together.

Although most participants anticipated roles along traditional lines, their actual behavior throughout marriage was quite different. While only
one woman explicitly stated that she expected to be a breadwinner, ten women actually held jobs throughout their marriages. Only one of these women expressed dissatisfaction with working, and was only employed for a short time during child rearing due to financial strain. Similarly, although ten men expected their roles to be strictly the provider, by the third phase of marriage eight out of twelve men reported sharing household and child rearing responsibilities with their wives. This marital behavior will be discussed more fully in following sections.

Prior to marriage, most respondents (n=16) recalled that they did not expect marriage to involve an effort on their part, or they had no expectations. These expectations were also influenced by families of origin and the gender-related cultural expectations, as reflected in Andrew's response:

I come from a family where that was the thing to do. You got married and you just took it for granted that it was gonna work because you weren't familiar with loads of people that had married and broken up... So you didn't feel there was an effort to it. It was just a way of life.

Ken did not expect to work at the relationship:

... because I loved her and she loved me, and I didn't think we would have to work. If I thought it was work, we probably wouldn't have gotten married. I never thought of it as work.

Fran had no expectations:

I wasn't even thinking about that but I soon found out that you did have to [work at the relationship].

Only one-third (n=8) of the participants expected that effort would be
needed to maintain their marital relationship over time:

Fred: I had a large group of friends, both male and female, and so did she. Not as many as I. She was kind of an introvert a little bit, but she had her admirers too and at first, when we first met, I think it was just like a joy type of thing and then after, when we broke up and got back together, I realized it was a working thing. It was something that we were going to have to work with.

As with marital role expectations, many couples recalled that an effort was required to sustain their relationships with their spouses. Nine men and eight women spontaneously commented that despite their expectations, they worked at their marriages.

Marital Themes

Marital Behavior

As previously stated, although most participants entered marriage with the expectation of traditional roles in the relationship, in retrospect their actual marital behavior was less conventional. Prior to the birth of their first child, nine men described their roles as predominantly instrumental, while ten women recalled their roles as a mixture of expressive and instrumental behaviors \(X^2(2) = 10.67, p = .001\). During this phase then, the majority of the men solely carried out their expected role of provider, while most women shared this provider role with their husbands. Regardless of whether they worked outside the home however, nurturance and household responsibilities were the primary expectations for wives. Judy recalled:

I was the wife, the cook, the entertainer, and I assumed all those
things in the house. When we were first married, the first couple of years, [husband] strictly went to work and came home and read the paper, and came to the table when I called him... That's the way it was... My nursing career was more or less something to do in between. Little did I know, 35 years later I'd still be nursing. But that's how it was to me at the beginning. That marriage was the thing.

During the child rearing phase of marriage, there was no change in how women described their marital roles, although their roles still differed significantly from those of their spouses \( \chi^2(2)=14.47, p=.005 \). There was a shift in men toward increased integration of instrumental and expressive behaviors. As the men reported adopting caretaking characteristics into their roles, their wives' roles continued to incorporate responsibilities both in and out of the home. Seven men described their roles as instrumental, and five as a mixture of both. A few men spoke of their marital behavior in expressive and instrumental terms:

Carl: You accept more responsibility and so she had things. I don't want you to just do everything towards the baby. I was to share in it too. I helped with the cooking and cleaning.

Larry: You had to begin to share things, to do things together, but she wasn't bashful, my wife. She would say "hey, you want to wash that diaper, go ahead and wash it. I'm not washing them any more." She'd take a stand.

Judy described her husband's shift in marital behavior:

Before Betty Friedan even, as we started to have more children and I
started to work, I actually worked after each child, but I got a very steady job in '67, where I still am today, and he started getting the dinners and it just evolved that he could take care of the children just as well as I could. ... He just became another mother, and there was no argument about it or I never had to ask him, he just pitched in. It seemed if we wanted a bigger family he realized that he was gonna have to do this without my asking him. I don't think he ever envisioned that when he was younger, that he would be doing these things. And that's totally different from how he was when he was younger ... He just automatically started to change as a person.

This shift toward integration of instrumental and expressive dimensions in men continued through the third phase of marriage, which was the time when the youngest child turned 18. Eight men reported this shift of becoming less instrumental and more expressive in relation to their wives. Although a few women reported a shift toward greater expressiveness, most viewed themselves as both expressive and instrumental throughout their marriage (nine women described themselves in terms of both dimensions). Again, there was a significant difference between spouses during this post-parenting phase \( \chi^2(2)=7.06, p=.029 \). Although many men and women shared provider and caretaker dimensions in their marriages, one-third \( n=4 \) of the men and one-fourth \( n=3 \) of the women remained in their traditional roles.

Child Rearing

There were no significant differences between men and women with regard to their perceptions of child rearing responsibilities throughout their marriage. Household chores and responsibilities were included in
this category as well. During the pre-parenting phase, 16 participants (8 men and 8 women) viewed the burden of responsibility on the wife. During the second and third phases, six men recalled responsibilities being mutually shared, while five women viewed them this way. As in the first phase, women were described as the primary caretakers of the home and children, but men reported assuming more mutual responsibilities during these times. Men were frequently described by their wives (and interestingly often described themselves) as "helping" with chores and caretaking. A few illustrations follow:

Donna: [Husband] had to work. He had to work very hard, a lot of hours, but he also, the time that he was home was quality time. And you know really there wasn't anything that he wouldn't do as far as helping the kids. When he was there he helped and when he was off we went places with the kids. He didn't just sit down and relax. I don't know how he worked as much as he did and still have as much time as he did for us.

Andrew: Well, I had mentioned I wasn't certainly a primadonna. I'd be happy to give her time. But we had most of the child rearing when I was an apprentice and I didn't have much time to do anything. I wouldn't hesitate, but [wife] wouldn't think to ask you to change the diaper, not as I say, not that I didn't do it when she wasn't there, but when she was there she felt it was her job. Not that I felt that it was, because lots of things I've always helped with, whether it be the dishes or something, but the children... I was always there if needed. But she was the prime one to do everything.

Spouses in 11 out of 12 couples were in agreement about child
rearing practices. In the other couple, the wife felt the burden of responsibility rested with her throughout the marriage, while her husband reported that chores were more shared in the second and third phases, still viewing his wife as the primary caretaker.

**Relatedness**

The capacity for a rich and intimate mutuality with another person is considered a crucial aspect of healthy maturity. Mutuality involves maturity, in which adults are emotionally interdependent upon each other. Although there were no direct questions in the interview about relatedness or mutuality, it emerged as a theme from the data. Relatedness was reflected in descriptions of intimacy and several relationship variables.

When asked how they felt about their marital relationship at the various stages, the majority described positive feelings of relatedness:

Carol: I think it's probably changed as far as more commitment, and probably even more respect for each other because of all the things we both have been through and been able to survive. And always looking out for each other: he always looks out for me and I'll try to look out for him... It's not something you plan, it's just you automatically try to take his feelings and concerns and consideration no matter what. I have a lot of meetings I have to go to and I have a lot of people ask me to participate in various speaking engagements, and a lot of them I turn down just because some of them are on weekends and that's our time together.

John: I don't think anything was always love and roses all the time; we had our ups and downs. But I think those are healthy for
marriage. I think we worked at it, and things got easier as the years went by. We got to know each other real well. I think we have been good for each other. She's helped me along with my own life and personality and I think I've gotten to be a better person by being with her. We're like peas in a pod now. I think we've been good for each other.

**Relationship variables.** All of the couples negotiated a balance between separateness and relatedness. One aspect of this was mutual understanding. Respondents were asked about their own understanding of their spouse and their spouses' understanding of them. There was a change in how partners perceived one another's level of understanding through the marriage. In the first phase, eight men (67%) felt understood by their wives, and four had mixed feelings; of the women, five (42%) felt understood by their husbands, five did not feel understood, and two had mixed feelings \(X^2(2)=6.36, p=.04\). In terms of their understanding of their wives, five men (42%) described themselves as understanding, two felt they were not understanding, and five had mixed feelings. Seven women (58%) described themselves as understanding of their spouses, and five were mixed.

Women's perceptions of their husbands' level of understanding did not change during child rearing, while the number of men who perceived their wives as understanding increased slightly to nine (75%), with three mixed \(X^2(2)=6.34, p=.04\). There was an increase in both men's (n=7; 58%) and women's (n=8; 67%) understanding of their spouses during this phase as well.

Significant differences disappeared during the post-parenting phase.
of marriage $[\chi^2(2)=2.22, p=.33]$. Eight out of twelve women (67%) described feeling understood by their husbands, while two (17%) still felt a lack of understanding, and two were mixed. Ten out of twelve men (83%) described their wives as understanding of them, with the others feeling mixed. In terms of their own behavior, the number of participants who perceived themselves as understanding increased as well. Ten men and eleven women felt they were understanding of their spouses, while two men and one woman felt mixed. Some examples of each follow:

Judy: I think it's something that evolved over the years. I don't think that he, we really knew each other at the beginning, and uh, I don't think he really understood me in those younger years - the frustrations of childbearing and, I think it's something he learned. I hope I gave him as much understanding. It's very hard to all of a sudden be free and easy and swingin' your baseball bat and then all of a sudden you have all this responsibility and I think that it's just as hard for a man in his own way and, I think I understood that. I think we've grown to know each other a lot better.

Carol: I think he's grown to understanding 100% my goals and aspirations for him, the kids and for myself... Initially, I thought I had 100% understanding but then I realized that because he was a black male there were some things he had to endure in order to make sure he had a job to take care of us. I didn't fully understand immediately but I learned, learned quickly some of the humiliations and other things he went through and some things he didn't say but I heard from others.

Other relationship variables explored in the interview included
sensitivity, respect, and trust. As with understanding, these areas were discussed in terms of respondents' perceptions of their own and their spouses behavior.

Most men and women in the sample experienced their spouses as sensitive, respectful, and trusting toward them throughout their marriage. In terms of sensitivity, 11 men (91%) viewed their wives as sensitive in the pre-parenting phase, 10 (83%) during child rearing, and 11 in the third phase. Seven women (58%) described their husbands as sensitive to their needs in the first and second phases, increasing to eight (67%) in the last one.

John: I think she's been sensitive enough to meet my wants. I've never looked for anything else. Whenever there was a time that I needed some help or some comfort, she was there.

Karen: I think that men aren't as sensitive. [Husband's] sensitive in many ways. He's a romanticist. But I think there were times where he has been insensitive with the raising of the children and with me and the things that I have done. Sometimes I think that he was preoccupied with his own things and maybe not as sensitive to things that I was feeling. But now that's changing in this time that we've had to spend together without the stress of the kids. Now we spend a lot of time together talking. I feel that probably his least sensitive stage was the second stage.

