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The Newlywed Experience for Women: A Phenomenological Investigation

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ABSTRACT

The major objective of this research was to explore the experience of new marriage for women. Previous research has neglected the qualitative investigations of the newlywed experience from an exclusively female perspective. Prior research has also focused on specific areas of the newlywed experience. The newlywed phase of marriage for women was studied to allow for comparisons to be made in subsequent studies of the newlywed phase of marriage for men. The purpose of this study was to give participants an opportunity to voice their experiences of new marriage so that others may be better able to understand and learn from their experiences.

The phenomenological method was used to interview fifteen adult women who were in their first marriage and had been married for less than three years. These interviews were then transcribed and analyzed by two different phenomenological research groups looking for themes that existed among the fifteen participants. Themes emerged on the grounds of **Different – Our Relationship** and **Our Identities**, which set the context for the study. The themes included **Being Together, Our Responsibilities**, and **How We Communicate**. The grounds, themes, and sub-themes are outlined and described in detail, with quotes from the participants provided to illustrate each one.

This research provides an understanding of the experience of new marriage for women so that mental health clinicians can have a better understanding of this experience and clinicians can use this knowledge to develop a framework to guide marital counseling and therapeutic interventions for married women.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This dissertation aims to investigate the experience of new marriage for women. Romantic relationships, marriage, and divorce are important experiences that greatly affect an individual's quality of life. These social relationships can bring great joy and/or great pain to one's life. The phenomenological method helped obtain a thorough and rich understanding of the newlywed experience of marriage for women.

Marriage is something that many people experience in their lifetimes. Approximately 59% of the U.S. population is married (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2002). Projections indicate that between 80-90% of men and women in the U.S. will marry sometime in their lives (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001). While many people are married, many people are divorcing as well. Conservative estimates currently place the divorce rate in America at 41% (Hurley, 2005). With marriage and divorce affecting so many people, both topics are worthy of further study in research. Studying marriage is advantageous in counseling as it is something that many clients experience in their lives. Marriage can bring great joy and/or great sadness to the lives of clients. Many mental health clinicians also provide marital counseling, and a study such as this will help provide further information on what the experience of marriage is like for newlywed women. Findings of this study can help guide mental health clinicians in their therapeutic work with engaged and newly married couples. In particular, this research can provide insights into the newlywed experience which may help mental health clinicians gain a greater understanding of how difficulties present in early years of marriage and how they may lead to problems later on in marriage.

A Review of the Literature

Problems During the Newlywed Period

A significant portion of research suggests that events and experiences in the early years of marriage may lead to difficulties and disruption in marriage later on. Using the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS) and the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS), Schramm, Marshall, Harris, & Lee (2005) studied marital satisfaction and adjustment for approximately 1,010 newly married couples. Marital satisfaction/distress and adjustment were measured using the KMSS and the RDAS respectively. These constructs were defined as the interplay between each partner's expectations and perceptions of marriage. It was found that between 8% and 14% percent of newlyweds fell in the distressed range on measures of marital satisfaction and adjustment, respectively. The most troublesome areas for both men and women in the early months of marriage were balancing employment and marriage and debt brought into marriage. The most compelling predictors of marital satisfaction and adjustment were respect, appreciation, commitment, mutual affection, and trust.

Amato and Rogers (1997) examined what problems found during the newlywed period for couples that ultimately divorced. Their research found that infidelity, jealousy, substance abuse, and spending money foolishly as the strongest factors leading to divorce. For couples who ultimately divorced, it was found that they recounted a greater number of problems 9 to 12 years prior to the divorce than couples who stayed married. Gottman, Coan, Carrere, and Swanson (1998) examined the levels of affect found in the first few months of marriage. It was discovered that, during the first months of marriage, low levels of positive affect foreshadowed divorce up to 14 years later. Huston, Caughlin, Houts, Smith, and George (2001) looked at the patterns

developed in the first two years of marriage, which may predict a couple's long-term outcome after 13 years. In particular, they discovered that differences in the amount of expressed negative affect toward each other and levels of newlywed romance forecasted if a couple was happy 13 years later. These findings suggest that during the newlywed years, the seeds of divorce may be planted when issues arise and patterns of communication and interaction are developed.

Other research has found a variety of patterns that commonly emerged within the first year of marriage (Huston, McHale, & Crouter, 1986). It was discovered that couples displayed declines over the first year of marriage in the frequency of expressing affection (kissing, hugging, etc.), in time spent talking to each other, and the amount of time spent together in leisure activities. The most noteworthy transformation that was found to happen during the first year of marriage was the substantial decline in couples engaging in activities that brought each other pleasure. It appeared that over time, couples consciously or subconsciously failed to do the small things that brought them together to begin with and began to take each other for granted.

The Newlywed Period from a Developmental Perspective

There are a few studies that look at the newlywed experience from a developmental perspective. Tamashiro (1978) discussed the conceptualization of marriage in terms of developmental stages. These stages conceptualize marriage as beginning in an idealized, fairy-tale like way in the minds of newlyweds. This follows with the couple thinking about their marriage in terms of strict conventional rules. Next, the couple moves beyond thinking of their marriage in societal roles and pays more attention to their inner feelings. The couple finally moves into a stage of addressing conflicts rather than avoiding them. While this study offered an interesting way to conceptualize the newlywed experience into developmental stages, it seems

that these may be oversimplified, as this study did not go into a lot of detail regarding the research findings upon which these stages were based.

McLaughlin, Lichter, and Johnston (1993) conducted an additional study that examined the age of marriage for women in U.S. metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. It was found that women in non-metropolitan areas married at an earlier age than those in metropolitan areas. Six years after high school graduation, 50% of those from non-metro high schools were married, while only 37% of youth from metro high schools were married. This study suggested that levels of education and the availability of prospective partners may have influenced this difference.

Mate Preferences in Newlyweds

An additional area of newlywed research centers on mate preferences and selection. Multiple variables have been studied to see where couples tend to have similarities and differences. Such variables include race, age, height, education, weight, alcohol consumption, physical attractiveness, smoking, mood and anxiety disorders, antisocial behavior, political attitudes, and religiousness. While the results are multifaceted, the accumulating data overwhelmingly support the existence of similarities amongst couples on these variables (Bouchard & Loehlin, 2001; Buss, 1984; Eysenck, 1990; Mathews & Reus, 2001; Vandenberg, 1972). Subsequent studies have found strong correlations regarding similarities in age amongst married couples (Feng & Baker, 1994). It has also been found that husbands and wives are often alike in their religious and political attitudes (D'Onofrio, Eaves, Murrelle, Maes, & Spilka, 1999; Feng & Baker, 1994; McCrae, 1996; Nagoshi, Johnson, & Honbo, 1992).

Watson et al. (2004) used an assessment battery that included the Big Five personality traits: affectivity, ego resiliency, values, political and religious attitudes, and marital satisfaction to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the assortative mating (the similarity of husbands and wives on a given trait) of newlywed couples. They found strong similarities in political orientation, religiousness, and age; moderate similarities in verbal intelligence and education; modest similarities in values; and little similarities in attachment, emotional experience and expression, self- and spouse-rated personality, and matrix reasoning.

Attachment in Newlyweds

The issue of attachment and how it relates to relationships has been studied extensively in psychological research. Cobb, Davila, and Bradbury (2001) found that in newlywed relationships, spousal perception of partner attachment and security played a key role in marital interactions between spouses. Specifically, it was found that newlywed spouses who perceived their partners as having secure attachments in social relationships were better able to constructively work on problems, were less negative and critical, and were more accepting of help. Gallo and Smith (2001) found that married couples' attachment styles were predictive of marital functioning both within and between spouses. In particular, it was found that anxious attachment was associated with perceptions of conflict both within individual spouses and between spouses. Senchak and Leonard (1992) found that newlywed couples in which both partners were securely attached demonstrated better overall marital adjustment than couples in which one or both partners were insecurely attached.

Physical Attractiveness in Newlywed Couples

Research has found that physically attractive people tend to behave more positively in social interactions than less physically attractive individuals (Langlois et al., 2000). Takeuchi (2006) suggests that people tend to choose mates that are similar to them in their own levels of attractiveness. According to equity and similarity theories, comparability in attractiveness should be linked with greater levels of relationship satisfaction and dissimilarity in attractiveness should be correlated with lower levels of relationship satisfaction. On a similar note, it is hypothesized that more attractive partners may have better alternatives available to them as mates and will feel less dependent on their relationships (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) and it could be that attractive partners feel freer to partake in negative behaviors that could harm their relationships (Frye, McNulty, & Karney, 2008).

McNulty, Neff, and Karney (2008) examined how the physical attractiveness of couples was related to their marital satisfaction. Physical attractiveness of each participant was rated on a scale of 1 to 10 by trained research assistants observing video tape footage from a research laboratory. It was found that the main association between levels of attractiveness and the outcomes of the marriages studies was that attractive husbands reported less marital satisfaction. Similar attractiveness amongst spouses was unrelated to spouses' satisfaction and behavior. Furthermore, it was found that spouses behaved more negatively in relationships in which the husbands were more attractive than their wives, but that both spouses behaved more positively in relationships in which wives were more attractive than their husbands.

Stress and Newlyweds

Marriages are inevitably affected by stresses outside of the relationship including environmental, work, and financial issues. Stressors external to the marriage have been linked, both longitudinally and crosssectionally, with greater marital instability and lowered marital quality (Bodenmann, 1997; Conger, Rueter, & Elder, 1999). To examine changes in marital quality over time and see how marriages change in the newlywed stage and beyond, it is essential to refer to the stressful events outside of the relationship to which couples must adapt (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

Neff and Karney (2007) examined stress crossover and conditions that may facilitate stress crossover. Using a sample of 169 newlywed couples' over 3.5 years, a significant crossover effect was found for husbands, which was moderated by couples' observed conflict resolution skills. A significant interaction for wives emerged, suggesting that the influence of husbands' stress on wives' marital satisfaction depended on wives' own stress levels. These results emphasize the importance of examining the different sources of stress and the stress levels of each spouse when studying the role of stress in marriage.

Cohan and Bradbury (1997) examined how newlywed couples adjust to stressful life events. They examined life events and problem-solving behavior relative to longitudinal change in depressive symptoms and marital adjustment over 18 months in 60 newlywed couples. It was found that spouses' problem solving behavior moderated the relationship between life events and adjustment. Specifically, it was discovered that wives' anger facilitated their adjustment to major and interpersonal events such that their depressive symptoms declined and their marital satisfaction increased. When spouses reported more major events, husbands' humor contributed

to marital instability. Overall, this study expands on the role of behavior in marriage and further identified the vulnerability-stress-adaptation model of marriage.

Stress has been found to have an effect on newlyweds in regards to physical aggression as well. Frye and Karney (2006) found that newlyweds were more likely to report engaging in physical aggression at times when they engaged in higher levels of psychological aggression. This study also found that husbands that reported higher levels of chronic stress were more likely to engage in physical aggression overall and were more likely to engage in physical aggression when they were experiencing higher than average levels of acute stress. Physical aggression appears to be even more prevalent during the early years of marriage. One third of engaged couples and almost half of recently married couples report engaging in physical aggression within the last year (Lawrence & Bradbury, 2001; O'Leary et al., 1989).