Ten men felt respect from their wives through the parenting phase, increasing to 12 in the post-parenting phase. For the women, 10 felt respected early in their marriage, nine during child rearing, and 11 in post-parenting years.
Ben: I've always felt that she's respected me.
Fran: He had great respect for me. I think that's one of his characters that, he wouldn't do anything ever that I ever remembered that would hurt me in any way.

With regard to trust, statistics were exactly the same for husbands and wives. The number of participants who perceived their spouses as trusting of them increased to 10 by the time their youngest child was 18 years old, as compared to eight early in marriage and nine during child rearing.

Fred: The world's limit. I could go to conventions. I could stay out. After a union meeting I could go drinking with the guys, and there was very little of the nagging: where've you been, who've you been with. Again, after that first period there. But she's very trusting. Sometimes to her fault.
Barbara: I really don't think when he was away that he trusted me. He really thought probably what he did I was supposed to have done too because through my mother-in-law and my sister-in-law I found out that he wanted to know if I go out by myself. So he couldn't have trusted me.

There was some variability among participants' perceptions of their own behavior in these areas. In the early stage of marriage, 11 men and 7 women viewed themselves as sensitive toward their spouses; 10 men and 10 women felt they showed respect and trust toward their spouses. During the middle phase, seven men and ten women perceived themselves as sensitive; 11 men and 10 women as respectful; and 10 men and 8 women as trusting. In the post-child rearing phase, eight husbands and
all of the wives viewed themselves as sensitive, which was a statistically significant difference $[X^2(1)=4.80, p=.03]$. Twelve men and eleven women felt they treated their spouses with respect, and 11 men and 10 women felt they were trusting toward their spouses.

Sensitivity:

  Judy: Much more sensitive than I was in the first phase of our marriage. Maybe I have time now, in the last 10 years especially, I have more time now to think of what we want and our goals and what kind of a person he is, and I'm not as demanding as I was.

  Carl: I know when she didn't feel good, I know when she was happy, I know when she got excited, to know when things was bothering her and let's go down and talk. It might have been someone's job or it might have been something that happened at home. Whatever. And she knows I was a good listener. And we'd always try to work it out.

  Ed: Phase one forget it. I thought a woman, bottom of the heap. You don't worry about her. She'll be around. Phase two, I think in the latter part I started to really understand, tried to understand her and now I'm trying the best I can to be sensitive to her. Try to help her out and try to get involved in things she likes to do now. She likes to go for a ride, to a craft fair. I hate it. I can't stand craft fairs but I will go and will walk around because that's what she's interested in. And it's about time that she had her day. She deserves it. I try to be sensitive to her.

Respect:

  Mary: Oh, I respected him, his ways and his life, his work and his everyday living.
George: You have to respect someone or they won't respect you. It goes that way. Sometimes you disrespect people but not intentionally. I wasn't always respectful, but when I wasn't she told me I wasn't and I apologized.

Eve: At first, he was my husband and I respected him. And then I guess I didn't respect the things he did, but he was my husband and I did respect him.

Trust:

Barbara: I've always trusted him. Even though we talked about the affairs all over, I still trusted him because he never had them when he was with me. And in Europe, what they do when they were there, that doesn't count.

Grace: Oh, I trusted him. I was just a jealous old kid, that's all. I got over that. I trusted him. Later on I knew I had to or else I was going to be the one that was having heart attacks and things.

Intimacy. Relatedness was also expressed in discussions of intimacy in marriage. Both physical intimacy and psychosocial intimacy were explored with couples. Physical intimacy included touching and other physical expressions of affection, and psychosocial intimacy involved expression of inner thoughts and feelings.

There was a trend toward increasing psychosocial intimacy over time in these marital relationships. Prior to child rearing, 42% (n=5) of men and 67% (n=8) of women experienced their relationships as intimate. There was an increase in men's perceptions of intimacy during child rearing to 58% (n=7), while women remained the same. During post-parenting years, there was a marked increase to 75% (n=9) of men and
women. Thus, nearly twice as many men experienced intimacy in their marriages during post-child rearing as compared to the pre-parenting years. Agreement within couples increased from 50% (n=6) early in marriage to 75% (n=9) in the "empty nest" phase. The following examples provide a flavor of the responses:

Carl: I would say sharing each others problems I guess. Holding each other up. When she's down and out I'll listen to her, if she has problems at her work she can come home and talk to me without me getting upset about it. I can not look at a ballgame and listen to her. Do things that are surprising to her. She'll come home "I feel bad today" then let's not cook. I'll take you out to eat. Little things that people don't expect you to do.

Irene: For me, the biggest problem or disappointment is that it's not a fuller relationship... When I feel strained it's like I feel, I could feel the stress myself of not wanting to be involved sexually. It's like, I don't wanna be here, ya know? If you don't talk to me in the kitchen, don't talk to me in the bedroom.(laugh) And when I'm feeling more vulnerable or more like I need to express my needs and whatever, then I can feel the walls go up for me.

It is important to note that the improvement in intimacy reported by most couples coincided with the shift found in men from being instrumental to becoming more expressive in their marital roles and confrontive in handling differences, as well as women's perceptions that their husbands were more understanding of them over the course of their marriages.

Physical intimacy was fairly consistent throughout these marriages.
Forty-two percent (n=5) of both men and women described positive physical intimacy early in their marriage as compared to 58% (n=7) of men and 67% (n=8) of women in the latest phase. This topic was typically discussed in terms of an individual's style or tendency to be affectionate, and how this matched the partner's needs. Physical affection appeared to be more important for women, with more wives than husbands expressing dissatisfaction in their spouses' lack of physical affection. Some examples follow:

Ben: Me, no. Her, yes... [It's important for her], but not really for me. Not as important as it is for her.

Barbara: I think we're very intimate and I think it goes with that I don't need the sexual part. If say I take a shower or I'm in the tub and he washes my back or something, I think that's much more gratifying to me than having the actual sexual act. And so he's very attentive. I'll say my back hurts and he'll go get the Ben Gay.

Ed: I see it as a learning experience when we're there. There are times when touching needs to be there. I love it. Then there are times when oh well snores, bingbangboom, all over with. Let's get to sleep. What we're finding now is that there are things [wife] needs more: she needs to be hugged, she needs to be held. Which I never saw because I was too busy taking care of myself and not worrying about her. But it's back. It's everyday a new learning experience but touching is there.

Eve: Well in the first phase, no, [husband] wasn't affectionate. The second phase he wasn't either. I used to be really affectionate. I loved to hug and then I guess in the second phase I kind of lost it.
guess I was just overwhelmed with raising three kids and I kind of didn't like him anymore so I didn't touch him. Didn't hug him. And I suppose you can't like him if you don't have hugs. Now we're learning to hug again and that took a long time for me to change my feelings towards him because when you hate somebody you hate him and when you dislike somebody it's very hard to fall in love with them again and you really have to work at it and I would say now is probably better than any time of our 24 years.

John: She taught me to be [affectionate]. I wasn't.

Communication. General characteristics of what these couples considered good communication appeared to influence relatedness. These characteristics included the amount and effectiveness of communication, and the ability to listen, particularly in terms of feeling that their spouses understood them. Negative communication was characterized by more arguing than usual, unresolved disagreements, misunderstandings, and a lack of communication. When asked about general communication in their relationship, couples reported interesting shifts throughout the course of their marriage. In the pre-parenting phase, 12 respondents (5 men, 7 women) described their communication in positive terms, three (2 men, one woman) in negative terms, and nine (5 men, 4 women) as a mixture of negative and positive qualities.

During the child rearing phase, the majority of the couples had mixed feelings about communication in their marriage (n=13; 6 men, 7 women). This was usually attributed to a lack of communication caused by how busy both spouses were with jobs and rearing the children, or to disagreements over children, which was seen as ineffective
communication. Ten participants (5 men and 5 women) described their communication as good, while only one man viewed it as poor.

By the time couples reached the third phase of marriage, there was a marked shift toward better communication in marriage. Seventy-one percent (n=17; 8 males, 9 females) of these couples had positive descriptions of their communication, one woman had negative perceptions, and 6 (4 men, 2 women) were mixed. There were no statistically significant differences between male and female responses in any of the marital stages. The following passages characterize perceptions of communication over the course of marriage:

Eve: I think communication is important. In the first phase I couldn't talk to [husband]. He wouldn't listen. I'd write him notes and sometimes I'd give them to him and sometimes I wouldn't. I'd tell him my feelings and because I can't talk like he can, I have to write things down... The second one I guess got a little better. We could talk and he would at least listen to me. And in the third stage we'd both talk and listen so that's how it's changed. From nothing to at least listening to me and then now talking and give me feedback, so I think that's good.

Barbara: I really feel in the very beginning of the relationship, I don't know if it was my mother or my grandmother who told me, but they always said never go to bed when you're angry at each other. Try to communicate and if not at least kiss and make up because you don't know if you wake up again in the morning. And we have never gone to bed angry... He's very quiet and you kind of have to pull teeth, but after awhile you know when something's bothering him.
And certain times that I know are very dangerous if I would say one more word then we would have an argument, I don't say nothing. But I won't let it die. Then when everything is calm again we discuss the problem.

David: Even though I talked a lot, I'm a quiet person. I would say that one of the faults that I could say as I look back is the communication, just being able to sit down and openly talk about anything. I do a lot of thinking but it's sort of private thinking. We have our own conversations and we talked alot. I would think that would be my biggest fault is that I'm not communicative enough... It's not my bag.

Donna: We don't talk alot. I think a lot of the communication is done more just in deeds. [Spouse's] not much of a person for expressing things, saying I look nice or a compliment or things like that, but I think his way of showing me is by doing... But I know he loves me by what he does.

**Decision-making.** Decision-making was discussed as part of communication in the interviews. Individuals were asked to describe their own style of decision-making, resulting in three categories: impulsive, intuitive, and logical. Those described as impulsive acted quickly, putting little thought into decisions. The logical style fell at the other end of the continuum, where decisions were thought out, with advantages and disadvantages considered. The intuitive style was based predominantly on one's intuition or inner sense rather than reason. Self-report of decision-making style remained consistent through the course of marriage for these couples, with the exception of one man who
developed a logical style by the third phase of marriage. Most respondents (n = 16) described their style as logical, with fairly even numbers of men and women. Six participants had an impulsive style, the majority of whom were men. Only two participants reported an intuitive style, both of whom were women. Some examples of each follow:

Ben [re: impulsive style]: I tend to make quick decisions. If I have a problem I want it solved right there. And she is the more, the thinker, wants to look at all of the objective sides and negative sides. I feel I'm impulsive when it comes to something like that. I just want to get it over with. Just like if we go shopping, she'll walk around the store for 3 hours. I go shopping, I know exactly what I want. I go, I get it, I leave and that's it. And our decision-making's the same way: if I want to make a decision, that's it it's done. Don't worry about what happens later, but she's the one that's got to think it out.