Stress effects in newlyweds have also been found on a physiological level. Kiecolt-Glaser, Bane, Glaser, & Malarkey (2003) conducted a longitudinal study to compare the stress hormone levels of ninety newlywed couples during their first year of marriage and then again 10 years later. The levels of the stress hormone epinephrine in couples in this study that ultimately divorced were 34% higher during an observed conflict resolution discussion, 22% higher throughout the day, and both epinephrine and norepinephrine levels were higher at night compared to the levels of these stress hormones in the couples that remained married. Levels of the stress hormone ACTH were twice as high among women whose marriages were troubled at the ten year follow-up than women whose marriages were untroubled during the observed conflict resolution. At this follow-up couples whose marriages were troubled produced 34%

more norepinephrine during conflict, 34% more norepinephrine during the daytime, and 17% more during nighttime hours than the couples whose marriages were untroubled.

Substance Abuse in Newlyweds

Substance abuse is a significant clinical issue and can dramatically influence the lives of individuals and their spouses. Compatibility theories of courtship and marriage suggest that relationships between individuals who share similar views about appropriate and inappropriate behaviors function better (Kurdek, 1991; Levinger & Rands, 1985). At the same time, role-incompatibility theory suggests that deviant behaviors, such as alcohol and drug abuse, can contribute to relationship distress as they create role conflict and are incongruent with the traditional marital role (Fals-Stewart & Birchler, 1999; Yamaguchi & Kandel, 1985). Using these theories as a framework, it is suggested that in couples in which only one spouse abuses substances there may be a greater risk for marital distress because of different spousal values, expectations, and patterns of social interaction. There may also be conflicts between partners regarding the substance abuse and the non-abusing spouse may be under strain due to the stress of living with a substance-abusing partner.

Mudar, Leonard, and Soltysinski (2001) examined the drinking, smoking, and drug abuse behaviors and marital quality for six hundred and forty-two couples entering into their first marriage. Each partner completed separate, self-administered questionnaires at home. Both husbands and wives in couples in which only one partner drank heavily or used drugs reported significantly lower marital quality than other spouses. The marital quality reported by these couples was even lower than that reported by couples in which both partners engaged in substance abuse. These results were consistent with the compatibility and incompatibility

theories as the spousal discrepancies in substance use were related to poorer marital quality, even at the newlywed stage of marriage.

Sexuality and Newlyweds

Popular media and psychological professionals alike often portray the newlywed period as a time of satisfying and frequent sexual activity (Aubin & Heiman, 2004). In fact, newlyweds report that they predict that the quality of their sexual relationships will be superior to that of other marriages that are older and more established (Greeblat, 1983). One theory of research suggests that more positive expectancies such as these should enhance the perceived quality of the sexual relationship (Miller & Turnbull, 1986). This positive expectancy process has also been shown to operate in other domains of close relationships (Downey, Freitas, Mackis, & Khouri, 1998; McNulty & Karney, 2002; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996). On the other hand, another line of research proposes that positive, sexual expectancies may lead to more contrasting evaluations of sexual experiences within relationships. Through norm theory (Kahneman & Miller, 1986) and interdependence theory (Johnson & Johnson, 2005), people often compare their own outcomes to their prior expectancies of those outcomes. Thus, people feel satisfied when their own outcomes exceed their expectancies, but feel disappointed when their outcomes fall short of their expectancies (Mellers, Schwartz, Ho, & Ritov, 1997; Shepperd & McNulty, 2002). It has been proposed that similar processes may shape how newlyweds evaluate their sexual relationships (Lawrance & Byers, 1992, 1995).

Hatfield, Greenberger, Traupmann, & Lambert (1982) examined whether or not equity considerations were relevant in couples' sexual relations. Equity considerations have been determined to be significant in such in a variety of relationships including employer/employee

relationships, exploiter/victim relationships, and philanthropist/recipient relationships (Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). Hatfield et al. (1982) found that newlywed couples in equitable relationships were more satisfied with their relationships and their lives in general than other couples. Additionally, newlywed couples in equitable relationships reported being more satisfied in their sexual relationships overall than other couples.

New Marriage for Women

Although the area of newlywed research is growing, there is a lack of newlywed research specifically focusing on women. The research that does exist is overwhelmingly of a quantitative nature and looks at very specific aspects of new marriage. Huston and Houts (1998) and Lindahl, Clements, and Markman (1998) examined partner violence present in the first year of marriage for women. It was found that the early years of marriage can be a crucial time in which increased levels of verbal and physical aggression and marital conflict may be present. Oggins, Leber, and Versoff (1993) used questionnaires to investigate race and gender differences in newlyweds and their perceptions of marital and sexual relations. It was discovered that White women were most likely to associate feelings of sexual enjoyment with care for their partner.

Atkinson and Huston (1984) explored the division of labor amongst newlywed couples. Assessments were administered to 120 newlywed couples examining their attitudes toward women and their perceived skills in carrying out household tasks. Whether or not wives participated in the labor force had the greatest effect on husbands' and wives' attitudes regarding sex roles. In the more traditional marriages, where the husband participates in the labor force more than the wife, the husband was less likely to engage in traditional "female" household tasks such as cooking and cleaning.

These studies all examine particular aspects of marriage. A study, which investigates the experience of new marriage for women as defined by participants, will allow other aspects and characteristics of marriage to emerge.

Newlywed Research and Implications for Marital Therapy

Marital therapy may be advantageous to the married couple hoping to avoid divorce. It is estimated that only one fourth of divorcing couples report seeking professional help of any sort to improve their relationship (Albrecht, Bahr, & Goodman, 1983; Johnson et al., 2001).

Research on specific areas of marriage, such as newlyweds, offers implications and framework for mental health clinicians providing marital therapy. Specifically examining how newlywed couples communicate and resolve conflict can be used in marital therapy to help improve marital relationships by changing the way that couples resolve conflicts and communicate (Christensen & Heavey, 1999). Doss, Simpson, and Christensen (2004) found that the most commonly reported reasons for couples seeking marital therapy included problematic communication and lack of emotional affection. If mental health clinicians use research to learn what the experience of marriage is like for populations such as newly married women, they can tailor their therapies in order to improve treatment outcomes.

Literature Summary

The literature review examines factors that affect the experiences of couples during the newlywed period. Some of these factors are types of marital difficulties, developmental factors, mate preferences, physical attractiveness, stress, substance abuse, sexuality, and gender.

Schramm et al. (2005) found that the most troublesome areas of reported distress amongst newlywed couples were balancing employment and marriage and debt brought into marriage.

Amato and Rogers (1997) identified infidelity, jealousy, substance abuse, and spending money foolishly as the strongest factors leading to divorce for newlywed couples. Gottman et al. (1998) reported that low levels of positive affect during the first months of marriage foreshadowed divorce 14 years later. Research suggests that newlywed couples are often similar to each other in their mate preferences and selection regarding factors such as race, age, education, physical attractiveness, political attitudes, and religiousness (Bouchard & Loehlin, 2001; Buss, 1984; Eysenck, 1990; Feng & Baker, 1994; Mathews & Reus, 2001; McNulty, Neff, and Karney, 2008; Vandenberg, 1972).

Attachment in newlyweds has been found to influence marital satisfaction, communication, and adjustment (Cobb, Davila, and Bradbury, 2001; Gallo and Smith, 2001). Stress in newlywed marriage has been found to affect marital stability and satisfaction (Bodenmann, 1997; Conger, Rueter, & Elder, 1999), coping styles of husbands and wives (Cohan & Bradbury, 1997; Neff & Karney, 2007), physical aggression of spouses (Frye & Karney, 2006; Lawrence & Bradbury, 2001; O'Leary et al., 1989), and physiological levels of stress hormones (Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 2003). Mudar et al. (2001) found that newlyweds in their first year of marriage found that substance abuse was related to lower reported marital quality. Hatfield et al. (1982) found that newlywed couples in equitable relationships reported greater satisfaction in their sexual relationships overall than other couples. Areas of concern in previous research on women newlyweds include partner violence (Huston & Houts, 1998; Lindahl, Clements, & Markman, 1998), the division of labor amongst spouses (Atkinson & Huston, 1984), and marital therapy (Albrecht, Bahr, Goodman, 1983; Johnson et al., 2001).

Chapter 2

Methodology

Basic Research Problem and Rationale

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the experiences of newlywed women. Some quantitative research has been reported, but no qualitative research has been carried out with this kind of purpose. Qualitative descriptions of women newlywed experiences can be helpful for marriage counselors and for both women and men who plan on getting married.

The Phenomenological Method

The qualitative method of phenomenology was used in this study. Phenomenological inquiry aims to describe and provide an understanding of a human experience. Merleau-Ponty's philosophical writings (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) provide the general basis for this phenomenological method and analysis. Phenomenological inquiry aims to describe and provide an understanding of a human experience. Drawing mainly from Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, this phenomenological method focuses on understanding the participants' perception of their experience of being in the world and how they find meaning in that experience, in relation to a certain event, new marriage.

The phenomenological thematic analysis is described through several key terms. The ground of the phenomenological method is the context of the experience. It is what the experience is compared to. A theme in the phenomenological method is a word or words taken directly from the participant interviews that describe the patterns of description of the participant's experience. In order for a theme to be selected, there must be supported by data

from the individual texts and it must offer a clear picture of the human experience of the phenomenon of interest. Themes describe experiential patterns exhibited in diverse situations (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Sub-themes break down the themes further to describe them in more detail. Sub-themes contain examples from each interview that are consistent across participant interviews (Fade, 2004).

Interviewers conduct interviews by asking a single open-ended question. The interviews are analyzed using the phenomenological method through reading and thematizing of the transcripts in a phenomenological research group. The researcher develops a final thematic structure by returning to the text of the interview transcripts and reflecting on the themes discussed in the phenomenological research groups (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). What follows here is a description of the phenomenological research method that was used in this study of women's newlywed experience. Finally, a description of the research participants is presented.

Writings on phenomenology state that to understand the world in which a person lives is the key component to understanding their life experience (Valle, King, and Halling, 1989). It is through language that a person can share about his/her own experience to someone else and allow the other person to obtain an understanding of that experience (Giorgi, 1985). Moran (2000) describes the five fundamental tenets of phenomenology as the presuppositionless starting point, the suspension of the natural attitude, the life-world and being in the world, the achievement of knowing, and intentionality.

Phenomenological psychology varies from mainstream psychology in its philosophical aims, assumptions, and methods. Because of its phenomenological basis, phenomenological psychology considers meaningful experience as providing the basis for all human behavior and

knowledge (Polkinghorne, 1989). One of the guiding principles of phenomenology is that the participant is the expert on his or her own experience. This principle incorporates the two fundamental tenets of phenomenology of the life-world and being in the world and the achievement of knowing (Moran, 2000).

Widening the scope of psychological research to include a phenomenological method expands the extent of understanding available to psychologists by allocating for the examination of the total human experience from the perspective of the participant (Polkinghorne, 1989). Through phenomenological investigation the researcher is able to understand more fully the experiences of the individual than would be achievable using other quantitative methods, given the limitations inherent in the standard interview guides or questionnaires. Participants' responses can be restricted through these methods (Markson & Gognalons-Caillard, 1971). It is essential to have further studies of a qualitative nature to produce research that is not restricting or limiting on what the participant can discuss about their experiences.

In the phenomenological interview participants are asked an open-ended question and, in responding, have the freedom to be spontaneous, explore, and have complete control of their response (D'Anniballe, 1996; Johnson, 1998). Allowing the participant this freedom enables the researcher to obtain a richer understanding and comprehension of the participant's experiences. The phenomenological method permits the interviewees to be in charge of the interview and fully able to express their expertise on the subject (Dale, 1996).