Fran [re: intuitive style]: Well, I pray a lot. Yeah, it's the only way that I can do that. I think that was through also like when my parents came home if they were drinking, I knew that it was going to be tough... I just keep saying once it's over it's going to be okay. And it is. So everything works out as long as you have faith in the gentleman upstairs.

Ken [re: mix]: No comparison, she can solve a problem, she'll look at it, figure it out, and I'll try to knock it over... You know honestly, some of the arguments we've had is because I think she wants to think about it too long. She wants to think about it and then she'll go on and on, and I myself will just do it and worry about the
consequences later ... I’ve mellowed, honestly. Now I will think about something I want to do or something that we want to do; before, I wouldn't.

The couples' style of decision-making was also explored, with an interest in whether decisions were made mutually or primarily by one partner. Areas explored included recreation, purchases, leisure time, and friends. Most respondents (21 in the first and third phases, 22 in the second) reported that decisions about these issues varied, some being individual choices and others mutual. The other three to four participants were fairly evenly divided between predominantly separate or mutual. Styles remained consistent over the course of marriage. "Major" decisions such as finances or large purchases, and vacations were usually mutual, while smaller decisions, such as day-to-day household issues were individual. Most couples negotiated leisure time, with some recreation involving just the couple, including mutual friends, and some with separate interests and friends. For example:

Carol: Usually sitting down together and trying to analyze the whole gamut of possibilities. I know a couple of times he's made decisions on his own on a couple of things that I disagreed with. But for the most part in some instances where he made the decision without consulting me and that was early on, it sometimes it didn't turn out to be the right decision but I made sure I wouldn't say "I told you so" but we just grinned and beared it and then went on from there because I know that wouldn't help. But after a while he would say "I should have listened to you." And so I think that kind of relationship and me not antagonizing him in that way helped to improve things.
Larry: Well, to a point, I was a traditional father and things had to be a certain way... I was still the strong male dominance in my thinking. I think major decisions were made mutually. There were a lot of issues that I made independently, that involved my work life. If it meant going on trips or going alone, I would make the plans, and sometimes I wouldn't ask, I would just tell her. And maybe that wasn't fair, but I did it, I wouldn't do it now. In those days, when I was feeling male strong, I was coming into my own. I was starting to make something of myself. ... I wouldn't do anything now, in most cases I wouldn't. I'd pick the phone up, and I'd try to reach her or wait to make the decision.

**Interpersonal Differences.** One part of the interview focused on how each spouse handled interpersonal differences. Respondents were asked to describe their own style of conflict resolution and their perceptions of their spouses' style. Two types of behavior emerged: avoidance and confrontation. The confrontive style involved direct expression of one's thoughts and feelings about conflicts or differences, while the avoidant style involved a tendency to deny or escape from dealing with conflict. Although men were more avoidant than women in general, their pattern changed more dramatically over the course of their marriage to a more direct expression of thoughts, feelings, and attitudes.

Throughout these couples' marriages there were significant differences between husbands' and wives' ways of dealing with interpersonal differences. During the pre-parenting and child rearing phases, nine men reported avoidance, while eight women reported confrontive styles \(X^2(1)=4.20, p=.04\). The number of men who reported
avoiding conflict decreased to seven during the post-parenting phase, while the number of women who reported confronting differences increased to ten \([X^2(1)=4.44, p=.04]\). Some examples of each follow:

Andrew: I'd say the few disagreements we've had, one would be peeved for a short while and that was it. It was behind you. You just didn't bring things up again. In other words, the sooner you forgot about it the better.

Donna: I'd get angry sometimes when we first got married, and I expected something... and that's when we would communicate about things and I would talk about it and he'd explain to me that he's just not like that and then he'd point out something that he does. Like we might even compare friends and I'd say "he's always kissing her or hugging her" or something like that, and he'd say "yeah, but does he wash the floor or do this or that? No he doesn't, so what's most important?".

David: It's just something that we both understood. When the kids were growing up I, if she said something I would not butt in. I might talk to her afterwards about the way she handled it and she'd talk to me about the way I handled it. But it was never in front of anybody to embarrass the other person, and I think that's a trait that I don't see in a lot of people.

Observations of the spouses' style of handling differences shifted over the course of the marriage, with men viewed as more confrontive in each phase, and corresponding fairly well to their own perceptions of their styles. Ten men stated that their wives were confrontive in the early phase of marriage; only four women described their husbands in this
way \( x^2(1) = 6.17, p = .01 \). During the child rearing phase, men's views of their wives remained the same, while half of the women viewed their husbands as confrontive and half as avoidant \( x^2(1) = 3.00, p = .08 \). Eleven husbands perceived their spouses as confrontive in the post-parenting stage of marriage; seven women described their husbands as such \( x^2(1) = 3.56, p = .06 \). The following illustrate these perceptions over time:

Eve: I try to talk to him about it, but I wouldn't get any answer. Then when we'd have a fight or something I'd just go in the other room. I'd never talk to him because he just wouldn't listen. So I held most of my stuff, any disagreements. We never really screamed or yelled because I just refused to fight. I'm not a fighter. And that's how we handled it. We didn't. We just let it ride... Just a couple of months ago I said we really have to talk and we sat down and we really talked and cried and everything. Now we can do that. I never ever thought that we'd sit and talk and discuss something back and forth and cry and laugh, and all at the same time. I never thought I'd ever see that, but we've grown so much for the better.

Judy: I think that the first half of that second phase was fiery... also the first couple of years of marriage. I had a temper, and I think I changed him. If we got into squabbles he'd just walk away, and that really used to infuriate me and I got him to the point where he'd stand and fight.

In the majority of couples, individual reports of husbands' and wives' perceptions of their own and their partners' styles of handling interpersonal differences and marital conflict were the same. That is, if one reported her behavior as confrontive, the spouse did also. This is
important in terms of the validity of the data, in the sense that subjective perceptions were validated by their spouses, and thus most likely representative of their behavior.

Marital Conflict. The level of marital conflict was explored in the interviews as well. Again there was striking agreement between spouses over the course of the relationship, with most marriages having minimal conflict. All but one individual, a male, perceived a minimal amount of marital conflict during the first phase. The conflict he experienced was related to adjustment to marriage and his concerns about his wife's drinking, which disappeared after a few years. In the child rearing phase, two couples and three women reported major marital conflict, mostly related to struggles over money or different styles of child rearing. One couple sought therapy at the wife's request, to work out marital difficulties. Irene recalled:

I've always wished that he was more involved in some ways, especially in the recreational aspect. At different times in our relationship we've had differences and there have been times when we questioned what are we doing here. In terms of our marriage. Because sometimes I just feel like this is crazy, there's gotta be more to life than this... I never felt sure enough of myself that our marriage, our relationship, could sustain conflict. [Husband] is an intimidating personality... and I just never had the self-confidence to believe that I would come out on the other end whole if I rocked the boat. Somehow or another I always believed that what he was doing was more important, and the stuff that I was doing, it wasn't going to make much difference, which is pretty sad... Well, we had
a long hard talk and basically I think we both realized that we love each other and perhaps it was worth working at. And for me, I can’t speak for him, at this point in your life it gets to the point where it kinda gets scary to think about starting your life all over again.

Only one woman reported major conflict in the third phase, which began during child rearing years and had not been resolved. This conflict was related to marital infidelity which her husband had denied but she was sure occurred.

There appeared to be a shared perception of both the level of conflict in these marriages and each spouses’ style of handling such differences. When these styles clashed within a couple, both partners recognized this and worked through it, with men gradually addressing conflict more directly as the marriage progressed, which also coincided with men becoming more understanding of their spouse.

**Equity.** Equity may also be a factor influencing relatedness in marriage. There was a shift among both men and women toward perceiving their marital relationships as more equitable in the third phase. In the beginning of marriage, eight husbands and five wives described their marriages as fair, increasing to eleven husbands and eight wives by the time their youngest child reached the age of 18. It is interesting to note that one-third of the couples viewed their marriages as equitable throughout the three phases. The marital relationship remained inequitable for both spouses in one couple and for three other women, two of whose husbands viewed the marriage as equitable throughout.

Carol: I had an opportunity for a promotion and I wasn’t gonna take it
'cause it involved me moving. That's how we got here. And I wasn't gonna take it because I never heard of any family moving 'cause the wife got promoted. It was always 'cause the husband got promoted. And so he sat down and talked to me and said look, you better think this over 'cause if you don't take it you'll never get promoted, you'll never do this. So he said let's drive down to this part and see what we can find as far as housing and see what the prices are and everything. And we did, so I took the job and he went house-hunting and then he took me up on the weekends 'cause I was in a 13 week training course and he picked me up on the weekend and we'd go house hunting. We found a house and that was it. But I was flabbergasted. I could not believe it.

Ed: Right now it's a 50/50 proposition. Maybe I'm lying, maybe it's 75/25. She still takes care of me. She's gone through an awful lot. We're a partnership now. We talk things over. If I get an irrational idea in my head, she talks me out of it real quick. She'll listen to the other side, the pros and cons of it. It's more of a loving relationship now, more so than the caveman idea.

Judy: They've balanced out extremely well. I don't think that I thought they were fair way back in the beginning. I thought that they were kinda lopsided that a man was free... He never had responsibility and had to go to work and I felt that hey, he can go down to the corner and get the paper if he wanted to and I never, I felt when the kids were all young I felt trapped. I didn't feel it all the time or all day. I knew it was part of my job, but I didn't feel free to, you know, they always had to be considered first and I felt a
man was freer... I feel as free as he does now. I'm trying to be like my kids. I'm trying to think of myself as a person and as a wife, which I didn't do when I was young. I think it's really, if I regret anything it's that it's wasted, that attitude that we had.

**Sexuality.** Couples had varying opinions about the quality and importance of sex in their marriages. There was a decline in the number of respondents who described their sexual relationship in positive terms over the course of these marriages. Early in marriage 16 people (eight men, eight women) reported having a satisfying sexual relationship, as compared to 12 (six men, six women) during child rearing, and 11 (five men, six women) in the last phase. Two couples and three other individuals (two men, one woman) consistently perceived their sexual relationship as positive throughout marriage.

The number of participants who described the quality of their sexual relationship as negative increased from none in the pre-parenting phase to one male during child rearing, and to ten (six men, four women) in the post-parenting phase. Two couples and one male consistently reported having unsatisfying sexual relationships over the course of their marriages. Most people who thought of their sexual relationships as unsatisfying attributed it to a difference in level of sexual desire or aging. Those who considered aging as the primary factor had reached a certain level of acceptance about it by the third phase of marriage. Most couples agreed on the quality of their sexual relationship in all three stages. The following examples illustrate how couples described the quality of their sexual relationships.

Andrew: Well, I'd say good. Of course there comes a time and your
wife wants to shake hands... I'd say it's the age. I guess my wife feels we've had our day, let's shake hands, but I feel a little different. But I can understand her position too. And it's not gonna make me like her any less... and I'm sure that the few times that it happens now it's more for my sake than for hers. I'm quite sure it is... It was a good part and we had a good relationship but like I said, my wife says it's time to shake hands.

Barbara: We have [sex] but very minimal. Not like before. Before it was like morning, noon and night and for a midnight snack or something. It's very easy for women to be sexually involved but you know men do have to perform, and I don't know if it was just too much at the beginning but it's very difficult for him... I think we're both satisfied with it. You know it's not the factor in our marriage. If it was maybe we could go to a sex therapist or something. But we discuss it and it doesn't bother me and it doesn't bother him. So we're happy.

Ivan: Well there are times when we certainly punished each other by withholding sex. I mean if you're not talking, you're certainly not going to fool around and there were times when we just did not have sex, not for protracted periods of time but certainly long enough that it was obvious that something was wrong. And, again, that's been cyclical. She feels that I'm a horny old man. I feel that she's no way near interested enough. The age old male-female battle.

Karen: Ah, good, excellent, we've always been very compatible that way, yeah, our sex life has been excellent really.

Mike: At first it was lukewarm but eventually it became, as we got
to know each other it was better... It's phased out quite a bit. It's zero right now because my wife's not too well and been that way for maybe about 5 to 10 years. She has arthritis very bad and I'm afraid I'll hurt her. In fact I have arthritis real bad, and I'm just gettin' over in the last 2 years a triple bypass. And I'm supposed to take it easy too. So, I don't want to hurt her. But as far as sex I'd say zero at the present time... I wish it was different but I don't wanna hurt her.

The importance of sex in marriage was also explored, with the majority of subjects viewing it as important. There was a gradual shift toward sex having less importance as the marriage progressed, however. In the pre-parenting phase, 21 people (11 men, 10 women) viewed sex as important or very important, as compared to 20 (11 men, 9 women) in the second phase, and 16 (eight men and women) in the third. Nearly three times the number of respondents perceived sex as unessential in their marriage by the time they reached the post-parenting years as compared to the pre-parenting phase. Most of those who felt that sex was important to their marriage reported having a satisfying sexual relationship, while most of those for whom sex was not essential stated that their sex life was mixed or unsatisfying. Some examples of the importance couples placed on the sexual aspects of their marriages follow:

Ben: I don't. She may feel differently. I never felt it was important or that it made any difference in the marriage.

Ivan: I think it's very important. Certainly. It's been an important part for me and I think at different times in our relationship for my
wife.

Judy: In this marriage it is. Yeah, it's very important to him... Not as important [to me]. But that's easy for me to say. If I didn't have it I'm sure I would really miss it. You know, it was more important when I was younger, but I think it's because I've changed in the last 6 or 7 years. I really feel that - I know I'm nuts and medical people would really go to bat on this one - but I really think it has changed. You know, and I'm getting older, but I think it's still very important in the marriage.

Values

Religion. The importance of the similarity of values between spouses was a predominant theme in this study. All of the couples talked about values as expressed through their faith in God and/or religious beliefs, and most respondents reported that religion influenced their marriage in some way, either positively, or a combination of positive and negative effects. The majority felt that it played a role in the success of their marriage, usually by strengthening their bond. Only two couples felt that religion did not have any influence upon their marriages, although for one couple this changed during the post-parenting phase when they reported that it had a positive effect. For one man, religious beliefs positively influenced his marriage through child rearing, but became less important by the post-parenting phase. He felt that religion was more important to his wife at that time, and practiced his own faith less. The following examples illustrate ways in which religion influenced marriages:

Carol: I think generally our religious backgrounds to tell you the
truth. Because that's the thing that saw a lot of difficult times and its something that we've always been involved in through our married life... and I think that's a basic substance of the relationship.

Donna: I think it had a very good effect on our marriage. I think it brought us very close. I think we were stronger about it in the first years of marriage. Well probably while the children were young we were very religious, both of us when we first got married, and our habits have changed a lot. I would never have thought of missing mass years ago, but I would now if I'm tired or something. [Husband] wouldn't. He's probably stronger at it than I am yet probably to begin with I was stronger.

Irene: I don't know that it has. We've always played a fairly active role in our religion, but I don't think that, I don't live my life by quote what the church says. I think that we both feel pretty strongly about our own feelings and beliefs. I don't think either one of us have been overly manipulated or influenced by the church. I don't know that I would separate it out as being an entity that I thought has influenced my life.

**Attitudes toward divorce.** Values were also expressed in attitudes toward divorce. Ten couples stated that divorce was never considered to be an option for them. In the other two couples, one spouse (one male, one female) was accepting of divorce. All of the couples reported that divorce was “unheard of” in their families of origin, and 22 out of 24 participants carried this value over into their own marriages. For example:
David: My family never saw it and I'm sure [wife's] family never saw it.

Ken: I honestly think that perhaps at some time during those 4 or 5 times I felt that way, I really had the feeling that I made a commitment when I made that vow, and I think that's important... I think that's a key factor in the stabilizing and holding the marriage together, that when you are really angry and really fed up with the whole thing, in the back of your mind is I made a commitment for life, not just I want to live together.

Carol's view of divorce differed from the majority of the sample: I think that if people really can't after sincerely trying can't get along, that they should. They shouldn't make each others' life miserable, but the thing is number one is, they need to in the beginning learn more about each other, talk to each other... I think that there should be more communication on everyday things between each other, but if they did that and even though they thought they were ready for marriage, if they couldn't get along then they should go ahead and part their ways I think because there's no point in making two lives or more miserable.

Other values. Nine out of twelve couples reported that other values played a role in the success of their marriages. These included faithfulness to the marriage or commitment, which was most frequently cited, as well as honesty, morality, family values, and friendship in marriage. A few illustrations follow:

George: We both have basically the same values.

Irene: I feel that probably the upbringing that we both had and...
believing that the good of the family is definitely a very important goal, and that what's good for the children is definitely a priority. And even if there were times when I wasn't particularly happy, I think that my beliefs and my teachings always made me come back and look at the overall picture.

Judy: I think loyalty is the most important thing to both of us. We both feel that what you do for each other is the most important thing, not what you give, not material things, but what you don't say. Family loyalty.

Karen: The only thing that I can say is that I have never thought of not being together, if you know what I mean.

**External Factors**

Couples were asked whether or not several external factors influenced their marriages. These included finances, respondents' extended family, spouses' extended family, and culture.

**Finances.** The majority of this sample reported that their financial situation influenced their relationship over the course of marriage. In the first two phases, money had a negative (n=5) or a mixed (n=9) effect on the marriage. Four participants reported a positive influence, three of whom were female. Couples often described struggling during these years:

Fred: I think probably when we were first married probably 7 out of every 10 discussions or arguments we had was about money. I think insecurity when you're first married can probably be the biggest factor. I don't know whether it's a sense of my feeling I wasn't able to provide or, and I can't speak for her but maybe she thought that
she couldn't handle whatever, the house and all that went with it. I think that's the most because it can kill friendship or a love affair pretty quick.

Several couples felt that their struggle with finances early in their marriage strengthened their relationships, as they were forced to work together to deal with hardship.

Perceptions of the effect of finances on marriage shifted in post-parenting years, however, with over three times as many subjects (n=13) stating a positive influence in this phase as compared to the first. This was generally associated with less financial responsibility since children were living on their own, as well as increased financial security. Agreement among couples regarding their perceptions of the role finances played in their marriages was approximately 50%.

Karen: I think that during the years of the struggling, when we bought this house... I thought we made the biggest mistake buying this house. I was so worried about it, but we struggled during that, and my mother helped me a lot during those days. She never gave me money, but she'd buy the kids their winter snow suits, which was major in those days. When we'd go to her house, those were two days I didn't have to buy food or cook, and that kind of thing, but we got along. We never were poor, but we struggled, and we struggled again when we had three kids in private college... Now we're at the stage where we're okay... We have a little extra money to do things with, but that was a long time coming to this stage.

Extended Families. Respondents were asked about the influence of their own and their spouses' extended families on their marriage.
Participants were almost equally divided about their perceptions of whether or not their own families had an impact on their relationship, with fewer people feeling influenced by their families in the third phase of marriage (n=12) as compared to the first (n=13) and second (n=14). In marriages where an influence was felt, more individuals experienced it as a mixture of positive and negative (first phase: n=7; second phase: n=9) as compared to negative perceptions (first phase: n=2; second phase: n=1). This shifted in the post-parenting phase when a more favorable effect prevailed (positive=5; negative=1; mixed=5). The following excerpts describe the ways in which families of origin influenced these marriages:

John: Good and bad. I have two older sisters that don't have any children but have always been like grandmothers to my kids. That's been the good part and also with that comes the responsibility of taking care of somebody else, like my sisters you might say. Certain things that I would have to do for them. Sometimes it gets a little touchy, how far you go, how much you can do, when you are taking your own time away from your family. But it's been good. That's what family is all about anyway... It might have caused a few little disagreements on the way.

Carol: It's played a large part since we've been back here because when we were in Western Mass my mother retired and moved in with us and then she moved down here with us but as the kids got older and became teenagers, everything got on her nerves and my husband's nerves so she ended up moving into senior citizen housing. But that was the main thing at that point in time and that's a difficult time
for any family anyway when you have teenagers.

The majority of respondents reported that their spouses’ families had no influence on their marriage (10 in the pre- and post-parenting stages, 13 during child rearing). In cases where an influence was felt, it was strongest during child rearing, and it was predominantly positive (n=7). Of those reporting mixed feelings about their in-laws’ effect on their marriage, most were women.

Donna: [Husband’s] family is closer I think. The thing with their family is they can get together and they can argue and discuss . . . I used to sometimes go to his house and all they do is fight. This is no fun. All they’re doing is fighting and I don’t like fighting, and they’d be over it just like that, where as I’d be so sensitive. My family’s very sensitive and we couldn’t talk that way because we wouldn’t be speaking, but I think that’s a wonderful thing to be able to discuss and then kiss each other goodbye two minutes later. I like it . . . Just a good effect; very positive.