To create this open interview setting, each interview begins with the interviewer asking the same, open-ended question ("Please describe for me, in as much detail as possible, your experience"), which allows the participants to determine the directions the interview will take.

Periodically, the researcher asks participants follow up questions, such as, “Could you tell me more about that?” in order to gain more specific details regarding things the participant had already mentioned and to further understand the participant's experience. Each interview session is recorded using a digital recorder. The researcher then listens to the interview and a research team member or a transcription service transcribes it.

Each interview transcription is read and reread by the primary researcher, and a research group of graduate students and professors using a phenomenological hermeneutic analysis method to identify qualitative themes of the participants’ experiences of their parents' divorce (Pollio et al., 1997; Thomas & Pollio, 2002). As transcripts are read aloud within the research groups, reading stops when a change in topic is perceived and a period of discussion for that passage takes place. At that time, different group members discuss particular phrases that stand out to indicate significant meaning to the participant. Through these tentative interpretations, meaning statements are developed for identify themes for this and all transcripts. Once an overall thematic analysis is developed, research group members evaluate it in regards to the textual evidence present for each theme and how each theme provides the reader with a new revealing understanding of the phenomenon as described by the participant (Pollio et al., 1997).

This method of thematization within the research group achieves a standard of verification through the peer review process. First, the interviewer develops a thematic structure as the interview is taking place. Then, at the conclusion of the interview, the researcher presents this thematic structure to the research participant. The participant then has the opportunity to add or correct any of the themes the researcher has presented. Next, the thematization of the transcripts by a phenomenological research group helps identify what themes were apparent in

the participants' descriptions of their experiences. The transcripts of the interviews can be divided and presented in different phenomenological research groups. The phenomenological research groups help protect against threats to internal validity. Having many trained researchers read the transcripts and thematize them helps keep the themes internally valid. After each transcript is thematized the researcher will e-mail each participant to inform him or her of what themes were found in the research group. As a method of validation, the participants are again able to add or change any of the themes. Finally, after all the transcripts are thematized the researcher can look for themes that characterize an overall thematic structure.

Participants

Women who were legally married and had been married for less than three years were interviewed. The researcher chose to interview only women in order to simplify and focus on her task of identify themes and an overall thematic structure. Obviously, other phenomenological studies focusing on newly married husbands need to be carried out.

Before recruiting participants, Institutional Review Board approval was granted through the University of Tennessee Office of Research. Participants were recruited by the snowball method. This method began with the researcher approaching individuals the researcher already knew and asking them if they would be willing to participate in the study. The next step was to ask these individuals if they know anyone else who may want to participate. Thus, the first round of potential participants was individuals already known to the researchers. To recruit additional participants, these first participants were asked to make referrals of individuals they think might be interested in participating. The researcher approached these individual via email or in person to solicit their participation. A description of the study was given to potential participants and

which explicitly stated the purpose of the research as a study of the experience of newlywed marriage. Informed consent was obtained from all research participants.

Fifteen adult women who were currently married, who were in their first marriage, and had been married for less than 3 years were interviewed. Pollio et al. note that in phenomenological research, analysis of “three to five interview transcripts” (1997, p. 51) is generally sufficient to obtain the range of conditions needed to thematize. Thomas and Pollio (2002) also contend that further interviews are not needed once the researcher observes redundancy in the transcripts and saturation of the themes occurs. The participants interviewed varied in age from 24 years old to 32 years old. Their time of marriage varied from 2 weeks to 2 years and 11 months. Demographic information on the participants is available in the participant profiles in Table 1. Demographic information was collected at the conclusion of each interview. Participants were asked to state which race and other demographic information described them best. The participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect anonymity. Efforts were made to recruit participants who were in a same sex marriage with another woman. However, no willing participants were found. Thus, all the participants interviewed were married to husbands.

Table 1

Participant Profiles

Pseudonym	Age	Demographics (length of marriage, religious preference, race designation, household income range, number of children)
Wendy	25	Married 2 weeks Non-denominational Christian Caucasian \$30,000-60,000 No children
Jane	26	Married 1 year and 6 months Methodist Caucasian Under \$30,000 No children
Rebecca	26	Married 6 months Church of the Brethren Caucasian \$30,000-\$60,000 No children
Kelly	29	Married 1 year and 6 months Christian Caucasian \$60,000-\$100,000 No children
Jacinda	29	Married 1 year and 8 months Episcopal Caucasian \$60,000-\$100,000 No children

Table 1 (continued)

Pseudonym	Age	Demographics
Jackie	27	Married 2 years and 6 months Catholic Caucasian \$30,000-\$60,000 1 child, 14 months old
Amy	26	Married 10 months Lutheran Caucasian \$60,000-\$100,000 No children
Shelby*	24	Married 1 year and 6 months Christian Caucasian \$30,000-\$60,000 No children
Katie	32	Married 2 years and 5 months Presbyterian Caucasian Over \$100,000 Participant pregnant with first child at time of interview
Grace	29	Married 2 years Christian Black, Non-Hispanic \$30,000-\$60,000 No children
Kara*	25	Married 2 years Does not practice a religion Caucasian \$30,000-\$60,000 No children

Table 1 (continued)

Pseudonym	Age	Demographics
Delilah*	26	Married 1 year and 1 month Christian African American \$60,000-\$100,000 1 step-child, 10 years old
Kayla*	29	Married 6 months Does not practice a religion Caucasian Over \$100,000 No children
Bella*	26	Married 2 years and 11 months Christian Caucasian Over \$100,000 No children
Tess	29	Married 2 months Hindu Asian-Indian \$30,000-\$60,000 No children

*Denotes phone interviews.

Procedure

Contacts to participants were made through email solicitation. Once a contact was made, the potential participant was informed of the specific procedures of the study and she was requested to sign an informed consent document. After receiving a signed consent form from each participant, a time and place were established in which to conduct individual interviews with each participant. For five participants outside of the Knoxville area, phone interviews were scheduled. These participants are identified in Table 1 with an asterisk.

Interview Settings

Five of the fifteen interviews were conducted over the phone, while the other ten were conducted in-person. For the phone interviews, informed consent was obtained by the researcher mailing the participant an informed consent form with the materials enclosed to mail the signed form back to the researcher. Once the researcher had received the signed form from the participant, the phone interview was scheduled and conducted. For the in-person interviews, informed consent was obtained at the time of the interview. In-person interviews allow rapport to be built between the interviewer and the interviewee through non-verbal as well as verbal cues. A disadvantage of phone interviews is that they do not permit the use of non-verbal cues. Also, the researcher does not know what environment the interviewee was in at the time of the interview. However, phone interviews allowed participants to be interviewed that would not be able to do so in person due to geographic limitations. They also allowed the researcher to interview individuals from different areas of the country (Opdenakker, 2006).

Chapter 3

Results

Fifteen newlywed women were interviewed and the data was analyzed according to the phenomenological method which is described on pages 14 through 17 in this dissertation. After the fifteen transcripts had been initially analyzed, an additional procedure was carried out. An added level of protection for external validity was to include outside research auditors. One graduate student and one psychologist familiar with the phenomenological method but unfamiliar with this project were each given 3 different transcripts from this project. These individuals thematized these transcripts individually and presented the researcher with the themes found. These themes were found to coincide with the themes the researcher had found through the thematization which took place through the phenomenological research groups. The following section reflects the thematization done by analyzing the fifteen phenomenological interviews that were conducted.

The following overall thematic structure was the result of this thematic analysis. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the newlywed experience for women. Two grounds were found in this study, **Different – Our Relationship** and **Our Identities**. These grounds formed the context for the themes of **Being Together**, **Our Responsibilities**, and **How We Communicate**. All the grounds, themes, and sub-themes are presented in outline form in Table 2.

The research question for this study came in the form of a request, “Please describe your experience of marriage.” The main requirement for participation in this study was that participants be adult women, in their first marriage, and be married less than three years. The

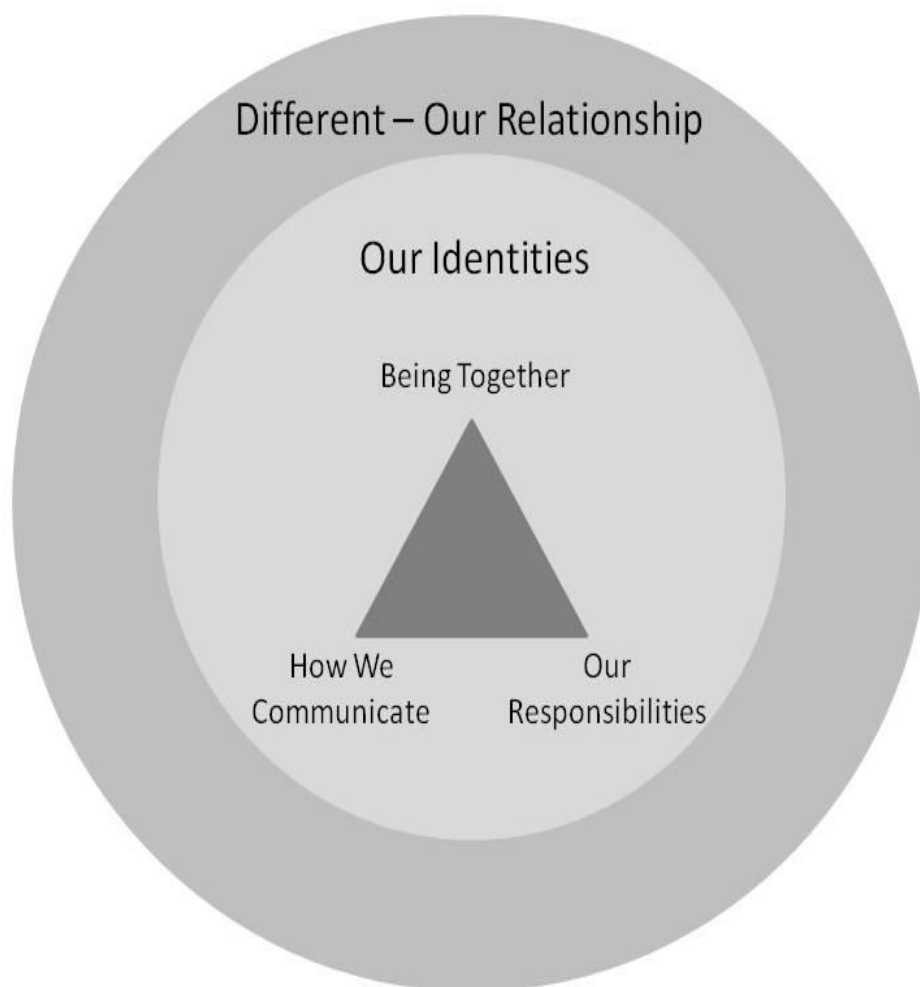


Figure 1. Thematic Structure of the Newlywed Experience for Women

Table 2. Thematic Structure Outline of The Newlywed Experience for Women

<u>Ground I.</u>	Different – Our Relationship
	What is Different
	What is not Different
	Timeframe of Relationship
<u>Ground II.</u>	Our Identities
	Religion
	Culture
	Family and Friends
<u>Theme I.</u>	Being Together
	Acceptance
	Having Someone There
	Best Friend
<u>Theme II.</u>	Our Responsibilities
	Finances
	Chores
	Children
	Work
<u>Theme III.</u>	How We Communicate
	Listening
	Adjustment
	Emotions
	Trust/Honesty

researcher chose this request in order to get a thorough understanding of the experience of new marriage in general, and not to be limited to a specific area or topic of marriage. The participants varied in their specific descriptions of their experience of being newlyweds. Grounds, themes, and sub-themes emerged across all fifteen interviews, however.