Larry: No. No influence. Obviously there was contact, but I couldn’t say either side influenced us or played a part in being good or bad.

Culture. Here participants were asked whether culture, which included race and ethnicity, influenced their marriages. More than half of the respondents reported no cultural influences (n=13, n=14, n=15 in each respective stage). Of those who felt some effect, perceptions were primarily positive. Feelings were more mixed in the first phase, becoming increasingly positive by the post-parenting years. A few examples follow:

A black woman: I never thought of it in that way. Just the
circumstances in which we were put in how we had to deal with people in order to keep some semblance of self-respect and not be walked over and yet still not be killed under different circumstances. I mean some things I walked into blind. I know we were travelling somewhere and [husband] stopped to get gas so I went in and ordered all these hamburgers and french fries and sodas for the kids and he was so angry with me. I didn't know why he was angry. He says didn't you see the sign, that sign was as big as that file cabinet all across the top "we do not serve blacks". I didn't even see it. I'm just oblivious, thinking get stuff for the kids so we can get going. And I didn't pay any attention. I mean I know everybody was looking at me but okay I didn't pay any attention. I just went in. I probably could have been strung up or something. I don't know. But I was oblivious to a lot of things. I didn't think in the black and white mode. I just thought this is my family. I'm gonna do this, I'm gonna do that. But when I think back now I think, boy I don't know how I did that. Didn't know the consequences of different types of things. As far as anything else I just attributed it to an individual's ignorance or circumstances of the time and worked to try and improve things for us and for those who came after us.

An Irish woman: I think it's been really good for it. I think it's an exchange of ideas, food. Our kids are all Irish step dancers, and my husband got a real big kick out of that, and so did his family. They participated in Feshes and had a wonderful time. Meanwhile, we all eat Italian food, not Irish food. It's a good exchange, but basically we're a lot alike with our Catholic views and our feeling of family,
and the work ethic. His parents came to this country and everybody worked hard and the first thing he did was buy a house. It's the same general feeling about everything. So it's really been a good mix.

**Influence of Family of Origin on Marriage**

Respondents were asked to describe their parents' marriage in terms of roles, relatedness, communication, and equity during the interview as well. In the case where a parent died when the subject was young, he or she was asked to base perceptions on the experiences they remembered and what they may have learned from siblings and other family members.

Half of the respondents viewed their marriage as primarily different from their parents' through all three phases. Those who saw their marriage as predominantly similar to that of their parents' decreased from four to two respondents by the post-child rearing phase, whereas the number who described their marriage as a mixture of both increased from eight to ten.

In describing these similarities and differences between their own and their parents' marriages, respondents typically identified either positive characteristics which they tried to incorporate into their relationship and negative ones they sought to avoid. Unfairness and poor communication were often identified as negative, while respect, a loving and caring relationship, and values were viewed as positive. For example:

Ben: I left home when I was 14 and went to live with my sister because of my parents, their marriage. My father was very demanding and wasn't a very good husband in my opinion, looking back at it. My mother took care of the family. She had 7 children and it was all up to her. I just didn't feel that she was getting a fair shake
and I made up my mind that my marriage was not going to be like that.

Eve: First of all my mother is very loud and screams and complains about everything. I don't do that. I'm the opposite. I'm very quiet. My father did help out a lot. [Husband] doesn't, didn't in our first and second periods. Never did anything. So there's big differences. I think I was disappointed too when I got married that he couldn't wallpaper. You can't paint? You can't make a bed? And my father would do all this so there are a lot of opposites in our marriage. They say that you marry a person like your father but that's not true. It's not true.

It is interesting to note that although alcohol abuse was present in eight participants' families of origin, the abusive pattern did not continue into the present marriage. Fred was concerned about his wife's alcohol use early in their marriage, as she came from a family where both parents were alcoholics:

I wasn't too happy with that... For awhile there I thought that she'd got married just to get out of her house... I didn't think she respected me at all after the so-called honeymoon was over. And I was disturbed with her drinking 'cause I thought it was reflecting upon her background and if she respected me more she would stop and all that kind of thing... After five or six years, I realized at least she was raising the children probably the right way... then I thought that she really cared. And then after about ten years, when the children grew up a little bit, then I thought she almost like flowered.

Participants had insight into how alcohol negatively affected their
parents' marriages, and thus wanted something different in their own marriages. For example:

Ann: Not until he was drunk [would they fight], and that would be every Friday night. Pay night... This would be coming in at 2:00 in the morning. And there was furniture broken. It was chaos. Something you'd like to bury in the back of your head. It wasn't a pleasant childhood. So you see why I'm glad where I am. But you know, I didn't perpetuate it on my children like they say. And that's another thing, they'll say if you came from this environment you will do this. It's your father to your children. Well, I have a brother that's a saint, and he was among the whole bit. He had to take on the role of the father, the poor thing... You sort of avoid it if it happened to you.

When asked how her father's alcoholism affected his marriage, Donna replied:

Oh, it was a problem and it wasn't good. I used to say to my mother, sometimes I don't know why you stay with him. And she would say because of my vows... She would give in to him all the time for peace. I think I'm like my mother as far as wanting peace and harmony. I don't like fighting and you know, even with the children growing up, I hated them to fight. And so I think I'm like my mother in that way. My mother never wanted us fighting and just everything to be wonderful all the time, and so I think I'm like that.

Marital Satisfaction

The majority of couples described having fulfilling marital relationships over all three phases (19, 17, and 21 participants
respectively), with a slight decrease during the child rearing phase. Only one woman felt dissatisfied in her marriage after the child rearing phase, which she attributed to inequity in the relationship. Some descriptions follow.

Fran: I enjoy being with him. I always have... He's a very caring person. He's very unselfish and he always made me feel like I came first. I never questioned that. And time, it never changed. If anything it got better... Well, we work good together, let's put it in that frame, that we like the same fun things... So you can't say that there's one thing, we just work well together.

Eve: Well the first couple of months were fine and then I got pregnant and I think that was hard because I didn't work after 6 months. So he had a burden on his back plus he had a baby and he didn't even want to wipe him, the baby. So that was a real hard kind of rejection part of our marriage. And then the second phase when I had the kids I felt as though I raised the kids all by myself and he was never around to help out. So I kind of took both mother and father roles and that was hard. And at times I kind of resented it. Then since they've been 18 and out it's been better. We've both grown a lot in 20 years and it's much better now. I found that after all these years I really do love him and he's a funny, crazy guy and I do love him, and I know that he'd do anything for me. There's no question about that and that's kind of security where before I doubted so I wasn't as happy as I am now. But I think we really do love each other and that's neat for someone to say after 24 years of marriage.
Irene: Well, the fact that we're pretty much basically down to just [husband] and I that we have to worry about, there's a lot less stress in terms of, are we going to meet all these other peoples' needs, and so it makes it easier for us to focus on our own and enjoy what we do have. So I could say I guess the degree of comfort in the rest of our lives probably makes the relationship more satisfying right now.

**Change Over Time**

Twenty-one out of twenty-four participants felt that their relationship had changed over the course of their marriage, primarily for the better. Respondents talked about how they had grown together, feeling closer and more committed to each other over time. Many couples described the post-parenting phase as easier because there was more time for them as a couple, and they could concentrate more on each other. For example:

Ed: The first phase I'd say it was fighting all the time. I think we were both trying to exert our authority, especially myself. Second phase, I'd say was more like a learning phase because of my accident, and we had a chance to sit back and look at one another and feel things out. Now that we're in phase three it's great. We have the opportunity to do more things. Going out to dinner back in phase two, forget it, but now we have the chance to go out to fine restaurants with some good friends and enjoy it... No more tough times. There's still tough times, but not like they were. Not worrying about, well do we pay the bill or do we buy food. Do we need lights or food. It's totally different. This is the way marriage should be from the start.

Judy: I think our marriage has changed from being a big romantic
whirlwind thing, to kind of long hard years with the kids, to a very nice time now. Yeah, we're very, wise enough to appreciate just a sunny day... We're lucky we have this time together... Now we're appreciating each other more than ever.

Irene struggled with this issue, stating on one hand that her marriage had changed in ways, yet on the other hand, her husband really hadn't changed:

I probably would say that it hasn't changed that much. I really wouldn't be able to say we've REALLY changed. I think that some aspects of it have changed... What we expect out of it I guess I probably wouldn't say has changed much... I would just say that I feel marriage is definitely a lot of work, and there are a lot of good days and a lot of bad days, and changes, ever so many times over the years, and the one thing that's interesting about staying in a marriage long enough is to see these changes and to realize that what I would've wanted 20 years ago and thought I couldn't live without, I could care less about today, and if I had gotten out of the marriage or had gotten a divorce or whatever and gotten to this point in my life when that thing back there is no longer important, then I would've given up a fairly decent, comfortable relationship. It's amazing to see how people change... People basically don't change; tigers don't change their stripes... I don't believe that [husband] will ever be able to be anybody but who he is.

Some respondents felt that as one spouse changed, the marriage did also:

Eve: Our relationship has gotten a lot better since the kids are older. I think that maybe he didn't want the responsibility of raising them and now that we don't have the responsibility, maybe he feels more
comfortable that we're back together where we were... So he never did any of that stuff until this last phase, because maybe I have been more assertive in this last phase. I didn't realize these are some of my needs, I need to have you do this, and so maybe I wasn't assertive in the first years. And now I feel more comfortable and confident that I can tell him what I want done and he can help me.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

Introduction

Nine salient themes emerged in this qualitative study of the factors associated with marital stability in working class couples. These themes included: initial attraction, expectations of marriage, marital behavior, relatedness (which included relationship variables, intimacy, communication, decision-making, handling interpersonal differences, level of marital conflict, equity, and sexuality), values, external factors (finances), influence of family of origin, marital satisfaction, and change over time. This chapter reviews and discusses significant findings as they relate to previous research and theory. Clinical implications and suggestions for future research are also discussed.

Implications of Significant Findings

A Portrait of Stable Marriage

A comprehensive picture of the complex and multifaceted nature of stable marriages emerged in this study. The results are consistent with Lewis & Spanier's (1979) theory of the interaction between marital quality and marital stability, which posited that marital quality was a major determinant of marital stability, but was mediated by several threshold variables. They identified seven variables as most significant in determining the circumstances under which a marriage would remain intact or dissolve:

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

With the exception of amenability to social stigma, and divorce law and availability of legal aid, the other variables were reflected in the themes that emerged in this study. The themes which specifically related to Lewis & Spanier's (1979) variables were relatedness, expectations of marriage, marital behavior, values (including religion and attitudes toward divorce), external factors (finances), and influence of parents' marriage. Relatedness was the core category; other themes which were encompassed by relatedness included: communication and decision-making, handling interpersonal differences, level of marital conflict, relationship variables (understanding, sensitivity, respect, trust), intimacy, equity, and sexuality. Values included commitment, the role of religion, and attitudes toward divorce. Marital expectations were reflected in couples' descriptions of their marriage as similar to or different from that of their parents'.

Certain premarital variables emerged in this study, which is consistent with Lewis & Spanier's (1978) notion that such factors influence marital quality, and thus contribute to the understanding of marital stability. They highlighted several determinants:

1) personality characteristics of the future marital partners, 2) attitudes, values, and philosophy of life relating to both marital and nonmarital domains, 3) social factors, 4) circumstantial factors,
5) marital expectations of the partners, and 6) social maturity level. (Lewis & Spanier, 1979, p. 273)

Personality characteristics of the future partner, attitudes and values, and marital expectations were supported by this research. Personality and physical characteristics were typically cited as factors of initial attraction to the future spouse, which were predominantly positive in this sample. The fact that personality variables were cited either alone or in conjunction with looks by just over half of this sample may be the beginning of a process of searching for and developing relatedness. Similarity of values emerged as an important relationship variable in the marriages of this sample, which was most likely identified and expressed during the courting relationship as well.

Marital expectations regarding anticipated roles and the effort needed to sustain the relationship were highlighted in this sample. In contrast to the notion in the literature that men tend to have more traditional expectations of marriage than do women (Komarovsky, 1973; Mason & Bumpass, 1975; Osmond & Martin, 1975; Rubin, 1976; Wills et al., 1974), most of the men and women in this study expected to assume traditional roles in their marriage, with the husband as the breadwinner and the wife as the homemaker. There was little ambivalence in describing their anticipated roles, which reflected the traditional values of the time, as well as their parents' marriage as a model for their relationships. Many of the participants reported having the assumption that their marriage would be like that of their parents, with clear traditional gender role differentiations.

Although prior to marriage only one-third of the couples expected
that effort would be needed to maintain their relationship, most reported that in retrospect they learned that it would require work. Early in their relationship, these couples realized that their marriage would not grow without attention and nurturance from each partner. The majority recalled that they worked hard to sustain their relationships with their spouses, which supports Altrocchi's (1988) conception that marriages need to be worked on to be successful.

**Marital Behavior**

Although most couples anticipated a traditional marriage in terms of roles, with men as instrumental and women as expressive, in retrospect they described their marriages as less conventional. Instrumental behaviors were typically associated with "doing", that is, a focus on getting the job done or problem solved, while expressive behaviors involved an affective concern for the welfare of the spouse and the harmony of the relationship. The majority of women described themselves in both instrumental and expressive terms from the start of their marriage, which was different from their premarital expectations. In contrast, men began marriage in a traditional instrumental role and gradually became more expressive and affiliative over the course of their marriage, which also differed from earlier expectations. This change was in part reflected by their assuming household and child rearing responsibilities, although the wife was considered primarily responsible for these areas by both men and women. These working class couples expanded their roles to include non-traditional activities, but maintained their traditional roles of the husband as primarily the breadwinner and the wife as caretaker, which is consistent with Hiller & Philliber's
(1986) study of middle class couples. Their notion that marriage partners believe that they hold more responsibility for household tasks than their spouses think they do was not supported by this study. In contrast, husbands and wives in this sample had matching perceptions of their own and their partners' level of household responsibilities. Perhaps this sharing of instrumental and affectional roles in the marital relationship led to greater marital satisfaction, as suggested by Wills, et al. (1974). If marital satisfaction is considered the primary determinant of marital stability, as posited by Lewis & Spanier (1979), then sharing gender roles in marriage would also increase marital stability.

Gender differences between men and women continued throughout the marriages of these couples, which is a trend found by other researchers (McGee & Wells, 1982; O'Neil et al., 1987; Zube, 1982). There is also evidence of a role reversal occurring in older age, with men becoming more affiliative and less mastery-oriented, and older women becoming more assertive and interested in self-fulfillment, and less focused on the family (Hyde & Phillis, 1979; McGee & Wells, 1982; Zube 1982). This role reversal was upheld for the men in this sample, but not for the majority of women. Although wives reported a shift in focus on their marital relationship in the third phase of marriage, it did not take away from the importance of family. Only one woman began her career in older age. In contrast, men became more affiliative and involved in affectional behaviors as they aged. This change appeared to be influenced by a coinciding increase in understanding of their wives, which was reported by both men and women, as well as the development of a confrontive style of handling conflict and interpersonal differences throughout their
marriage. Perhaps their increased involvement in child rearing and household responsibilities also influenced this change in men.

Self-in Relation Theory (Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1986; Surrey, 1984) views masculinity as defined through separation and femininity as defined through attachment. The shift in men toward increased affiliation, with the coinciding increase in understanding and expression of thoughts and feelings, suggests that they have negotiated the struggle of relating with another and overcome their denial of connection, which is rooted in their development (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Miller 1986; Surrey, 1984). With the progression toward greater affiliation and expressiveness in men over the course of marriage came a breakdown in rigid, stereotypical gender role behavior. It highlights the presence of some gender role flexibility in the husbands and wives in this sample.

The sharing of gender roles resonates with Bem's (1987) concept of androgyny, in which an individual has both high masculine and high feminine traits. Early in marriage, husbands and wives had rather traditional notions of what men and women should do in marriage; according to Bem (1987) they were a product of society's linking of behavior to gender, thus creating gender schemas. Men's perceptions changed, however, moving from being more stereotypically male to a less gender-schematized life. Perhaps such changes away from gender-schematization are important in making marriages last.

Given this gender-role flexibility, the marriages described in this study were more egalitarian (Altrocchi, 1988; Altrocchi & Crosby, 1989; Klagsbrun, 1985) than the couples in Komarovsky's (1962) and Rubin's (1976) studies, where more rigid role distinctions prevailed. Rubin
(1976) reported that although couples accepted the goal of companionship in marriage, they lacked the means to achieve it, which she attributed to there being no models for these behaviors and attitudes in their families. Although the couples in this sample also lacked such role models in their families, they were exposed to models in society, especially through the women's movement, which may have contributed to the higher level of companionship and sharing found in these marriages. The high level of maturity and ego development of the individuals in this study may also have contributed to the egalitarianism and flexibility found in these marriages. They had resiliency and resources to cope and adapt to changes and issues related to marriage. This has implications for adaptation to the marital relationship, in the sense that greater flexibility may lead to improved adaptation.

**Relatedness**

Relatedness emerged as the core category, encompassing eight other themes. Relatedness involved mutuality, in which couples negotiated a balance between independence and dependence, which Gilligan (1982) discussed in terms of maturity of interdependence. It relates to the concept of intimacy, defined by Rubin (1976) as a sharing of each other's inner life, and by Scarf (1986) as "a person's ability to talk about who he really is, and to say what he wants and needs, and to be heard by the intimate partner" (p. 49). Communication is implicit in both of these definitions of intimacy, and emerged as an important theme influencing relatedness. In addition, several other variables were found to influence relatedness in this study, including positive regard for the relationship and spouse, relationship variables (understanding, sensitivity, respect,
and trust), handling interpersonal differences, marital conflict, decision-making, equity, and sexuality.

These couples' general sense of relatedness, as expressed through positive feelings about the relationship, increased throughout marriage (with a slight decrease during child rearing), as did reports of intimacy (psychosocial and physical), husbands' understanding of their wives, communication (also with a slight decrease during child rearing), men confronting interpersonal differences, and equity. For these couples relatedness evolved over time in marriage, which supports the importance of a developmental approach to marital theory, as suggested in the literature (Moore, 1980; Nadelson et al., 1984; White et al., 1986; Storaasli & Markman, 1990).

Communication in and of itself did not emerge as a major determinant of marital stability, which is contrary to the literature and the expectations of the researcher, but consistent with Demment's (1992) study. It has implications for relatedness, similar to Rubin's (1983) notion that intimacy involves a reciprocal sharing of feelings and thoughts, and a desire to understand another's inner life. A broad definition of communication emerged from the data, which included understanding, respect, and trust, as suggested by Demment (1992) and White et al. (1986). This broad definition also involved participants' descriptions of good and bad communication, which Demment (1992) also found. Good communication was characterized by the ability to listen and feel understood by their partners, which Gottman (1977) and Kahn (1970) identified as important in marital satisfaction. In addition, the perception of an adequate amount of communication between husbands
and wives was an important factor in determining effective communication, as suggested by Noller (1984). Negative communication was characterized by a lack of communication, misunderstanding, and unresolved disagreements, a factor Billings (1979) and Birchler & Webb (1977) identified as influencing marital satisfaction. Contrary to the literature (Barnes & Buss, 1985; Yelsma & Brown, 1985), no gender differences were found in relation to communication patterns.

It has been suggested that effective conflict resolution is important to marital satisfaction, and thus marital stability (Barry, 1970; Billings, 1979; Yahraes, 1980). The majority of participants reported minimal marital conflict in all three stages of marriage (23 in the first and third stages, 17 in the second). Most of the conflict these couples experienced related to child rearing, which is consistent with Demment's (1992) finding that couples experienced the greatest marital difficulties during their children's adolescent years. The styles of handling conflict and interpersonal differences were different for men and women in this sample, with women consistently more confrontive than men. As previously stated, however, men became more confrontive in their marriage over time. Rather than avoiding conflict, they were increasingly able to discuss their feelings and opinions with their wives. Thus, the ability to discuss problems and express feelings appear to be indicators of marital stability, as suggested by Snyder (1979).

In addition to understanding, three other relationship variables appear to be important to communication and relatedness: sensitivity, respect, and trust. Most respondents consistently characterized themselves and their spouses as sensitive, respectful, and trustworthy.
These variables seem to be important in successful marriages, and might be considered necessary but insufficient ingredients for relatedness.

Another aspect of communication that was part of relatedness was the couples' style of decision-making. Eleven out of twelve couples reported that their style varied between making independent and mutual decisions, depending on the type of decision. Major decisions regarding large purchases, vacations, and family issues were made on a mutual basis, while day-to-day decisions were usually made by one individual. These couples negotiated around issues such as recreation, leisure time, friends, and finances, developing a style that worked well for them as a couple, reflecting a high level of relatedness and mutuality.

Relatedness was expressed also through couples' perceptions of the equity of their marital relationship. The majority of couples reported an improvement in equity as their marriage progressed, which supports Schafer & Keith's (1981) finding that perceived equity increases throughout the lifecycle. There was a marked increase in equity during the post-child rearing phase of marriage, with 19 participants perceiving their relationship as equitable. The increase in equity coincided with an increase in intimacy and marital satisfaction for these couples. These results may also lend support to their notion that marital satisfaction and adjustment are greater in marriages perceived as equitable.