Ground I: Different – Our Relationship

The ground of **Different – Our Relationship** was discussed by each participant during their interviews describing their experience of marriage. **Different – Our Relationship** provided a context for each participant's experience of new marriage. All of the themes and sub-themes were based in some way on how each participant viewed her relationship with her husband as different or not different now that she was married to him. One of the three sub-themes of **Different – Our Relationship** was **What is Different**.

What is Different

One of the sub-themes for this ground was **What is Different** which pertained to the aspects of their lives and relationships that participants cited having changed since marriage. Rebecca spoke about what had specifically changed for her since being married.

That has been a complete change for me and in being married and being in the situation where we are together all the time and I am quite surprised that I am adapted to that. I have my moments, because I need space but that has been the one thing about marriage that has surprised me how well I am able to, um, live with another person. Rebecca

Participants such as Tess described how this difference in their relationship with their spouse influenced their interactions with their in-laws.

And one thing that did change a lot for me after marriage was, um, having a sense of responsibility, that, uh – you know, you just can't do your thing anymore. And, um, I'd – I mean, the rest of it didn't really change, but the responsibility that, you know, you have to call, uh, your in-laws and just to be more, uh, in touch with them. Tess

Participants frequently discussed what specifically was different about their relationship with their spouse now that they were married.

What is not Different

Participants also alternately described aspects of marriage that were not different, illustrating the second sub-theme, **What is not Different**. For participants such as Jacinda, being married was not quite as different as they expected it to be.

Um, I think one of the things we talked about after we got married was how weird it was that it wasn't weird. Cause we had lived, we lived in different cities actually for most the time. We dated 10 years and 6 of those years was long distance. And so a lot of our friends were like "Oh it's going to be...even, even if you were living together when you put that ring on it's a whole different thing and it's so weird. And you're in it for life." And after we were married we were like "Is it weird that it's not weird?" Like it's sort of normal and natural. Jacinda

Kara also spoke about how being married was not as different as she thought it was going to be.

Things weren't really all that much different from the way it was before we were married. Kara

Timeframe of Relationship

Many participants described how differences in their relationship with their spouse had developed over time, from their dating, engagement, and marriage. The third sub-theme of the ground **Different – Our Relationship** was **Timeframe of Relationship**. Participants frequently described how their relationships changed and evolved over time. Grace discussed how the transition from dating her husband to being married to him was different.

And we kind of – we took it fairly slowly, I guess, um, in the beginning, but we were engaged within seven months and then, um, married a year after. Um, but the transition going from a dating relationship into a marriage relationship is – it's different. Grace

Delilah described how marriage was different from dating and how her relationship with her husband had evolved since they got married.

It's [marriage's] not just like, um, you know, going on one long date, but now you're – you're merging like your spiritual life and your finances and, um, household chores, like things that aren't fun that you can, um, avoid when you're dating because you need to go

home. You can't avoid when you're married, and so I think, initially, that, um, that brings out some conflict once you get over the – the honeymoon period or whatever. Delilah

All of the participants discussed how things were different or not different in their relationships now that they were married. They specifically spoke of elements of their relationships and lives that had or had not changed since being married. This was the background with which they compared everything. They expressed how other aspects of their lives and identities were different or not different since they got married. They specifically compared these differences or lack of differences to other times in their relationship with their spouse where transitions took place.

Ground II: Our Identities

All of the participants reported that various aspects of their individual identities and their identity with their spouse as a married couple had changed or not changed now that they were married. Sub-themes of the second ground, **Our Identities**, were **Religion**, **Culture**, and **Family and Friends**.

Religion

Religion was a key factor of participants' identities that they described in the interviews.

Well, you know, in the Bible, it says that it's not good for a man to be alone, and we both had been alone. You know, so we both felt how that felt like, and we both do not like to be alone. We would rather have that companionship. Shelby

Religion was an important component to many participants in conceptualizing themselves as a married woman. For Delilah, her religious beliefs guided her in understanding her husband and herself.

And so learning how to like, um, pray about issues we're having and just like doing that, a lot of them resolve themselves. Like maybe my husband will change but also maybe it

was my attitude that's causing him to react a certain way and give me behavior I didn't like. Delilah

Participants often spoke of how religion was something important they shared with their spouse.

For Kelly, she described her and her husbands' religious beliefs as being the foundation of their marriage.

We really believe that, um, we have put God at the center of our marriage. Because of our relationship with Christ, throughout our lives we have seen him take care of such new situations, and God is so faithful. And it wasn't really like a thought of not living for ourselves, but living for what God wants us to do. Kelly

It is apparent that for many participants, religion was a key component of shaping who they are as individuals and as a married couple.

Culture

Culture was another essential part of how participants viewed themselves as individuals and as part of a married couple. For some participants, it was a shared cultural background between them and their husband that strengthened their commitment to working on their marriage as a couple. Grace and her husband came from the same cultural background.

And so we just overall try to do, you know, everything we can to make sure that we are going to be a successful couple and that we'll be able to model that for our kids, and kind of break that cycle that, you know, kind of plagues the Black community, I think. You know, single parents – and single parents are in, you know, um, culture – cultures, but a lot in the Black community there's a single mom raising the kids. Um, and they just – they – if they don't have anybody to look up to, like, who – how are they gonna know kind of what to do? Grace

Grace and her husband been affected by their similar cultural backgrounds. They are motivated to create a marriage that is different than some of the relationships they experienced growing up and the relationships they currently see modeled in some of the families within their **Culture** and community.

Participants frequently spoke about how cultural differences and similarities played out in their marriages. For Wendy, the cultural differences between her family and her husband's family affected their marriage dynamic even before they were married.

There were a couple of times throughout our engagement that things would happen between our families. And I would think, "Oh my, this is reality and I don't wanna do this." But, that goes back to the cultural differences and the fact that you have to adjust. Even if you have families that are culturally exact, there are still gonna be some sort of differences. Wendy

Wendy was aware of her and her husbands' different cultural backgrounds shaped who they were as individuals and who they would become as a married couple. This sense of **Culture** being connected to family was apparent in Tess's comments on **Culture** as well.

You know, in [my country of origin], when, um – when you get married, you – I mean, w-we say that you don't marry a person, you actually marry a family. And, um – so, you know, now I'm not just his wife, I'm – I'm actually a part of the family, which is his family really. Tess

It was evident from the participants' descriptions of **Culture** in their marriages that there is a lot of overlap between **Culture** and family. The participants described how their cultural and family backgrounds influenced how they viewed themselves as individuals and how these views were challenged and/or changed as they married and began to understand their husband's cultural and family backgrounds.

Family and Friends

The sub-theme of **Family and Friends** was a prominent element of all the participants' descriptions. This sub-theme described how **Family and Friends** influenced how participants viewed themselves as individuals and as being part of a married couple. Participants particularly spoke about how their families and their husband's families changed their relationships and their

identities upon marriage. Jacinda discussed how being married influenced how she and her husband communicated with each other around their respective families.

It's almost like we have kids. We were like okay, 'If you have a problem with this or this, tell me, but not in front of your family.' Like back each other up. Kind of don't put each other down in front of your family. Jacinda

Now that Jacinda and her husband are married, they work to present a united front to their respective families.

For many participants, their parent's marriage influenced how they viewed marriage and what they strived for in their own marriage. Katie described wanting to communicate in different ways in own marriage.

And so I – and because [my parents] are divorced now I'm like, "Well, let's see. Let's - give you lessons on what didn't work for their marriage or, you know, what upset them, let's listen to those." And so I try to, you know, be as open as I can and honest with [my husband], but not catch him off guard, and try to catch him at the right time. Katie

Participants also spoke about how their relationships with **Friends** changed or did not change after they married. Bella particularly noticed that her **Friends** treated her a bit differently once she was married.

And I think that other people like once they, that used to still hanging out with us they realized, "Hey, they still are Bella and [husband's name]. And just because they're married doesn't mean that they only want to hang out with married people." And we do have a lot of married friends now. That, that's changing as more of our friends are getting married. But um, we still maintain good relationships with people that aren't married. Bella

Bella's identity changed after she was married, particularly in how her **Friends** viewed her. The notion of married friends vs. non-married friends came up for many other participants as well. It seemed that for many participants, their evolution from a single individual to part of a married couple affected whether or not they spent time with married friends or single friends. Rebecca

shared how going from being single to being married changed the amount of time she and her husband spent with friends.

We tend to hang around with married couples now, which is different than before I probably would have avoided that. And now the friends that we do hang out with are usually married. And even [friend's names] have a child. So that's been different, a different friend base. But yeah, that's neat. It's a more mature friend group I guess too since I've been married. Rebecca

Part of what was seen as different in participants' relationships after being married included their relationships with **Friends** after being married.

Kayla described that finding time to spend alone with her husband was a challenge after marriage, specifically due to the amount of time they spend with their friends.

The only thing that I will say that has been really different is – and I don't think it's necessarily that because we got married this is different. It's because we have, um – our friends have a very active social life, and they bring us – and we do all these things with them. And I will say the only thing that has been tough has been like trying to find time for us together. Kayla

Marriage evidently brought about a transition in many participants' lives that influenced their relationships with **Family and Friends**.

Theme I: Being Together

All the participants spoke about experiencing a sense of **Being Together** that was either different or not different now that they were married. Many participants, such as Rebecca, discussed how they felt closer to their husbands and how they spent more time together as a couple since they were married.

Being together is an easy fit. We like the same things. Um, we pretty much have the same routine, and uh, we have similar goals. So, it was definitely an easy fit to be with him and that's probably where the natural attraction came from just how easy we fit together. Rebecca

Participants regularly described how they felt a sense of **Acceptance** and **Having Someone There** in their relationships with their husbands, especially after being married. Participants also frequently described their husband as their **Best Friend**, speaking to the close bond they had with their spouse. **Acceptance**, **Having Someone There**, and **Best Friend** were sub-themes of the theme of **Being Together**.

Acceptance

A sense of **Acceptance** from their husbands was an important component of marriage that participants regularly reported. Shelby specifically discussed how the **Acceptance** she felt from her husband compared to other relationships in her life.

I feel, you know, as my husband, that he would be less disappointed in me if – if I were to make a mistake or make a certain decision than as my parents were at some extent. So I feel – I feel a little more like just that he accepts me completely. Um, regardless of, you know, my flaws and everything. Shelby

Other participants, such as Jackie, described the acceptance they feel with their husbands coming across in their day-to-day interactions.

I don't have to impress [my husband] every day. I don't walk on eggshells because I have to be some image of something that [he] wants. Jackie

Feeling accepted by their husbands was an aspect participants reflected on having changed within their relationships after being married. Participants noted that they felt a stronger sense of acceptance in their relationships with their husbands since being married.

Having Someone There

Participants also described a sentiment of **Having Someone There** present in their relationships with their husband since they've been married. Most participants described this

companionship as **Having Someone There**. Delilah emphasized how being able to come home to her husband at the end of the day was something she valued.

Um and I don't know if it's for like emotional security or what that is, but it's just nice to have somebody to come home to. And it's nice – it's nice to know that, um, no matter what happens at work or in traffic or, you know, with my relatives or my friends or any of that, at the end of the day, I can come home to him, and he's a great man. Um and so at the end of the day, there's always a silver lining. Delilah

Amy also spoke about how she enjoyed having her husband present in her life.