Although there was a decline in the number of participants who described their sexual relationship in positive terms over the course of marriage (from 16 in the first phase to 11 in the third), the majority still felt it was important (16 in the third phase as compared to 21 in the first and 20 in the second). Dissatisfaction was associated with
differing levels of sexual desire within partners or to the decrease in desire that occurred in conjunction with the aging process. It appeared that partners reached an understanding and acceptance regarding these aspects of their sexual relationship. Despite the increase in negative and mixed feelings about the quality of their sexual relationship, reports of intimacy and relatedness actually increased throughout marriage. In addition, reports of physical intimacy increased over time, referring to touching and behaviors other than sexual intercourse, which may account for part of the greater sense of relatedness these couples reported.

In contrast to the couples in Komarovsky's (1962) and Rubin's (1976) studies, the couples in the current study appeared to achieve a higher level of intimacy and relatedness in their marriage. These couples described a level of sharing and companionship that was not present in the prior studies of working class couples, which Rubin (1976) attributed to their lacking the means to achieve such goals. Decision-making was not as largely divided along traditional lines as it was in Rubin's (1976) study, where the man made the final decision in cases where a difference remained after discussion between the spouses. Rather, there was a definite sense of mutuality expressed regarding decisions in the current study, with major decisions made together by the couple. The majority of participants in this study felt their communication was good, and actually improved throughout their marriage, which is contrary to previous research (Komarovsky, 1962; Rubin, 1976) and Rubin's statement that working class couples "talk at each other, past each other, or through each other - rarely with or to each other" (p. 116). The individuals in Rubin's (1976) and Komarovsky's (1962) samples were much younger than
those in this study, however, and they were married for a shorter period of time.

Values

The importance of values and religion for marital happiness is well-documented in the literature (Hicks & Platt, 1970). Similarity of values was an important factor in all of these stable marriages. Traditional values such as commitment, faithfulness, honesty, and the importance of family were often highlighted. Commitment to the marriage was strongly reflected in the attitude that divorce was not an option for 22 out of 24 spouses, a value which all of the participants stated was present in their families of origin. Each respondent discussed his/her values in terms of religious beliefs and/or faith in God, with eighteen out of twenty-four people stating that religion positively influenced their marriage, usually by strengthening their marital bond. These results support Lewis & Spanier's (1979) conceptualization of marital stability, which includes attitudes, values, and philosophy of life in the premarital predispositions, and commitment to the marriage, religious doctrine, and divorce law as threshold variables influencing marital stability. Values may also influence a couples' sense of relatedness, in the sense that the greater the commitment, the better the relatedness.

External factors

Although several factors were explored, finances emerged as the only external variable thought to influence these marriages. Most couples reported "struggling" from the beginning of their marriage through child rearing, due to financial limitations. Struggling was viewed to have both a positive and negative effect on marriage; positive in the sense that it
forced couples to work together to face difficulties, and negative in that money was often the cause of arguments. Disagreements arose regarding differing spending styles, where one partner wanted to spend more than the other, and how to spend money - on necessities versus frivolities. This finding is contrary to previous research with working class couples (Komarovsky, 1962; Rubin, 1976), in which finances were viewed as a consistent burden and preoccupation. This difference may be attributed to the higher salaries of the working class couples in the nineties as compared to the sixties and seventies, as well as the fact that the individuals in this sample were older and the men experienced greater success in their careers. In addition, the majority of the wives were employed in successful and better paying jobs than in Rubin's (1976) sample. It is interesting to note that whether women worked outside the home was often determined primarily by financial need rather than the need for self-actualization, which is similar to Rubin's (1976) study. Most women sought employment to supplement their husband's income and relieve financial constraints.

Influence of Family of Origin

The notion that a person's experiences in his/her family of origin influence the marital relationship is prevalent in previous research (Barry, 1970; Berkowitz, 1984; Calogeras, 1985, Demment, 1991, Nichols, 1978; Scarf, 1986; St. Clair, 1986), and supported by this study. Marital expectations were expressed through respondents' perceptions of how their marriage compared to their parents' marriage. Although half of the participants viewed their marriage as different from that of their parents, they had clear ideas of how they chose to make it different, by
avoiding what they perceived as negative aspects of their parents' relationship. Approximately one-third of the sample identified a mixture of similarities and differences. Similarities were usually viewed as positive, and included characteristics such as respect, values, and a loving relationship, while unfairness and poor communication were most often identified as negative aspects to avoid. Families of origin thus influenced these marriages, providing a model of marriage, both positive and negative.

Marital Satisfaction

Although the results of this study support previous findings of a relationship between marital satisfaction and marital stability (Hicks & Platt, 1970; Lewis & Spanier, 1979; O'Neil et al, 1987; Spanier & Lewis, 1980), a causal relationship cannot be posited. These couples reported consistent marital satisfaction throughout their marriage, with a slight decrease during child rearing, but increasing again during the post-parenting phase. This curvilinear relationship between marital satisfaction and stages in the life cycle is consistent with O'Neil et al.'s (1987) findings. This decrease during child rearing coincides with the slight decrease in relatedness, the decrease in communication, and the increase in marital conflict reported by these couples in the same phase. It appears that children, especially adolescents, stir up issues in marriage, and the focus on caretaking of children distracts from the couple's focus on their relationship, thus contributing to higher marital conflict and lower relatedness and satisfaction. Children did not influence marital stability in any other way, contrary to the researcher's expectation that some couples would stay together for the sake of their
children.

Change Over Time

Previous research (Bentler & Newcomb, 1978; Bowman & Spanier, 1978; Nadelson et al., 1984; O'Neil et al., 1987; Storaasli & Markman, 1988; Zube, 1982) conceptualized marriage as a dynamic, changing relationship which evolved as each individual progressed through developmental stages. This notion was supported by descriptions of these couples' marriages, which highlights the importance of a developmental approach to the study and treatment of marriage. Couples discussed how they had grown together, feeling more committed to each other over time. They also described the post-parenting phase as a time to refocus on their marital relationship and their role as partner rather than parent. This third phase was the time couples reported an increase in relatedness, intimacy, equity, and communication. Struggles related to finances also eased during this phase, most likely having a positive effect on the relationship. Significant changes in individuals appeared to influence the changing nature of marriage as well. As previously discussed, men became more affiliative, incorporating expressive aspects into their roles as husbands, and their style of handling conflict and interpersonal differences changed from avoiding dealing with these issues to confronting them.

Implications for Marital Therapy

Altrocchi (1988) and Wilcoxon (1985) stressed the importance of focusing on healthy aspects of functioning in marital and family research and practice. This study focused on adaptive marital relationships, with
participants chosen from a non-clinical population, and several themes related to successful marriage emerged. The portrait of stable marriage that emerged from the data was not universal in this sample. Although commonalities were found, there was diversity within the themes. For example, some couples reported low levels of relatedness, some marriages were very traditional in terms of roles, some were characterized by major marital conflict, and in others one or the other partner avoided dealing with interpersonal differences and conflict; yet the couples considered their marriages successful. Each couple determined what was fair in their marriage, and each developed a shared understanding of success. This diversity highlights the need to understand how a couple makes meaning of their marriage, which is the purpose of the qualitative method (Giorgi, 1985; Kvale, 1983). The therapist needs to take into consideration the couple’s idea of what constitutes a successful marriage, tailoring interventions to fit these needs.

The portrait of a stable marriage described in this study could be used as a guideline for exploration in marital therapy, in the context of the developmental nature of marriage. The marital relationship can be viewed as a changing and evolving entity, from premarital expectations to how couples develop a mutual and successful marriage, which includes finding a balance between independence and dependence. First, each of the nine areas needs to be assessed with the couple, to identify their expectations and definitions of marital behavior, relatedness, values, external factors, and marital satisfaction. Goals could then be set. In terms of relatedness, the areas relevant to this theme would be explored,
including intimacy, patterns of communication and decision-making, relationship variables (level of understanding, sensitivity, respect, trust), style of handling interpersonal differences, marital conflict, equity, and the quality and importance of the sexual relationship. It would be important to understand how couples negotiate their marital roles, and the importance they place on external factors, such as finances.

The influence of the family of origin on the marital relationship has implications for treatment as well. It highlights the importance of examining individuals' experiences in their families of origin in terms of what they bring into their own relationship. Similarities and/or differences between their marriage and that of their parents need to be assessed and could help the couple and therapist understand the dynamics of the marital relationship. The genogram is often a helpful tool in this endeavor.

It is important to consider the time at which a couple enters treatment as well. All of these areas could be assessed at various times throughout the marriage, and types of interventions used may depend on the particular phase of marriage. For example, child rearing years were associated with the highest level of marital conflict and the lowest levels of relatedness, communication, and intimacy. Education and intervention regarding parenting skills could be an adjunct to focusing on the other variables previously mentioned.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study described themes related to marital stability in working
class couples married at least 20 years. The results highlight the need for continued qualitative and quantitative research of marital stability, and the relationship between marital satisfaction and marital stability. A definite need for research on working class marriage remains, especially in light of the differences found between the current study and previous research (Komarovsky, 1962; Rubin, 1976). The picture of working class marriage in the current research is more positive than that painted in the sixties and seventies, which requires further corroboration. Replication of this study with similar populations to see whether the same themes arise would be important.

The present findings should be compared to samples from different socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and geographic groups, as well as homosexual couples, heterosexual couples who never marry, and couples without children. In addition, comparisons could be made with couples during each of the three phases to see if these themes arise then or evolve over time.

The relationship between marital satisfaction and stability remains unclear. Although these stable marriages were characterized by marital satisfaction, it cannot be stated that marital satisfaction was a major determinant of successful marriage, as posited by Lewis & Spanier (1979). It is clear that the two are related, and it would be valuable to determine the nature of this relationship through further research.

Further investigation of gender differences in marriage is warranted as well. This study found gender differences on three variables: marital behavior, which includes roles; understanding of and feeling understood by spouse; and style of handling interpersonal differences and conflict.
Gender differences were not found in communication, contrary to previous studies (Barnes & Buss, 1985). This may be attributed to the interview structure, which was not designed to explore specific communication patterns in detail. Yelsma & Brown's (1985) finding that gender-role classifications are more effective in explaining communication differences than biological sex classifications warrants further investigation.

**Summary**

Marital stability for working class couples married over 20 years appears to be influenced by several variables, including initial attraction to future spouse, premarital expectations, marital behavior, relatedness, values, finances, and marital satisfaction. Relatedness was the core category, to which most other themes related, including overall positive feelings about the relationship, relationship variables (understanding, sensitivity, respect, trust), intimacy, communication, decision-making style, style of handling interpersonal differences, level of marital conflict, equity, and sexuality. Couples described their relationships as changing over time, highlighting the developmental nature of marriage. The marital relationship appears to evolve and grow toward a balance of independence and dependence, which resulted in mature levels of interdependence.