I just like having someone there. Um, I never thought that I would be 25, 26 and already married. Um, and overall, it's just – it's just nice having a best friend there. So he's a great guy, and I love him. Amy

Best Friend

Frequently, participants expressed their sense of **Being Together** with their husband by describing him as their **Best Friend**. Participants placed great importance on the fact that their husband was their **Best Friend** and that this led to a feeling of **Being Together** as a married couple.

I really enjoy being married, it's probably one of the best times of my life. Um, it is very nice to have somebody that you can, um, count on, be dependent on, not dependable but depend on, and um it is almost like having, well, um, he is my best friend. Kelly

Bella also discussed how she saw her husband as her **Best Friend** and how she really valued being able to go through life with him.

So it's really nice having somebody who's your best friend and who you love very much to kind of be there to support you in all of those things and for you to support them in what's going on in their life. Bella

Kara described how husband was her **Best Friend**, but she emphasized this was not necessarily an aspect of their relationship that developed after marriage.

Things weren't really all that much different from the way it was before we were married. Um, I've always thought of [my husband] as my best friend, and I still think of him that way. Kara

Some participants described how marriage made their relationship with their husbands different in that their husband was now their **Best Friend**. For other participants like Kara, they viewed their husbands as their **Best Friend** even before they were married.

Theme II: Our Responsibilities

An aspect of marriage that was frequently discussed by participants was the idea of **Our Responsibilities** that the participants shared with their spouses. Participants often described the responsibilities that they faced as being part of a married couple. This theme was a particular area of their lives that participants saw as being different after marriage. For Tess, this sense of responsibility she felt as a married woman related to the responsibilities she believes come with being an adult.

So I think that sense of responsibility is actually about behaving like a mature adult - which, you know, most of us, I think that we do in the social world. Tess

Our Responsibilities were described by participants as relating to **Finances**, **Chores**, **Children**, and **Work**. These are the sub-themes of the overall theme of **Our Responsibilities**.

Finances

The sub-theme of **Finances** was a dominant issue described repeatedly by participants. Especially with the difficult economic climate present at the time of the interviews March-June, 2009, it is not surprising that **Finances** were a concern for many participants in their marriages.

One of our major, um, things that we have to work on was the financial piece. Um, that's the only thing that I can say that, you know, comes up quite frequently, especially with the, um, economic downturn and – and whatnot, and my husband losing his job. But I'm definitely the spender of the relationship. Grace

Many participants discussed how they combined or divided their finances with their husband after marriage.

Well, about probably around the first month or two after we were married, it was – I had the realization that now we're combining all of our financial responsibilities. Like it's not just mine anymore. It's not just his anymore. And now that we're married, we both share all the financial responsibilities past, present and future. Shelby

Still, some participants maintained multiple bank accounts, some shared and some individual. Kayla discussed how she and her husband had worked out their finances and other responsibilities before they were married.

We've [my husband and I] been living together before for probably the last four years together, I want to say. And because of that, we had kind of already, you know, done with the chore thing, and we had combined our bank accounts. Um we had – we have one bank account together and then we have one each, uh, for our personal account. But we had combined stuff in like paying bills and, um, things like that. Kayla

For participants such as Kayla, the issue of **Finances** was not something that was different after marriage. Many participants who reported living together before marriage had already begun to merge their finances with their husbands. The issue of managing finances was a complex one, definitely impacted by the difficult economy present at the time of the interviews.

Chores

The sub-theme of **Chores** was often discussed by many of the research participants. **Chores** were typically described as responsibilities regarding taking care of the shared marital home. For participants such as Wendy, **Chores** such as doing the dishes were a point of frustration in their relationship.

He has a habit of putting dishes in the sink. I put them straight in the dishwasher. That is a pet peeve of mine. Umm, so every time I go to the sink and there are dishes in there I want to scream because that's not where they go! Wendy

A similar frustration was echoed by other participants as well. For Jane, she came to understand that her husband needed some guidance in how to go about performing certain household chores.

So that's been like a struggle to overcome with that in terms of like he just didn't know how to...At first I thought he was just being like, 'I didn't know it was dirty.' Like in a 'Just so you would do it' sort of way. But he really just had no idea. Like, he had no clue how to do that stuff for himself. So having to, um, sort of teach him how to clean a bathroom and the materials to use to clean the bathroom. Comet, it will be your friend.
Jane

Amy also reported some learning that was involved with her husband's completion of household **Chores**.

Uh, it's just been a learning process in, um, when it comes to like household things. Um, he's great 'cause he will cook and he will clean and stuff, but I'm so used to doing those things, um, and wanting to do those things that, for me, to like ask him to do those type things and like continually ask him until he does it becomes a little bit frustrating because, for me, it's just like I do it. You know? And I shouldn't have to ask him, but that's the part of the learning thing. Amy

Some participants specifically described how they split different household **Chores** with their husbands and that they enjoyed dividing those responsibilities.

[My husband] has been fantastic in splitting the household chores. We, we, you know, it just worked out. He has this set of things he likes to do he likes to do, the cooking, he likes to do the grocery shopping. And I would much rather clean and do the laundry 'cause I care about my clothes (laughs) and he cares about his food. So he just does all this stuff and I do all the other chores and um that has worked out well. Rebecca

The balance of dividing the household **Chores** was something that Rebecca appreciated about her marriage.

Children

For many participants, an additional aspect of **Our Responsibilities** included **Children**. Participants frequently spoke about how their responsibilities towards their children changed

their relationships with their husbands. Jackie in particular noticed a transition within her relationship with her husband after the birth of their first child.

There was a long period of time probably that first 3 months of [our child]'s birth from like April to July where, um, [my husband and I] just didn't, I mean there was no real one-on-one contact where we just talked about our relationship to each other. It was always about the baby. It was always about how tired we were or how messy we were, or how...you know what I mean? Like there are just other things happening. Um, that now we you know...[our child]'s what 14 months old now so now it's much more back to where we can spend time together even with him in the house. Jackie

Katie, discussed the upcoming birth of her and her husbands' first child and how they planned to adjust to the additional responsibilities of caring for a baby.

Um, but now it's like – we're talking about childcare and daycare and I hate going to daycare. Um, but that's kind of where we're headed, and it's like – you know, he's like – [my husband] really wants me to be a stay-at-home mom. I don't know if I'm ready to give up that money yet. Maybe once the baby comes, you know, that'll change. Katie

Planning and adjusting to the changes that come about when starting a family can be a considerable challenge. Rebecca talked about how planning for a family influenced her and her husband's career choices.

The [school name] job was number one for me and the [school name] job was number one for [my husband]. And in the end, we took the [school name] position. And you kinda have to battle that was...well if we start a family, you know, I'm gonna be the one who's pregnant now and he's not. So, it makes more sense to go to [school name] were he has his number one job if I'm gonna take a year off anyways. Rebecca

It was evident through the interviews that even if a couple did not currently have children; the idea of planning for a family was present. Participants regularly discussed the idea of **Children** and how they thought beginning a family would fit in with their experience of marriage. This planning process was an aspect of their relationships that was different after marriage.

Work

Work was an additional area of **Our Responsibilities** that participants described impacting their relationships with their husbands upon marriage. Again, the difficult economic times present during the time of the interviews impacted the participants and their husbands' respective **Work** circumstances. For Jane, the economy had been particularly tough one her husband's job prospects and this had been a struggle for them as a married couple.

We've had (pause) you know our share of troubles. My husband has been...unable to find a full-time job throughout our entire marriage so it's been interesting. Um, not without, not for lack of trying. He has tried really hard to try to find a full-time job but it's a mixture of the economy and his work experience has just played against us. Jane

Shelby also discussed how the difficult economy influenced her husband's **Work** and how this was a struggle they encountered immediately upon marriage.

And, um, as far as difficulties go, I would say financially would be the biggest one for us, um, because like a week before we got married, [my husband] lost his job. And so, that was probably, you know, the hardest thing with – because he had to kind of pretty much start over. Shelby

Amy spoke about how her husband was an important form of social support for her in regards to her **Work** difficulties and disappointments.

Uh, [marriage] also is helpful in times where I just need that pick-me-up. For example, this weekend, I had to fire two staff members, and it was extremely difficult. Um, just having him here as well as a sounding board for my frustrations was helpful. Amy

Work was an important aspect of marriage that impacted both the participants and their husbands. The difficult economic times present during the interviews had some bearing on **Work** and the participants' marriages.

Theme III: How We Communicate

A specific aspect of their marital relationship that participants discussed was **How We Communicate**, which is the third theme of this study. Participants frequently discussed how marriage had or had not influenced how they communicated with their husbands. Many participants stressed that marriage had taught them the importance of communicating and the differences present in their communication styles and their husbands' communication styles.

I'm always the first one to say, 'We need to talk about this.' Umm, [my husband] does not communicate, well, he can communicate he's just not a person that opens up well. Umm, and so, anytime there's an issue I always, I'm the first one to say, 'Let's talk about this and let's see what we can do to resolve this.' Wendy

Noticing differences in communication styles between each other as a married couple was something that many participants reported. Some participants spoke about how they believed their respective families influenced their communication styles.

I – I come from – I feel like my family – well, we're all communicators and [my husband's] family's not, and so, you know, I think that that was hard for us at first, um, you know, just learning each other's communication style. Um, and – and now he – I feel like he's started to open up more. Katie

Participants also discussed how it was important to them to communicate and work out problems with their husbands, especially considering the possible implications of not working out problems as a married couple.

And so we just – you know, when you look at it like that, without divorce being an option, then I think you're kind of, you know, setting yourself up to, you know, communicate and – and work through things. And say the hard stuff, even if you – you know, if it makes your stomach hurt before you have to tell the person. You still just push through it and – and let them know and be totally honest. Grace

How We Communicate was something that many participants reported having to establish as a married couple. Figuring out how to relate their communication styles with their husbands' proved to be a challenging but worthy task within their marriages. The sub-themes of the theme **How We Communicate** include **Listening**, **Adjustment**, **Emotions**, and **Trust/Honesty**.

Listening

Listening was a particular aspect of **How We Communicate** that participants discussed as being an essential component of communication with their husbands. **Listening** was part of the marital relationship that many participants valued highly.

You know I can tell [my husband] anything and he always listens and seems to know what to say. And the same thing with me. Bella

This emphasis on **Listening** overlapped with the theme of sub-theme of **Having Someone There**. Within both of these themes, participants spoke about how they enjoyed "having someone there."

And, you know, having someone that, you know, I can talk to all the time and I know [my husband]'ll be there, and he'll be there listening. So I really – I really enjoy that a lot. Shelby

The simple act of having a husband **Listen** to concerns and frustrations was important to many participants.

[My husband]'s never said I think you should change this or change that. Um when I come home with issues that are going on at work, he um, he may sometimes...he's the best listener in the world and sometimes he says two or three things that might give me insight. Kelly

Listening was an essential part of **How We Communicate** for participants. Participants reported that **Listening** helped strengthen their bonds, communication, and connections with their husbands.

Adjustment

Many participants reported that there were aspects that were different within their communication with their husbands that led to a period of **Adjustment** within their relationships. Some reported that they were still making **Adjustments** within their marriages.

I mean, there is still a lot of things to get adjusted to. And a lot of stuff, like, that he came into like from his experience with his family versus what I came into with my experiences from my family. In terms of things like, you know how, to clean the house, things like that, like money management, and stuff like that...that we have to get adjusted to with each other. Jane

[Marriage]'s definitely work from the newlywed perspective. Even though we're in a honeymoon phase, it's all new and we're adjusting and everything hunky dory right now, it is work...It is work, um, and I say that trying to be a realist and trying to be realistic about it. But it is work, um, and communication. Wendy

For other participants though, they were expecting much more **Adjustment** to take place within their marriage than they actually encountered.

I think we were both expecting something a huge adjustment period like, 'Oh my gosh, now we're together all the time.' And, um, and now, you know, or 'Are we going to be fighting about random things?' And, I don't know. Because you hear all of these like, not even horror stories, just, oh what to expect in your first year of marriage kind of thing. And it's just...it wasn't any big thing. It's just, 'Okay!' And we happened to be married. And um it just sorta flowed naturally. Jacinda

For many participants, the **Adjustment** from being engaged to being married was a very natural transition. Others found it to be necessary to make changes and compromises.

Emotions

For many participants, **How We Communicate** involves **Emotions**. Participants frequently discussed feelings that came up within their marriages and how these feelings were or were not communicated. Sometimes these were feelings of frustration and guilt.

We just kind of pick up after ourselves, or if I get sick of looking at it for awhile, I'll pick it up. So kind of – and I mean I won't say that it's not like – sometimes it's frustrating

because, you know, [my husband]'ll do – leave something out for a week or whatever, or I'll feel like I'm doing so much more. But really it's – it's – those feelings go away really quickly because then I'll just – like he'll start picking up the slack and then I'll feel bad that I'm not cleaning. Kayla

Still, many participants reported feelings of happiness, enjoyment, and excitement. For these participants, they discussed how they shared these feelings with their husbands.

The first year [of marriage] I think was like bliss. Like, I was so excited to be married. I was in a good job that I liked...in our cute little tiny apartment that we barely fit in but I loved that tiny apartment and we still look back at that pictures of our first Christmas together. We're like that was the best time even though I...I mean literally our belongings did not fit in there. We had one closet in the entire apartment like but I loved it. Jackie

And when people see us they say that we have this glow about us and that we're, um – we're newlyweds and – and all of that good stuff. But, um, we're really enjoying – we're really enjoying, um, our life together so far...When [my husband] wakes up he wants to make me smile. He wants to do something silly to make me laugh, and I want to do something silly to make him laugh. Grace

While participants reported experiencing different feelings within their marriages, **Emotions** were a common part of **How We Communicate** for the participants interviewed. In particular, it was apparent that the sharing of feelings within their marriage was an important part of participants' marital relationships.

Trust/Honesty

An important part of **How We Communicate** that participants discussed included **Trust/Honesty**. Participants regularly mentioned how **Trust** and **Honesty** were essential components of their relationships with their husbands and how they communicated with each other. For some participants, **Trust/Honesty** were aspects of their marriage that they valued especially because they did not see **Trust/Honesty** displayed in their friends' marriages and relationships as much.

I have other friends who are in relationships and they are – they feel like they have to hide things from their – from their husbands and all that stuff, and I don't – I don't feel that way. I don't feel like I have to hide anything from him. You know? I can tell him whatever I want, and I can tell him how I feel about something, and he doesn't – he doesn't get upset about it. He listens. So I think that's a really good thing about our relationship. Kara

For some participants, they viewed **Honesty** as a part of how they connected and communicated as a couple.

I think honesty is very very very very important. Um, sometimes when I know [my husband] may not like, um, something we've done...I go ahead and get it out there. It's just that it's nice, and he does the same with me and we just share each other's thoughts. Kelly

Still other participants reported that it was a challenge for them to learn to **Trust** within their marriage, especially considering their family backgrounds.

Um, coming from a divorced set of parents, um, I tend to, I have to work on communication. I tend to have the non-trusting factor just because my parents are divorced. I mean our families are completely different. His same mom and dad got married, never been divorced, never had any problems. Here I am never known a mom and dad to live in the same household. Wendy

Trust and **Honesty** are important components to a marriage and communication for a couple.

For participants in this study, **Trust** and **Honesty** were significant elements of their communication with their husbands.

Summary

The results of this study yielded a thematic structure that included two grounds, **Different – Our Relationship** and **Our Identities**. The women reported that they viewed their relationships with their husbands and their identities to have changed or not changed since being married. The three themes discussed are of **Being Together**, **Our Responsibilities**, and **How We Communicate**. Participants reported that they had found these elements of their lives to

have change or not changed since being married. The sub-themes included **What is Different, What is not Different, Timeframe of Relationship, Religion, Culture, Family and Friends, Acceptance, Having Someone There, Best Friend, Finances, Chores, Children, Work, Listening, Adjustment, Emotions, and Trust/Honesty.** The women discussed these grounds, themes, and sub-themes through their own words in their description of their experience of being newlyweds.

Chapter 4

Discussion

The fundamental purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the experience of new marriage for women who were in the midst of that experience. Fifteen adult women who were in their first marriage and who had been married for less than three years described their experience in individual, audio-recorded interviews. The interviews were thematized and analyzed thematically using a phenomenological method. This phenomenological analysis resulted in an overall thematic structure, consisting of three main themes: **Being Together, Our Responsibilities**, and **How We Communicate**. These three themes took on meaning in the context of two experiential grounds, **Different – Our Relationship** and **Our Identities**. The two experiential grounds and three main themes all included sub-themes. Many quotes from the fifteen transcripts were presented to authenticate the thematic structure. In Chapter 4 the bracketing interview, verification of the themes, reflections on previous research, and new findings of this study are discussed. Lastly, implications for future research are also discussed.

Bracketing Interview

An essential component of the phenomenological process includes the researcher undergoing a bracketing interview. In this interview someone who is trained in the phenomenological process interviewed the researcher. The researcher was asked the open-ended research question of: “Please describe your experience of marriage.” This interview was completed, transcribed, and thematized before the researcher interviewed participants. The bracketing interview is a standard of verification in that it will help to clarify the biases the researcher may have as a researcher. Pollio et al. (1997) advised that a bracketing interview:

is done to provide the researcher with some feel for what it is like to be interviewed on the present topic and to provide a thematic description of his or her present understanding of the phenomenon...The intention is...to have (the researcher) become more attuned to (his/her) presuppositions about the nature and meaning of the present phenomenon and thereby (sensitize him/her) to any potential demands (he/she) may impose on (the) co-participants either during the interview or in its subsequent interpretation. (p. 48)

Thus, the bracketing interview helped the researcher gain knowledge of her opinions and thoughts on marriage before she interviewed participants for the study. This process incorporates the tenet of phenomenological theory of, “the suspension of the natural attitude” (Moran, 2000). The knowledge gained from the bracketing interview allows the researcher to make a conscious effort to be aware of her views and potential biases while completing the interview process.

At the time of the bracketing interview, the researcher had never been married or engaged to be married. In the bracketing interview, the researcher reflected on the fact that she had never experienced the topic of the research study, new marriage. The researcher discussed her experiences of observing marriages within her family and friends. The thematic structure of the bracketing interview included a ground of **Day-to-Day Adjustment** and themes of **Children**, **Wedding Planning**, and **Challenges**. The researcher saw a major part of marriage as being the **Day-to-Day Adjustment** that couples make to deal with life’s regular **Challenges** and struggles. It was also found that the researcher saw an adjustment in marriage taking place after couples come down after the excitement of **Wedding Planning** and get used to everyday life together as husband and wife. The researcher also believes that **Children** are a big part of marriage. At the time of the writing of this dissertation, the researcher is engaged to be married and is preparing to become a newlywed.

Verification of the Themes

Multiple steps were taken to ensure validity in the thematic structure that was developed. At the end of each interview, the researcher summarized what the participant shared and what themes appeared to present from the initial interview. Each participant was given an opportunity to verify the accuracy of the themes found in the thematic structure that was developed for her interview. Each participant was invited to correct or add anything to the thematic summary that was presented at the end of the interview. After each interview transcript was thematized in the phenomenological research group, the researcher e-mailed the participant listing the themes that were found. Again, the participant was invited to state whether or not there was anything she would like to correct or add to the themes found and if the thematic structure sounded like an accurate description of her experience of marriage. Below are some quotes from nine of the fifteen participants that responded to the verification e-mails and offered their feedback about the accuracy of the thematization.

The thematic structure sounds good to me! Jacinda

This [the thematic structure] looks great. Jackie

I think that [the thematic structure] sounds about right. Shelby

Thanks for letting me know the themes of your dissertation. And yes, what you wrote does sound accurate. Kelly

Yes, this [the thematic structure] sounds accurate. Thanks for double checking! Kayla

You've summed it up nicely. Delilah

That [the thematic structure] sounds good to me. Bella

This [the thematic structure] sounds absolutely right. Tess

About the dissertation, it [the thematic structure] does sound like exactly what I said.

Grace

No research participant indicated that a theme and/or topic had been missed. All the feedback was of a positive nature. These verification steps allowed participants to take an active part in authenticating the thematic structure that was developed.

Reflections on Previous Research as Related to Themes

Several of the themes that emerged in this present study have been investigated and discussed in other research on newlyweds. Selected themes from the present study will be discussed relative to other research. These themes are **Religion, Family and Friends, Finances, How We Communicate, and Emotions.**

Religion

The sub-theme of **Religion**, in the context of **Our Identities**, has been found to be an important aspect of the newlywed experience in psychological literature. Previous research has shown that Black newlywed couples may be more likely to report themes of **Religion**, while White newlywed couples may be more likely to report themes of achievement and **Work** (Chadiha, Veroff, & Leber, 1993). This finding also shows support for the sub-theme of **Work** as reported in this present study. However, this present study found that participants reported themes of **Religion** and **Work** regardless of race.

In regards to **Religion**, other studies have found that compared to other couples, spouses who attend church together more frequently have higher levels of marital satisfaction (Kunz & Albrecht, 1977; Wilson & Musick, 1996), are less likely to be divorced (Bahr & Chadwick, 1985; Glenn & Supancic, 1984), and are less likely to engage in family violence (Ellison,

Bartkowski, & Anderson, 1999). Couples who score higher in more general measures of religiosity are also more likely to have more stable marriages (Albrecht & Kunz, 1980; Nye, White, & Friederes, 1973; White & Booth, 1991) and have also been shown to be happier (Anthony, 1993; Mahoney et al., 1999). Even after controlling for demographic variables, such as age at marriages, these relationships have emerged (Call & Heaton, 1997).

Sullivan (2001) examined religiosity amongst two samples of newlywed couples. This study found that religiosity was associated with attitudes toward divorce, commitment, and help seeking crosssectionally. It was also determined that religiosity had a positive impact on husbands' and wives' marital satisfaction in couples in which the husband had lower scores in neuroticism and a negative impact in couples with more neurotic husbands. Indirect evidence was also found that husbands and wives who reported being more religious had less tolerance for the idea of divorce, a greater level of commitment, and were more likely to be willing to seek help in times of distress.

Family and Friends

Additional research has demonstrated that newlywed couples must navigate their relationships and identities with others, which is consistent with the theme **Family and Friends**, of the ground **Our Identities**. Aspects of in-law relationships of newlywed couples have been studied by Morr Serewicz (2008). In this study, the complex relationships between families that changes after a marriage is discussed. It was described how upon marriage, the spouse obtains a new set of relationships to develop with their in-laws and various new extended family members. However, the in-laws navigate a new relationship with just one person: the spouse. Therefore, attention to the special characteristics of this single in-law relationship carries more weight for

the parent than for the spouse. It has also been found that the transition of marriage may be more difficult for mother-daughter relationships in which the daughter gets married. Fischer (1981) reported that daughters married with no children have the least contact with their mothers, as compared to daughters married with children and single daughters.

Evidence for the sub-theme of **Family and Friends** has been found in research on newlywed couples and their social support (Kurdek, 1989). Through this research it was found that newly married women reported more satisfaction with social support than with their husbands. It was also found that wives regularly identified spouse, **Family and Friends**, and in-laws as providers of social support. It was determined that newlywed couples' psychological distress was negatively related to the frequency with which the spouse was named as a provider of social support and the satisfaction with social support.

Finances

The sub-theme of **Finances**, as part of the theme of **Our Responsibilities**, has been found to be an important part of marital satisfaction (Amato & Rogers, 1997). In particular with young, newlywed couples, debt brought into marriage has been found to be connected to decreased marital satisfaction (Schramm et al., 2005). Another study found that the most commonly reported problems among newlyweds are related to time, sex, and **Finances**. The Center for Marriage and Family Study at Creighton University (2000) provided an outline of couples married five years or less and described their troubles and experiences. This study revealed that the most widespread problem reported by newly married couples was balancing family and job (related to the sub-theme of **Work**), followed by regularity of sexual relations, and debt brought into the marriage (**Finances**). Subsequently, the most frequent mentioned

problems centered on the expectations regarding household tasks, the husband's employment (**Work**), and the **Financial** situation of the couple.

How We Communicate

The theme of **How We Communicate** in relation to newlywed relationships has been reported on in psychological literature. In particular, communication has been addressed in previous studies by looking at conflict styles of newlywed couples and how perception influences newlywed communication, marital stability, and marital satisfaction. Support has been found for the benevolent perception model in which having more positive perceptions of one's partner, regardless of how that partner views themselves, are associated with higher marital satisfaction in newlyweds. Having benevolent perceptions of one's partner, even if those perceptions reflect a distortion of reality, tends to coincide with increased marital satisfaction (Segrin, Hanzal, & Domschke, 2009). The influence of perception on newlywed communication was also studied by Carrère et al. (2000). Through that study it was found that how an individual perceives their spouse's communication style during times of conflict can potentially affect their marital stability.

How We Communicate and **Emotions** have been found to be predictors in the divorce rate newlywed couples (Carrère & Gottman, 1999; Gladwell, 2005). **Emotions** such as contempt, anger, disgust, and sadness have important implications for predicting whether or not a newlywed couple will still be married after fifteen years of marriage. By observing newlywed interactions and using a coding scale, attention was paid to facial expressions and dialogue. Through this coding scale, Carrère & Gottman were able to predict with substantial accuracy if a couple would get divorce within fifteen years. After watching an hour of film clip in which a

newlywed couple discusses a point of contention, Gottman can predict with 95% accuracy whether or not that couple will still be married fifteen years later. Malcolm Gladwell (2005) highlights Gottman's predictions in his book, *Blink*. The emotion of contempt has been found to be the most outstanding emotion when it comes to making this prediction. If contempt is present within the newlywed couple's communication, it has been found to predict not only if a couple will stay married, but also how many colds a husband or wife will get. It is argued that expression of contempt in newlywed communication is related to the emotion of disgust, which is about rejecting and excluding someone from the community (Gladwell, 2005).

Emotions

The issue of **Emotions**, as part of the theme of **How We Communicate**, present during the newlywed years is something that has been found to be relevant to the newlywed experience in previous research. Specifically, subsequent research has focused on particular **Emotions** such as the presence of happiness in the early years of marriage. Some research has looked at how levels of happiness change over time within the newlywed years. Ruvolo (1998) found that married couples that had higher levels of reported happiness in their first year of marriage tended to have higher levels of reported happiness in their second year of marriage as well. Through those findings it was hypothesized that general happiness affects marital well-being and marital well-being affects general happiness. Ruvolo's work also found that individuals high in marital well-being tend to be happier overall, over time, and their partners report experiencing higher marital well-being also. At the same time, individuals low in marital well-being report experiencing lower general happiness, and their partners report decreased marital well-being.

Laurence (1980) conducted a phenomenological study on the experience of happy marriage. Focusing on the emotion of happiness, Laurence found that there was no singular trait or concept which embodied the fundamental nature of being happily married. He found that some common traits of happily married couples included commitment, common sense, practicality, and the giving up of marital illusions, and taking responsibility. Laurence also found that these were important components of the identity of the married couple, which is consistent with one of the grounds of this study, **Our Identities**. In particular, it was discovered that participants had strong individual and couple identities. Through Laurence's work it was also found that happily married people reported the following behaviors: closeness, negotiation, clarity of communication, chores, money, intimacy, family relationships, and similarities/differences. Indeed, many of the findings from Laurence's study are consistent with the present study's themes and sub-themes of **How We Communicate, Family and Friends, Being Together, Finances, and Chores**.

Support for the importance of the emotion of happiness in new marriage has been found to be related to relationships with family and in-laws. Timmer, Veroff, and Hatchett (1996) found that close family ties did not have an effect on the marital happiness of White couples but was significantly linked to the marital happiness of Black couples. In particular, it was found that Black couples that increased their closeness to their in-laws in their first year of marriage reported an increase in marital happiness by their third year of marriage. Emotion in relation to reported marital distress has also been studied. Kurdek (1991) found that for women, reports of high levels of marital distress were linked to fewer years of education, low income, living with stepchildren on a full- or part-time basis, not pooling finances, and high emotional investment.

New Findings and Potential Areas of Focus for Future Research

While many of the themes and sub-themes are reflected in previous research, there are distinctions to point out in regard to the detailed findings of this study and the previous research discussed. While a significant portion of research on newlywed communication focuses on conflict styles and perception (Segrin, Hanzal, & Domschke, 2009; Carrère et al., 2000), this study found aspects of **Listening**, **Adjustment**, **Emotions**, and **Trust/Honesty** to be important aspects of **How We Communicate** highlighted by the participants. Indeed, participants in this study discussed how communication was an essential part of how they worked out their differences with their husbands. But, aspects of connection and **Being Together** were emphasized as participants spoke about how they valued the **Listening** they received from their husbands. For many participants, this **Listening** was a strong part of what made their husband their **Best Friend**. Through this open **Communication**, rich with **Trust/Honesty**, participants reported feeling **Acceptance** from their husbands. They also reported that **Communicating** openly with one another was what allowed them to make **Adjustments** to what was different about their relationships after marriage.

In regard to the sub-theme of **Family and Friends**, in this study, both White, Black, and Asian-Indian participants discussed aspects of relating to their in-laws. Unlike in previous research (Timmer et al., 1996), there were no differences found amongst these races in regard to how in-law relationships related to marital happiness. For many participants, **Family and Friends** were a part of their identity and way of relating to others that either changed or did not change upon marriage. This is consistent with this study's ground of **Our Identities**. Many

participants reported that certain **Family** members, specifically in-laws, were aspects of married life that entailed some **Adjustment**.

Implications for Future Research

This study offers an outline to understand the experience of new marriage for women. Additional studies could also be conducted to study the experience of new marriage for men. Gender comparisons could be discussed by looking at the newlywed experience from the male perspective. Further research could also be conducted to include same-sex married couples. It would be interesting to compare the themes reported for both heterosexual and homosexual married participants.

To gain a better understanding of the experience of marriage over time, follow up studies could be conducted after specific blocks of time had passed. It would be fascinating to see what themes participants discussed after 5, 10, 20, and 30 years of marriage. In particular, it would be noteworthy to find out how many of the participants remain married at these milestones. Comparisons could be made of the themes found at different stages of marriage.

This study offers a broad view of the experience of new marriage for women. Further studies could be conducted to look at more specific areas of the newlywed experience, using the phenomenological method. Studying the area of finances in new marriage would be an interesting topic worthy of consideration. As this was an important theme discussed by so many participants in this study, examining it more in detail would be beneficial to better understanding how finances impact new marriage. Additional studies could also be conducted to examine how newlyweds relate to each other as best friends, as was repeatedly reported in this study. This seems to be an endearing and noteworthy way to refer to one's husband. Additional

phenomenological studies looking at the experience of viewing one's husband as your best friend could offer insights into the particular aspect of the marital relationship that women value so highly.

Most women who have been through the newlywed experience will recognize the themes and sub-themes presented in this study. The validity of this qualitative study will be supported by those readers who have been newly married at one time. The results of this study can also provide a structure that mental health clinicians can use when providing premarital or marital therapy.

Women who are newly married may be encountering changes in how connected they are to their husbands, how they handle their responsibilities with their husbands, and how they communicate with their husbands. All of these areas, as described in this study, can be used to guide mental health clinicians to anticipate and understand the issues that newly married clients may be facing.

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Appendices

Appendix A
Informed Consent Form B

Appendix A

Form B

IRB# _____
Date Received in ORC _____

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE, KNOXVILLE
Application for Review of Research Involving Human Subjects

(In accordance with institutional assurance of compliance to DHHS)

Date Submitted: 12/17/08

I. IDENTIFICATION OF PROJECT

Primary Investigator:
Suzanne E. Stambaugh
2117 Andy Holt Ave. #314
Knoxville, TN 37916
(865) 595-6339 home

Faculty Advisor:
Dr. Mark A. Hector
416C Austin Peay
The University of Tennessee
Knoxville, TN 37996
(865) 974-1984

Title of Project: The Newlywed Experience for Women: A Phenomenological Investigation

Department: Psychology

Starting Date: Upon IRB approval

Estimated Completion Date: 12/09

External Funding Agency and Identification Number: N/A

Grant Submission Deadline: N/A

II. OBJECTIVE OF PROJECT

The objective of this project is to describe the experience of new marriage for women. The participants will be asked to describe their experience of marriage. The knowledge gained through a phenomenological investigation of new marriage for women can help researchers develop more accurate assessments to further understand this specific experience and thus provide better aid to individuals enduring this life adjustment in the future.

III. DESCRIPTION OF SUBJECTS

The participants in this study will be no more than 25 women ages 18+ who are currently married, are in their first marriage, and have been married for less than 3 years. Race, religion, and ethnicity will not be factors, as all that is necessary is that participants be women who are in their first marriage and have been married less than 3 years.

IV. METHODS OR PROCEDURES

Qualitative research procedures will be used in this study. This study will rely on a specific technique of qualitative research: the existential-phenomenological approach. The goal of this research technique is to uncover and descriptively express themes of an individual's experience. The ultimate goal of the researcher is to gain an understanding of the phenomena being studied in order to have a deeper understanding of the lived experience of the individual. Data will consist of the transcripts made from audio taped interviews that are held between the investigators and the participants. There will a maximum of 25 interviews with research participants in this study. The interviews will be held at a location and time at the convenience of the participant.

The interviews will be conducted through a three-step process. The first step will consist of recruiting potential participants. The investigators will recruit participants by the snowball method. This method begins with the researcher approaching individuals he already knows and asking them if they would be willing to participate in the study. The next step is to ask these individuals if they know anyone else who may want to participate. Thus, the first round of potential participants will be individuals already known to the investigators. If additional participants are needed, these first participants will be asked to make referrals of individuals they think might be interested in participating. The investigators will approach them via email or in person to solicit their participation. A description of the study will be given to potential participants and will explicitly state the purpose of the research as a study of the experience of new marriage for women. At the time of this initial contact with the participant, informed consent, audio taping, and confidentiality will be explained so the participant has time to consider their participation before the actual interview date. The contents of the informed consent are included in Appendix A. An interview time will be arranged at the participant's convenience in a private setting and a reminder phone call or email will be sent to the participant one day in advance of the interview. Two hours will be scheduled for each

interview, however, participants can take less time, as they see fit. Most interviews will last between 45 and 60 minutes.

Second, the researcher and the potential participant will meet for the interview. Upon meeting with the participant for the interview, the researcher will provide two copies of the informed consent document. The participant will be given the opportunity to ask questions regarding the procedure for the interview and taping. The researcher will explain that a pseudonym will replace their name in the transcripts and all identifying information will be removed, such as references to specific individuals, departments, institutions, cities, etc. Each participant will be given the opportunity to review the final transcript of their interview if they so desire. When the participant's concerns and questions have been addressed, they will be asked to sign the informed consent document. The participant will receive a copy of the document for their own use; it will include the researcher's contact information in case the participant needs to contact the researcher following the interview.

Third, the investigators will begin the actual interview by asking the participant the following question: "Please describe for me in as much detail as possible your experience of marriage." As the participant describes her experiences, the investigators will ask follow up questions. Follow up questions will always be based upon the participant's previous statements. Examples of follow-up questions are: "Please tell me more about that." "Can you describe that in more detail?" The investigators will be careful to introduce no new concepts or phrases to the interview. The overall goal is for the participant to describe her experiences in as much detail as possible.

These interviews are expected to last approximately 45-60 minutes; however, the participants may choose to take as much time as needed (not to exceed two hours). The investigators will then transcribe the interviews.

Participants will be given the opportunity to review the typed transcripts for accuracy if desired. Pseudonyms for name, organization and exact title if necessary will be added to the transcripts to maintain confidentiality. However, anonymity cannot be guaranteed. After the interviewing process and the transcription, the transcripts will be read with the goal being to identify common themes of information among the participants. Direct quotes and experiential stories may be used to illustrate a theme, but names will be identified only as pseudonyms. A team of qualitative researchers, who are either graduate students or faculty at The University of Tennessee, will also read the transcripts for verification of the researcher's analysis. This collaboration will allow for objectivity and a thorough interpretation of the data. All research team members will be required to sign a pledge of confidentiality. A copy of this pledge can be found in Appendix B.

V. SPECIFIC RISKS AND PROTECTION MEASURES

Procedures used in this research are non-invasive. Participation in the interviews will be strictly voluntary and the participants will be advised that they may terminate the project at any time. Interviews will be conducted in a private room on The University of Tennessee campus or in a mutually agreed upon private location. The participants will be informed that a pseudonym will be used for their real names mentioned on the audiotapes and this pseudonym will be later used on the transcripts. The investigators will prepare the transcripts or will contract with another professional to transcribe the tapes. If someone other than the interviewer does the transcription he/she will be asked to sign a confidentiality statement. Once the transcript is completed and thematized, the audiotapes will be erased. Participants will be informed that they can request a copy of the transcript at any time as long as it is within three years, after which the transcripts will be destroyed. Other than the investigators and the participant, no one will have access to the audiotapes until such time as they are erased. The audiotapes, transcripts, and other demographic data on the participants will be kept in a locked file drawer in room 416C Austin Peay Building on the University of Tennessee campus. The record of correlation between pseudonyms and participant identities will be kept in a separate locked file drawer in room 416C Austin Peay Building on the University of Tennessee campus.

The participants will be specifically advised: (a) that the interviews will be audio taped for accuracy, (b) that they may refuse to be interviewed or stop the interview at any time, (c) that they may inquire about the procedures at any time, (d) that no royalties are due to the participant for any subsequent publication, (e) that copies of the transcripts will be provided for them to review upon request, (f) that the transcripts will be reviewed by the investigators and other researchers for identification of themes, and (g) transcriptionists who hear the audio tapes and research team members who read the transcripts to assist the primary investigator identify themes will sign a pledge of confidentiality.

VI. BENEFITS VS. RISKS

Participation in this study entails no unusual risks or discomforts. No emotional discomfort is anticipated. Names, titles and organizations will be coded with pseudonyms in order to provide confidentiality; however, anonymity cannot be guaranteed. If emotional discomfort should arise, referral to counseling services will be made.

VII. METHOD OF OBTAINING “INFORMED CONSENT” FROM SUBJECTS

Potential participants will be recruited by the researcher through the snowball method. It will be clearly stated that the investigator is a doctoral student in Counseling Psychology interested in interviewing who are currently in their first marriage and have been married less than 3 years. If interested in participating, the potential participant may contact the investigator at sstambau@utk.edu. The confidentiality of email contact cannot be guaranteed. If the potential participant agrees to consider participating, the informed consent statement will be given to the participant for review before the day of the

interview. This process is intended to reduce pressure to sign the form on the day of the interview and to allow time for cancellation of the interview if desired. At the set interview time, the consent form will be reviewed with the participant and signed if he is in agreement. The investigators will collect the form and store it in a locked file drawer in 416C in the Austin Peay Building at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN 37996. The participant will retain a copy of the informed consent form for their records.

VIII. QUALIFICATIONS OF THE INVESTIGATOR

Dr. Mark Hector, the advisor of the investigator, has been involved with numerous qualitative research projects in the past. He has practical, theoretical, and professional experience in interview techniques and qualitative design.

Suzanne E. Stambaugh is in her fourth year of the doctoral program in Counseling Psychology. Suzanne has had coursework related to interviewing and research design, and has also participated in quantitative and qualitative research projects.

IX. ADEQUACY OF FACILITIES TO SUPPORT RESEARCH

Interviews will be held in a private room on the campus of the University of Tennessee. If meeting on the University of Tennessee campus is unfeasible for the participant, the interviews will be held in a private setting that is convenient for the participant. Email contacts will not be recorded, but notes including dates and times of the emails will be made, and will be accessible only to the primary investigator. They will be kept in a locked file drawer with the transcripts, audiotapes, and other confidential materials, as explained in Section V.

X. RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PROJECT DIRECTOR

In compliance with the policies established by the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Institutional Review Board, the principle investigator subscribes to the principals stated in “The Belmont Report” and standards of professional ethics in all research, development, and related activities involving human subjects under the auspices of The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

- A) Approval will be obtained from the Institutional Review Board prior to instituting any change in the research project.
- B) Development of any unexpected risks will be reported to the IRB.
- C) Signed consent statements will be kept for the duration of the project and for at least three years thereafter.

XI. SIGNATURES

Suzanne E. Stambaugh
2117 Andy Holt Ave. #314

Knoxville, TN 37916

	_____	_____
	(signature)	(date)
Faculty Advisor:		
Dr. Mark A. Hector		
416C Austin Peay		
The University of Tennessee		
Knoxville, TN 37996		
(865) 974-1984		
	_____	_____
	(signature)	(date)

II. DEPARTMENTAL REVIEW AND APPROVAL

The application described above has been reviewed by the IRB departmental review committee and has been approved. The DRC further recommends that this application be reviewed as:
☐ Expedited Review – Meets criteria for minimal risk, Category(ies) _____

OR

☐ Full IRB Review

Chair, Psychology Departmental
Review Committee:

	_____	_____
	(signature)	(date)

Psychology Department Head:

	_____	_____
	(signature)	(date)

Protocol sent to Compliance Section for final approval on _____
 (date)

APPROVED: Coordinator of Compliance's
Office of Research
404 Andy Holt Tower

University of Tennessee
Knoxville, TN 37996
(423)974-3446

(signature)

(date)

Informed Consent

Title of Project: The Newlywed Experience for Women: A Phenomenological Investigation.

This research is designed to investigate the experience of new marriage for women. The investigation involves two parts:

- 1) Explanation of the study and gaining your informed consent, and
- 2) A discussion of your experience of your marriage.

The length of the interview is anticipated to be approximately 50 minutes. However, you may take any amount of time you would like, up to two hours. The interview questions will be open-ended, informal and conversational in nature. The interviews will be scheduled at a mutually convenient time and place. Only group demographic information will be reported in the final manuscript to ensure your privacy.

Your participation in this study entails no unusual risks or discomforts. A manuscript based on this research may be prepared. The knowledge gained from this research may be presented to others through published works and/or presentations.

The only potential risk is your identification. While anonymity cannot be guaranteed, confidentiality will be maintained by replacing names, titles and organizations with pseudonyms to be used in the typed transcripts. The interview process requires audio taping of the interview and subsequent preparation of a transcript of the interview. The audiotapes and transcripts will be retained in a secure location on the campus of the University of Tennessee. After the transcripts are completed, the tapes will be erased.

The transcripts and informed consent statements will be retained in a locked file cabinet for three years on the campus of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. If you so request, a copy of your transcript can be provided to you. Every precaution will be made to ensure confidentiality of records.

I have read the above statement and agree to participate in the research. In addition, I am aware that:

1. My name, audiotape, and transcript will remain confidential and the tapes will be erased after a transcript is prepared.
2. I am entitled to have any further inquiries answered regarding the procedures.
3. No royalties are due to me for any subsequent publication.
4. Participation is voluntary and I may withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time and for any reason without penalty. For further information about this study or your role in it, contact:

Suzanne E. Stambaugh
2117 Andy Holt Ave. #314
Knoxville, TN 37916
(865)-595-6339

sstambau@utk.edu

5. The primary investigator and other researchers who are graduate students or faculty at The University of Tennessee will review the transcripts for themes.

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

Printed Name _____

Primary Investigator Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix B

Research Team Member's Pledge of Confidentiality

Appendix B

Research Team Member's Pledge of Confidentiality

The Newlywed Experience for Women: A Phenomenological Investigation.

As a member of this project's research team, I understand that I will be reading transcripts of confidential interviews. The information in these transcripts has been revealed by research subjects who participated in this project in good faith that their interviews would remain strictly confidential. I understand that I have a responsibility to honor this confidentiality agreement. I hereby agree not to share any information in these transcripts with anyone except the investigator of this project, Suzanne E. Stambaugh (595-6339); the research advisor, Dr. Mark Hector (974-1984); or other members of this research team. Any violation of this agreement would constitute a serious breach of ethical standards and I pledge not to do so.

Research Team Member	Date
Research Team Member	Date
Research Team Member	Date
Research Team Member	Date
Research Team Member	Date

Vita

Suzanne Elizabeth Stambaugh was born and raised in St. Petersburg, Florida. She is the daughter of Chris Stambaugh and Helen Huntley. Suzanne graduated from Lakewood High School in 2001. After high school, Suzanne went on to the University of Florida, earning a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology in 2005. While at the University of Florida, she worked for the Department of Housing and Residence Education as a Resident Assistant at the University of Florida, volunteered at the Alachua County Crisis Center as a Phone Counselor, was a member of Sigma Kappa Sorority, and participated in a study abroad program in London, England.

Upon completion of her undergraduate studies, Suzanne moved to Knoxville, Tennessee, in 2005 to begin the doctoral program in Counseling Psychology at the University of Tennessee. While developing her counseling psychology skills, Suzanne has continued her work in residence life as a Graduate Assistant for the Department of University Housing at the University of Tennessee. She has also developed clinical specializations in substance abuse treatment, women's issues, and college student mental health concerns through coursework, providing individual and group counseling services, and conducting outreach programs.

Suzanne is currently completing the final stages of her doctoral program at the University of Tennessee. She will receive her Doctor of Philosophy degree in August 2012.