Marital therapy should include a focus on these common variables, with the understanding that each couple has its own definition of successful marriage. Family histories of each spouse are valuable in understanding the influence of the parents' marriage on the dynamics of
the marital relationship. A developmental approach to the study and treatment of marriage is important.
References


Coordinator, 185-191.


Appendix A

CONSENT FORM

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

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

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

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

Signed: ___________________________  Date: ___________________________
Witness: ___________________________  (Interviewer)
Appendix B

INTERVIEW GUIDELINE

INTRODUCTION
Thank respondent for being in study, read and sign consent form, and explain the need for separate interviews.
These interviews have three parts:
First, I wish to talk to you about your marriage now and how the relationship has remained the same and how it has changed since you and your spouse first met.
Second, I want to ask you about your memories of your own family background and values.
Third, I am interested in your ideas about the influence of your experiences in your family on your marriage: how do the thoughts and feelings which come from growing up in a family influence your marriage?

BACKGROUND DATA
Name
Date of Birth:
Educational Level:
Occupation: Income:
Children (names and birthdates):

Ethnicity/Race: Geog. Origins:
Religion:
Date of Marriage:
Spouse's Name and Date of Birth:
INTERVIEW

A. The marital relationship over time:
   1. As you look back to the time when you met ________, what attracted you to him/her? (Spouse)
      a) What type of interests did you share?
      b) What kind of role did you see yourself playing in the relationship?
      c) What about ________, what role did you see that he/she would play? (Spouse)
   2. Can you tell us what was going on in your life around the time of your marriage to ________ (educationally, vocationally, family, etc.)? (Spouse)
      a) How did your family feel and react to ________? (Spouse)
      b) Tell us about your family's reaction to your marriage (Explore feelings about approval or disapproval, etc.)?
   3. How did ________'s family react to the marriage? (Spouse)
   4. I'd like you to think back to the beginning of your marriage. Ask specific yet open-ended questions about how the person viewed self and spouse in terms of roles, relatedness, and equity. Focus on the quality of the marital relationship, its mutual and non-mutual aspects. For each aspect start with the beginning of the relationship and then ask respondent how it changed and/or remained the same during child rearing and post-child rearing periods.
      a) Would you describe what your relationship together was like from your point of view (roles, responsibilities, etc.)?
         1. Can you tell me how you and spouse got along?
         2. How did you both go about making decisions and solving problems (work, friends, recreation, etc.)?
         3. Can you give me some examples of how you faced and dealt with crises (health, financial, personal, etc.)?
      b) How did you feel about your relationship?
         1. What was good, not so good, and bad about the relationship?
         2. How much understanding did you feel ________ had of you (differentiation, separateness, etc.)? (Spouse)
         3. How much understanding did you have of ________? (Spouse)
         4. How sensitive was ________ to you? (Spouse)
5. How sensitive were you to _____?  
   (Spouse)
6. How much respect did you feel from _____ in the relationship?  
   (Spouse)
7. How much did you respect _____?  
   (Spouse)
8. How did you handle differences (sexual, values, career, etc.)? 
9. How close and trusting did you feel towards _____?  
   (Spouse)
10. How close and trusting did you think _____ felt towards you?  
    (Spouse)

c) Overall, did you feel a sense of fairness in the marriage?
   1. Despite differences, did things balance out in the marriage?
   2. Do you feel that your ways of solving problems as a couple were generally fair to each partner?
   3. Were there situations where one of you had more influence than the other (money, friends, recreation, work, etc.)?

B. I'd now like to ask you about other aspects of your life that may have been important to you and the marriage. How have the following played a part in your life together and how have they affected your marital relationship?
   1. Religion
   2. Extended families
   3. Cultural factors including ethnicity and race
   4. Economic factors including income
   5. Sexual relationship
   6. Other values (beliefs, moral standards, etc.)

C. Parent's Marriage:
   1. What do you think you learned about marriage from observing your parents?
   2. Ask specific yet open-ended questions about how the person viewed mother and father in terms of roles, relatedness, and equity. Focus on the quality of their marital relationship, its mutual and non-mutual aspects. Ask about memories and observations of their marital relationship.
      a) Can you tell us how your parents got along?
         1. How did they both go about making decisions and solving problems?
         2. Can you give me some examples of how they solved a problem where each disagreed?
      b) Overall, was there a sense of fairness in their marriage?
1. Despite differences, did things balance out in their relationship?
2. Did you feel that their ways of solving problems as a couple were generally fair to each partner? Were there situations where one of them had more influence than the other (money, friends, recreation, work, etc.)?
3. What are some important similarities in your marriage compared to the marriage of your parents?

D. In this final section of the interview, I'd like to ask how you see your marriage changing and remaining the same since you and your spouse first met. I'm interested in how you both have been able to deal with the challenges of remaining together and building a relationship. I also want to understand how you see your marriage being similar to and different from your parents' marriage.

1) As you look back in time over the relationship, what were the personal qualities of ______ and factors in the relationship that kept you together? (Spouse)
2) How does what you are currently looking for in the relationship differ from your earlier expectations (needs, roles)?
3) How have your expectations changed or remained the same?
4) Do you think that your marriage has changed or has the relationship remained pretty much the same from the beginning?
   a) Explore themes in relation to roles/tasks, relatedness, equity, and communication.
5) What words best describe what ______ means to you? (Spouse)
   a) Now and in the past.
6) Is there anything that you wish to add about what were the critical issues/factors that kept you in the relationship?
7) Is there anything else that you think would be important for us to understand about your marriage, yourself, or your spouse?

End of Interview
Appendix C

**Coding Form**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview #</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Spouse's Name</th>
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<tbody>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Date</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Interviewer</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th># of Years Married</th>
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<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>

1. Subject's Initial Attraction to Spouse (0) negative (1) ambivalent (2) positive
2. Subject's Family Support for Spouse Choice (0) disapproval (1) approval (2) mixed
3. Subject's Circumstances at Time of Marriage (0) no conflict (1) conflict
4. Role Expectations of Self in Marriage (0) traditional-clear (1) traditional-diffuse (2) non-traditional-clear (3) non-traditional-diffuse
5. Expectation of Need for S's Effort to Sustain Marriage (0) no expectations (1) no (2) yes
6. Subject's Perception of the Sexual Relationship (0) negative (1) mixed (2) positive
   A. first phase
   B. second phase
   C. third phase
7. Subject's Perception of the Importance of Sexual Relationship (0) not important (1) important (2) very important
   A. first phase
   B. second phase
   C. third phase
8. Subject's Perception of the Presence of Intimacy in Marriage (0) no (1) mixed (2) yes
   A. Psychosocial Intimacy
      1. first phase
      2. second phase
      3. third phase
9. S's Personal Style of Decision-Making (0) logical (1) impulsive (2) intuitive
   A. first phase
   B. second phase
   C. third phase
10. External Decision-Making Style of the Couple (0) separate (1) variable (2) mutual (e.g. friends, recreation, vacations, purchases)
    A. first phase
    B. second phase
    C. third phase
11. Style of Handling Interpersonal Differences in Marriage (0) avoid (1) confront
    A. Subject's Style
       1. first phase
       2. second phase
       3. third phase
    B. Subject's Perception of Spouse's Style
       1. first phase
       2. second phase
       3. third phase
12. S's Reported Level of Marital Conflict (0) minimal (1) major 
   A. first phase ___
   B. second phase ___
   C. third phase ___

13. S's Perception of Responsibilities for Child Rearing (0) individual (1) mutual 
   A. first phase ___
   B. second phase ___
   C. third phase ___

14. S's Perception of Relationship Variables: Spouse to Subject (0) no (1) mixed (2) yes 
   A. Sensitivity
      1. first phase ___  2. second phase ___  3. third phase ___
   B. Understanding
      1. first phase ___  2. second phase ___  3. third phase ___
   C. Respect
      1. first phase ___  2. second phase ___  3. third phase ___
   D. Trust
      1. first phase ___  2. second phase ___  3. third phase ___

15. S's Perception of Relationship Variables: Subject to Spouse (0) no (1) mixed (2) yes 
   A. Sensitivity
      1. first phase ___  2. second phase ___  3. third phase ___
   B. Understanding
      1. first phase ___  2. second phase ___  3. third phase ___
   C. Respect
      1. first phase ___  2. second phase ___  3. third phase ___
   D. Trust
      1. first phase ___  2. second phase ___  3. third phase ___

16. S's Perception of Fairness/Equity in Marital Relationship (0) no (1) mixed (2) yes 
   A. first phase ___
   B. second phase ___
   C. third phase ___

17. S's Perception of Communication Within Marital Relationship (0) no (1) mixed (2) yes 
   A. first phase ___
   B. second phase ___
   C. third phase ___

18. S's Overall Sense of Relatedness (0) negative (1) mixed (2) positive 
   A. first phase ___
   B. second phase ___
   C. third phase ___

19. S's Perception of Other Influences on the Marriage 
    (0) negative influence (1) no influence (2) positive influence (3) mixed 
    A. Finances
       1. first phase ___  2. second phase ___  3. third phase ___
    B. Religion
       1. first phase ___  2. second phase ___  3. third phase ___
    C. Subject's Extended Family
       1. first phase ___  2. second phase ___  3. third phase ___
    D. Spouse's Extended Family
       1. first phase ___  2. second phase ___  3. third phase ___
    E. Culture/Ethnicity
       1. first phase ___  2. second phase ___  3. third phase ___
    F. Other Values (list in comments) 
       1. first phase ___  2. second phase ___  3. third phase ___
20. S's Perception of Similarity of Own Marriage w/ Parents' Marriage  
   (0) discontinuity  (1) mixed  (2) continuity  
   A. first phase  
   B. second phase  
   C. third phase  

21. S's Perception of Own Marital Behavior  
   (0) instrumental  (1) mixed  (2) expressive  
   A. first phase  
   B. second phase  
   C. third phase  

22. S's Parents' Attitudes Toward Divorce  
   (1) disapprove  (2) accepting  

23. S's Perception of Interpersonal Fit w/ Spouse  
   (0) no  (1) mixed  (2) complimentarily  (3) symmetry  
   A. first phase  
   B. second phase  
   C. third phase  

24. S's Overall Sense of the Marriage as Satisfying  
   (0) no  (1) mixed  (2) yes  
   A. first phase  
   B. second phase  
   C. third phase  

COMMENTS: