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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Linda C. Robinson entitled "A Qualitative Study of Marital Strengths in Enduring Marriage." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Human Ecology.

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A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF MARITAL STRENGTHS IN ENDURING MARRIAGE

A Dissertation

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Degree

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Linda C. Robinson

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ABSTRACT

This study explored marital strengths in enduring marriage through the phenomenology of couples married at least 30 years. Fifteen couples were interviewed separately and in depth. The couples were asked to share their perceptions as to the strengths of their relationship and to talk about the close times in their relationship as well as times of relational distance.

The more salient characteristics which emerged from this study include the following: commitment, intimacy, autonomy, congruence, religious orientation, and communication. This study suggested possible interrelationships among the concepts, which future research could attempt to verify. By definition, commitment is a prerequisite to an enduring marriage. Commitment is related to another key component, intimacy. It appears that intimacy is a central concept related to all the other key elements. Intimacy is connectedness to one's mate, although the degree of connectedness varied widely. However, intimacy needs to be tempered with autonomy in order to avoid dysfunctional enmeshment. Intimacy fosters communication, which in turn enhances intimacy. Communication and commitment also appear to be reciprocally related. Religious orientation influences commitment as well as intimacy. Although religious orientation may have a positive effect upon communication, a moralistic posture may stifle communication.

One's satisfaction in marriage also is influenced by congruent expectations. The degree to which one is able to adapt to this

incongruence influences his or her degree of satisfaction with the relationship. Couples who are more loosely connected may turn to other sources of fulfillment, such as career or family. However, their satisfaction with this arrangement will depend upon their congruent expectations.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Currently, over one million marriages end in divorce annually (Monthly Vital Statistics Report, 1988). These statistics are of concern to social scientists who have attempted to explain why some marriages endure and others do not. However, much of the research on marriage is approached from a clinical perspective, deducing conclusions about high quality marriages from the study of troubled marriages or marriages that break up (Lauer & Lauer, 1986; Olson et al., 1983). This focus on dysfunctional couples may actually serve to discount those couples who are functioning healthily, thus perpetuating the myth of the demise of the nuclear family (Lewis, Beavers, Gossett, & Phillips, 1976).

Rather than focusing on dysfunctional couples, an alternative method of study would be to explore the marital strengths of couples in long-term marriages. Thus, the findings would be directly applicable to the population of interest, those couples who are able to successfully persevere through the stresses of marriage.

Statement of the Problem

This study explored couples' perceptions of marital strengths in their enduring marriages. Couples were asked to share their perceptions as to the strengths of their relationships and to talk about the close times in their relationships as well as times of relational distance. These interviews generated salient

characteristics related to marital functioning and suggest possible interrelationships among these concepts.

Rationale

According to stress theory, an important factor in a couple's ability to deal with stress is that of resources, conceptualized by Burr as "the family's ability to prevent an event or a transition in the family from creating a crisis or disruption" (cited in McCubbin & Patterson, 1983, p. 9). Therefore, the resources available to a couple during times of relational stress would impact upon the couple's ability to resist disruption, or to endure the crisis.

Dyk and Schvaneveldt (1987) conceptualized resources as including "existing characteristics of individual members, the family unit, and the community as well as expanded resources that are developed and strengthened in response to stressor demands" (p. 31). Thus, resources are available to the couple on a variety of levels. Resources at the family level would include marital strengths, or those resources which the couple share as a dyad. Some of the marital strengths which have been identified in the literature include: commitment, love and liking, selflessness, trust, personality issues, communication, a balance of separateness and togetherness, consensus, conflict resolution, financial management, leisure activities, sexual relations, children and marriage, family and friends, egalitarian roles, religious orientation, and congregational activities (Fields, 1983; Goldberg, Green, Hof, Treat, & Westfall, 1985; Lauer & Lauer, 1986; Mace, 1982;

MacKinnon, MacKinnon, & Franken, 1984; Olson et al., 1983; Sporakowski & Hughston, 1978; Weishaus & Field, 1988).

Although many characteristics regarding marital strengths have been identified, further study is needed in order to explore interrelationships among the various strengths (Schumm, 1985). Such exploration would facilitate the development of a mid-range model of marital strengths. Specifically, there is a need to determine which variables are prerequisites for others and to order the various concepts into an integrated whole (Schumm, 1985). Schumm (1985) attempted to develop a model of family strengths based on the work of Stinnett. A major flaw in this model was the high degree of religious orientation of Stinnett's sample, leading to the depiction of religious orientation as a "'prime mover' that, at least indirectly, influences all the variables in the model" (Schumm, 1985, p. 4). Yet Schumm's (1985) model suggested the important role of sequencing in the development of a model of family strengths, e.g., "at least moderate levels of appreciation must be established prior to working on time together or open communication" (p. 8).

Lewis and Spanier (1979) developed an inductive mid-range theory of marital quality and stability incorporating various indicators of marital quality gleaned from the literature. Four third-order propositions were derived from 74 first-order propositions and 13 second-order propositions. Marital strengths were incorporated into propositions related to dyadic characteristics. However, all propositions were related directly to marital quality. Although this

theory is quite useful in organizing the literature on marital quality, research also needs to focus on the interrelationships among concepts.

Other attempts to organize concepts of marital strengths have been focused in the areas of family functioning. Barnhill (1979) grouped eight dimensions of family functioning into four basic themes: identity processes, change, information processing, and role structuring. These themes incorporate such marital strengths as cohesion, adaptability, and communication. Olson and McCubbin (1982) and Beavers (1982) organized these same concepts into models of family functioning in which communication facilitates the development of cohesion and adaptability. Clearly, the development of mid-range theory of marital strengths is an area in need of further exploration.

Research Objectives

1. To explore spouses' perceptions of their marriage and why it has endured.
2. To explore marital functioning in enduring marriages.
3. To ascertain the marital strengths in enduring marriages.
4. To explore interrelationships among marital strengths in enduring marriages.

Theoretical Framework

Two bodies of literature have been influential in organizing this study. The first is that of marital strengths in enduring marriages, providing insight into qualities which enhance marital relationships. The second body of literature is that of crisis theory.

Marital Strengths in Enduring Marriages

Research in the areas of marital strengths and enduring marriages has generated a variety of characteristics related to enhanced marital relationships, such as love, reciprocity, communication, understanding, religious orientation, patience, commitment, intimacy, shared responsibility, personal identity, persistence, hopefulness, flexible boundaries, and congruence (Fields, 1983; Goldberg et al., 1985; Lauer & Lauer, 1986; Sporakowski & Hughston, 1978; Weishaus & Field, 1988). Although this list appears very broad and cumbersome, some variables are emerging as more salient than others. For example, a study by Lauer and Lauer (1986) identified four key concepts: friendship, commitment, consensus, and humor. Other researchers are attempting to establish relationships among the various variables (Barnhill, 1979; Beavers, 1982; Olson & McCubbin, 1982; Schumm, 1985). It is evident that the area of marital strengths is conceptually in its formative stage. Therefore, further exploratory study may help to focus more clearly on key concepts and their interrelationships.

Crisis Theory

Crisis theory was first specified by the ABCX model, which was later expanded upon as the Double ABCX model and then the FAAR model.

ABCX Family Crisis Model

The ABCX Family Crisis Model was presented by Hill in 1949 (cited in McCubbin & Patterson, 1983). Interaction between the stressor event (the a factor), the family's resources (the b factor), and the family's

definition of the event (the c factor) results in crisis (the x factor) (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983). The ABCX Model is actually a pre-crisis model and was expanded upon by McCubbin and Patterson.

Double ABCX Model

McCubbin and Patterson (1983) enhanced the original ABCX Model by incorporating post-crisis variables, deriving the Double ABCX Model. This model describes:

> (a) the additional life stressors and changes which may influence the family's ability to achieve adaptation; (b) the critical psychological and social factors families call upon and use in managing crisis situations; (c) the processes families engage in to achieve satisfactory resolution; and (d) the outcome of the family efforts. (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983, p. 11)

Family Adaptation and Response (FAAR)

The family adjustment and adaptation response (FAAR) model (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983) utilizes concepts from the Double ABCX model and incorporates the processes of adjustment and adaptation. Resources, including marital strengths, aid in the restructuring process by "buffering the impact of pile-up . . ., by influencing the definition of the situation . . ., and maximizing the solutions available (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983, p. 23).

It is evident that marital strengths is an important component of family stress theory as well as of enduring marriages. Therefore, further research to clarify the key marital strengths and the ways in which they are related enhances these two areas of research: enduring marriages and crisis theory.

Nominal Definitions

Enduring marriages are those marriages which have endured for a significant period of time. However, there is a lack of consistency in the operational definition of enduring marriages (Sporakowski & Axelson, 1984). For the purpose of this study, enduring marriages were conceptualized as those marriages which have lasted at least 30 years.

Family stress is "a state which arises from an actual or perceived imbalance between demand (e.g., challenge, threat) and capability (e.g., resources, coping) in the family's functioning. It is characterized by a nonspecific demand for adjustment or adaptive behavior." (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983, p. 10).

Marital strengths are the characteristics of couples that "exhibit a high level of functioning" (MacKinnon, MacKinnon, & Franken, 1984).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Enduring Marriages

The literature on enduring marriages provides insight into marriages which have lasted many years. Of particular interest are the marital strengths which have been found to be operative in long-term marriages. These strengths may offer the key to understanding why some couples are able to endure the stresses of marriage and other couples are not. However, there are certain issues to consider in the study of enduring marriages.

Conceptual and Methodological Issues

Operationalization of "Long-term"

In their critique of the literature on enduring marriages, Sporakowski and Axelson (1984) presented various methodological and conceptual issues pertinent to this area of study. One of the most relevant issues concerns the lack of consensus in the operationalization of the concepts of "enduring" or "long-term" relationships. Although Brubaker and Ade-Ridder (1984) defined long-term marriages as those which have lasted at least 30 years, many studies have focused on marriages of much shorter duration. Thus, some of the marriages studied are in the middle stages of the family life cycle (Fields, 1983; Lauer & Lauer, 1986), whereas many are composed of couples in the latter stages (Lauer & Lauer, 1986; MacKinnon et al.,

1984; Sporakowski & Hughston, 1978; Swensen, Eskew, & Kohlhepp, 1984; Weishaus and Field, 1988). This range of length of marriage becomes problematic when one considers the possible impact of the family life cycle variables upon marital quality.

Curvilinearity of Marital Quality

For many years, the question of a decline in marital quality over the family life cycle has been debated. Pineo's (1961) analysis of longitudinal data gathered on couples who had been married 20 years or less suggested that couples experience a drop in marital adjustment and intimacy between the early and middle stages of marriage. Further research in this area indicated that marital quality may be curvilinear with increases in the latter stages of the family life cycle that approximate earlier levels of satisfaction (Spanier & Lewis, 1980).

A recent longitudinal study of long-term marriages suggested that marital quality appears to develop according to six differing patterns, either stable, linear, or curvilinear (Weishaus & Field, 1988). Results of a study by Rowe and Meredith (1982) indicated that couples married less than 50 years charted marital happiness as curvilinear with the lowest level of happiness being approximately 80%, whereas couples married 50 years or more described their marriages as constant at the 80% level of happiness throughout the marriage. In their study of people who had been married for at least 30 years, Copeland, Bugaighis, and Schumm (1984) found weak support for curvilinearity. Thus, the impact of the family life cycle variables upon marital quality remains unresolved, yet needs to be addressed in the study of long-term marriage.

Marital Typologies

A related issue in the study of enduring marriages is the variation in quality among long-term marriages. Although marriages may endure, this does not necessarily indicate marital quality or happiness (Cuber & Harroff, 1965; Goldberg, Green, Hof, Treat, & Westfall, 1985; Luckey, 1966; Weishaus & Field, 1988). Some marriages remain stable with very little positive affect in the relationship, whereas other marriages may experience a decrease in satisfaction. The following studies of marriage have generated typologies indicative of the variations in the quality of the marital relationship.

Cuber and Harroff. Perhaps the most frequently cited typology of married couples is that of Cuber and Harroff (1968). They conducted unstructured in-depth interviews lasting from three hours to several days. Their phenomenological approach utilized such opening questions as, "Well, what's it like to be a woman today?" (Cuber & Harroff, 1968, p. 10) and, "What do you think about marriage?" (Cuber & Harroff, 1968, p.10). Thus, the individual's perception about marriage evolved out of his or her individual phenomenology. This study has been criticized for its methodology, specifically a highly educated, upper middle class sample, but the typology has been helpful in categorizing marriages and their characteristics.

Their typology consists of five marital types. Conflict-habituated marriages are characterized by tension and conflict and the constant demands of controlling this conflict. Devitalized marriages are those in which the deep love of earlier years degenerates into a more apathetic relationship. Passive-congenial marriages differ from

devitalized marriages in that there was never the initial love or passion. Emotional energy is channeled into other interests, such as career or children, rather than into the marital relationship. In vital marriages, the couples are psychologically bound together in genuine togetherness, deriving much pleasure in sharing with one's mate. Total marriages parallel vital marriages, but the sharing pervades more facets of their lives. Although extremely rare, some couples in total marriages share all of the important areas of their lives.

Cuber and Harroff (1965) also posited two types of marriages based on the level of intimacy between the partners. Utilitarian marriages are described as follows:

> "By the term Utilitarian Marriage we mean simply any marriage which is established or maintained for purposes other than to express an intimate, highly important personal relationship between a man and a woman. The absence of continuous and deep empathic feeling and the existence of an atmosphere of limited companionship are natural outcomes, since the purposes for its establishment or maintenance are not primarily sexual and emotional ones. . . . The cohesive forces which maintain the union come out of other purposes and provide other kinds of satisfactions." (pp. 109-110)

On the other hand, intrinsic marriages involve a high degree of spousal intimacy:

> To those who want or need vital or total relationships . . ., the relationship of a man and woman has top priority among the several considerations which make up a total life. . . . In the Intrinsic Marriage if there is conflict between obligations, the private and personal desires and needs of the pair come first." (pp. 132-133)

Marks. Marks (1986) derived five types of marriages from his qualitative study of marital relationships. Couples may be loosely connected, in which case both partners lean toward outside interests yet retain interest in their relationship. Couple-centered connectedness is a relationship in which the partners are concerned primarily with their relationship. Family-centered connectedness is characterized by concern with the couple's joint outside interests, i.e., their children. In balanced connectedness, couples maintain balance among their inner selves, their marital relationships, and their outside interests. Finally, marital separateness is a marriage in which the partners have no joint concerns.

Weishaus and Field. Weishaus and Field (1988) derived a marital typology from the study of the surviving couples of the Berkeley Older Generation Study conducted by the Institute of Human Development at Berkeley. These couples were the parents of children who had been in the Guidance Study and Berkeley Growth Study begun in 1928 and 1929. The couples had been married 50 to 69 years and were intensively interviewed in 1929-1930, 1945-47, 1968-1969, and 1982-1984, corresponding to young adulthood, middle age, young-old age and old-old age respectively. Although the interviews were conducted separately, the couples were observed together during breaks in the interviews.

Weishaus and Field (1988) posited six marital types: stable/positive, stable/neutral, stable/negative, curvilinear, continuous decline, and continuous increase. Stable marriages endure over time, with either positive, neutral, or negative affect between the spouses. Curvilinear marriages are those in which marital

satisfaction decreases at some point and then later increases to approximate the original level. This phenomenon leads Weishaus and Field (1988) to caution that marriages assessed at the middle stages of the life cycle may be qualitatively different from those same marriages assessed at later stages. No couples in the study exhibited continuous decline or increase of marital satisfaction. The authors posited that marriages that are characterized by continuous decline either end in divorce or experience increased satisfaction, in which case they become curvilinear marriages. Weishaus and Field (1988) maintained that continuous increase is possible, although not common, as this phenomenon has been cited in studies of arranged marriages.

Companionate Versus Traditional Marriage

Mace (1982) theorized that much of the difficulty modern couples have in achieving marital success is attributable to the change in the function of marriage. Traditionally, family stability was maintained through the decision-making power of the husband. However, the vast cultural changes in our society since the turn of the century have changed drastically the function of marriage. These changes include the evolution from an agrarian to an urban society, increased mobility, mass media, the liberation movement, and increased affluence (Mace, 1982). These changes have resulted in a change from traditional, or institutional, marriages to companionate marriages based to a greater extent on love and equality. Companionship marriages are characterized by a movement toward joint decision-making, fluid roles, equal partnership, and flexibility.

Whereas conflict in traditional marriages was resolved through the dominance of the husband, modern marriages require complex negotiation skills in order to successfully navigate the interpersonal interactions inherent in marriage (Mace, 1982). The following qualities are essential to coping in a successful companionate marriage (Mace, 1982): "commitment to growth" (p. 28), "an effectively functioning system" (p. 28), and "the ability to make creative use of conflict" (p. 30).

Characteristics of Enduring Marriages

Many characteristics of enduring marriages are similar to those of marriages of shorter duration. These characteristics include the importance of love, reciprocity, communication, family, social support, religion, understanding, patience, kindness, respect, commitment, intimacy, companionship, zest for living, humor, shared responsibility, personal identity, persistence, hopefulness and optimism, flexible boundaries, congruence, reframing, financial management, leisure activities, and sexuality (Ammons & Stinnett, 1980; Fields, 1983; Goldberg et al., 1985; Mace, 1982; MacKinnon et al., 1984; Olson & McCubbin, 1982; Roberts, 1979-80; Rowe & Meredith, 1982; Sporakowski & Hughston, 1978; Stinnett, Carter, & Montgomery, 1972; Weishaus & Field, 1988).

MacKinnon et al. (1984) conducted their study of long-term marriages with 116 couples who had been married over 40 years. Their study focused on variables which discriminated between strong families, as identified by a variety of family strengths measures, and families that were not as strong. Many of their findings replicated previous

findings in the literature, such as family and marital satisfaction, cohesion, adaptability, time together, communication, consensus regarding leisure activities, and religious orientation. However, they also identified strengths which had not been identified previously in research involving younger couples: "satisfaction with health, sexual relations, financial management and well-being, and personality issues" (p. 124). They posited that these variables may be unique to long-term marriages, suggesting a developmental component to family strengths.

In their study of 351 couples who had been married at least 15 years, Lauer and Lauer (1986) determined the following characteristics to be key elements of enduring marriages: friendship, commitment, consensus, and humor. The literature on long-term marriage tends to support their conclusion. In their critique of the literature on enduring marriages, Sporakowski and Axelson (1984) concluded that the following characteristics were common across studies: "endurance, tolerance, enjoyment, perseverance, fulfillment over the years" (p. 88), concepts very similar to those of Lauer and Lauer (1986).

Friendship

Friendship plays an essential role in enduring marriages (Lauer & Lauer, 1986; MacKinnon et al., 1984; Weishaus & Field, 1988). According to Lauer and Lauer (1986), "liking one's mate is more fundamental than loving one's mate" (p. 76). The work of marriage is transformed when spouses truly enjoy each other (Gottman, 1982; Lauer & Lauer, 1986). Indeed, friendship serves to enhance the bond between spouses, increasing their willingness to face the difficulties inherent in their relationship (Gottman, 1982; Lauer & Lauer, 1986; Weishaus &

Field, 1988). Liking replaces passion as the motivating force of togetherness and enables couples to find each other stimulating through decades of marriage (Lauer & Lauer, 1986).

These findings suggest the importance of an intimate friendship with one's spouse. However, some studies indicate that intimacy may be less salient in long-term relationships than in marriages of shorter duration. As length of marriage increases, intimacy and expressions of love appear to decline (Rowe & Meredith, 1982; Swensen, Eskew, & Kohlhepp, 1984). However, ego development appears to interact with duration of marriage and with commitment to impact upon intimacy and marital satisfaction. According to Swensen et al. (1984),

> For the average couple, changes over time lead to devitalization of the relationship. However, those who are at the more complex stages of ego development, who cope actively with problems and conflicts in the relationship, and who have created security in their relationship by a personal commitment to each other, create a vital, stimulating, and satisfying intimate relationship that does not deteriorate. (p. 104)

Commitment

Lauer and Lauer (1986) delineated three kinds of commitment: to a happy marriage, to marriage itself, and to both the marriage and the spouse. Commitment to a happy marriage means that marriage should last forever only if the spouses are happy. Marriages in which spouses are committed to the marriage, rather than to each other, endure regardless of the feelings of the mates and are exemplified by devitalized, or stable/negative, marriages (Weishaus & Field, 1988). Happy enduring marriages are characterized by commitment to each other as persons as well as to the marriage (Lauer & Lauer, 1986; Weishaus & Field, 1988).

This commitment "is to the actual person as he or she is, not to an ideal mate that exists only in fantasy" (Lauer & Lauer, 1986, p. 57). Commitment to marriage and the spouse entails working through the difficult periods in a relationship as opposed to passively remaining in a marriage (Lauer & Lauer, 1986).

Commitment to the spouse as a person accords a basis for problem solving (Swensen, Eskew, & Kohlhepp, 1984). Swensen and Trahaug (1985) found a decline in spousal commitment to the other as a person, yet those couples who maintained commitment to the other had fewer marital problems. Increases in commitment to the spouse as a person were related to fewer marital problems and increased expressions of love (Swensen & Trahaug, 1985).

Mace (1982) also referred to commitment to growth. It is possible that commitment to growth maximizes commitment to the marriage and to the spouse through greater adaptability.

Commitment is important to both husbands and wives in defining marriage (Sporakowski & Hughston, 1978). It may be considered as the ability to renegotiate the relationship as changes occur, similar to the concept of adaptability (Fields, 1983; Goldberg et al., 1985). Other factors which may facilitate commitment include hopefulness, optimism, respect, understanding, tolerance, determination, and persistence (Ammons & Stinnett, 1980; Goldberg et al., 1985; Weishaus & Field, 1988). According to Goldberg et al. (1985), couples must be willing to "endure ambivalence, uncertainty, and lack of gratification for long periods of time" (p. 220). Mace (1982) posited the following characteristics as operative in marital growth: maturation of the

relationship; assimilation (i.e., drawing sustenance from the partner and increased compatibility); and adaptation to the differences in each other, to the growth of each other, and to new experiences and situations.

Congruence

Congruence emerges as a pertinent issue in a variety of studies. According to Sporakowski and Hughston (1978), the ability to "rate self and spouse similarly in terms of personality attributes" (p. 325) differentiates couples according to extreme levels of adjustment. There is a significant relationship between marital satisfaction and the "ability to reflect one's spouse's self-perception" (Fields, 1983, p. 38). Fields (1983) posited that "having enough knowledge of one's spouse plays a role in developing empathy between people and that having the capacity to perceive one's spouse accurately is crucial for a successful marriage" (p. 39). However, in their study of spouses' perceptions of marriage-related terms, Arias and O'Leary (1985) found that perceived similarity correlated more highly with marital satisfaction than did actual similarity.

Weishaus and Field (1988) referred to the importance of congruence in levels of expectations between partners as follows: "When adaptation, acceptance, and tolerance develop during the course of a marriage, a more congruent level of expectations, and thus increased marital satisfaction, results" (p. 771). Thus, it appears that congruence in perceptions as well as expectations may enhance the marital relationship.

Humor

According to Lauer and Lauer (1986), humor and playfulness within marriage communicate happiness. It also may convey other qualities inherent in happy enduring marriages, such as hope, optimism, affection, and love (Goldberg et al., 1985; Sporakowski & Hughston, 1978; Weishaus & Field, 1988). The marital bond is thus strengthened and the couple's ability to cope with difficulty is increased (Lauer & Lauer, 1986).

Communication

Good communication skills are essential to long-term marriages. Lauer and Lauer (1986) referred to the importance of verbal and nonverbal communication in the development of intimacy. In particular, the authors note the use of couple argot, consisting of gestures, words, or languages that only the couple understand. Couple argot allows the spouses to communicate intimately in the presence of others, adding to their "shared history of intimacy" (Lauer & Lauer, 1986, p. 94).

A component of communication which has generated some controversy is that of self-disclosure. Women desire more self-disclosure than their husbands (Fields, 1983), and men have been encouraged to be more self-disclosing. However, self-disclosure needs to be tempered with sensitivity to the impact on the spouse (Lauer & Lauer, 1986). Happy couples communicate regularly and frequently about their concerns and interests, but they do not engage in total self-disclosure (Lauer & Lauer, 1986).

Finally, creative conflict resolution is an important quality in coping with marital conflict (Mace, 1982). Indeed, dealing with anger is critical to marital success or failure (Mace, 1982).

It appears that many of the characteristics of couples in long-term marriages enhance the couples' level of functioning. These characteristics, or marital strengths, may serve to lessen the degree of marital strain experienced by a couple as well as to enable the couple to effectively deal with many of the stresses they face through the years of marriage. Thus, marital strengths serve as resources which allow the couple to cope with stress in marriage, thereby avoiding and/or coping with a situation of crisis.

Stress and Coping in Marriage

The literature indicates the need to consider the total context of stress: the individual, the dyad, the family, and the society with which the family interrelates (Boss, 1988; McCubbin, 1979; Walker, 1985). Boss (1988) differentiated internal and external contexts of stress. Internal contexts include those dimensions controlled by the family, whereas external contexts refer to dimensions out of the control of the family (Boss, 1988). According to McCubbin (1979), the family not only reacts to stress within the family, but also copes with the stress associated with its relationship to the community. Thus, Walker (1985) urged the monitoring of societal changes and their impacts upon the "individual/relationship/familial system" (p. 834).

Stress resistance is aided by strengths, coping strategies, and basic resources (Olson et al., 1983). Resources may include existing

characteristics as well as resources that are developed in response to the stressor and may be found at the individual, family, and community levels (Dyk & Schvaneveldt, 1987).

Individual Resources

Individual resources include "self-esteem, intellectual and analytical skills, and interpersonal and other social skills" (Dyk & Schvaneveldt, 1987). Ammons and Stinnett (1980) emphasize the role of individuality, or high ego strength, as follows: "Stressful times are debilitating for the husband or wife with low ego strength. Their underlying insecurity and fear of losing the relationship may cause them to adopt a posture of over accommodation as they cling to their mate in neurotic desperation" (p. 40).

The uniqueness of each individual's crisis will call forth different individual resources (Walker, 1985). Accordingly, study at the individual level "would enable us to identify the combination of individual abilities and coping strategies that result in optimal group functioning" (Walker, 1985, p. 830).

Family Resources

Resources at the family level may be defined as the "operationalization of the interdependence among family members" (Walker, 1985. p. 831). Family resources include the following: cohesion, adaptability, communication, "homogeneity of problem-solving competencies" (Dyk & Schvaneveldt, 1987, p. 31), financial resources, and social support (Dyk & Schvaneveldt, 1987; Boss, 1988). As stated

by Boss (1988), adaptability is "the key to family stress management" (p. 142).

Marital strengths serve to buffer couples from stress within their relationship (Olson et al., 1983). In their study of marital strengths, Olson et al. (1983) utilized the ENRICH scale, which consists of 11 content categories and one social desirability scale. The content categories include: personality issues, communication, conflict resolution, financial management, leisure activities, sexual relationships, children and marriage, family and friends, egalitarian roles, religious orientation, and congregational activities. Olson et al. (1983) found that wives' marital satisfaction was correlated with leisure, relatives and friends, and religious orientation. Husbands' satisfaction was correlated with communication. The stressors that were the most common throughout the life cycle include financial demands, intrafamily struggles, and work-family difficulties. Marital strains were most evident at the latter stages of the life cycle due to difficulties with sexual relations. Olson et al. (1983) concluded that spiritual support is the most important resource for married couples, followed by reframing and social supports, both formal and informal. However, their finding of the importance of spiritual support may be a result of sample bias due to the predominance of Lutherans in the sample.

Community Resources

Community resources include people or institutions which offer support and care (Dyk & Schvaneveldt, 1987). Olson et al. (1983) found

that informal sources of social support are used more often than formal ones.

Coping

Family coping is affected by the interrelatedness of the three levels of family systems. Dyk and Schvaneveldt (1987) summarized this process as follows:

> Ideally, efforts by individual family members, subsystems, and the family unit will be aimed at achieving a balance in the family system that promotes individual growth and development (individual level), facilitates organization and unity (intra-family level), and manages external and/or internal demands assessed by the family as exceeding current family resources (family level). (p. 28)

Systems theory indicates that one member's inability to cope may affect the functioning of the entire family (Boss, 1988). According to behaviorists, good marriages are the result of effective coping skills (Nichols, 1984). Thus, marital quality will be optimized if both partners can cope with stress effectively.

The couple's ability to cope with stress within their relationship is determined by their level of functioning. The next section will focus on the major models of family functioning: Olson's circumplex model and the Beavers-Timberlawn model.

Family Functioning

The literature on family functioning centers, to a large extent, on Olson's circumplex model and Beavers-Timberlawn model. Both models incorporate the dimensions of cohesion and adaptability to derive

categories of family functioning. However, the basic difference between the two models is the conceptualization of adaptability.

Olson's Circumplex Model

The concept of cohesion in Olson's Circumplex Model incorporates emotional bonding between family members as well as the autonomy of the individual members (Maynard & Olson, 1987; Olson, 1986; Olson, 1988; Olson & McCubbin, 1982, Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle, 1983). Although more recent definitions of cohesion omit reference to autonomy, the description of balanced family types alludes to the individuality of family members: "In the model's central area (separated and connected), individuals are able to experience and balance between these two extremes and are able to both be independent from and connected to their families" (Olson, 1988, p. 11). Thus, the conceptualization of cohesion does appear to incorporate autonomy as well as emotional bonding. The elements of cohesion include: "emotional bonding, boundaries, coalitions, time, space, friends, decision-making, and interests and recreation" (Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle, 1983, p. 70). Adaptability is conceptualized as "the ability of a marital or family system to change its power structure, role relationships, and relationship rules in response to situational and developmental stress" (Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle, 1983, p. 70). Systems need a balance of stability and change, for "it is the ability to change when appropriate that distinguishes functional couples and families from others" (Olson & McCubbin, 1982, p. 51). Both cohesion and adaptability are curvilinear dimensions in that extreme levels of

cohesion and adaptability are more likely to be found in dysfunctional families and balanced levels are more likely to be found in functional families (Maynard and Olson, 1987). Therefore, extremes on these two dimensions generally indicate marital or family dysfunction, although problems are less likely for extreme families with congruent expectations (Olson, 1986; Olson & McCubbin, 1982).

Theoretically, couples may change their patterns of cohesion and adaptability in response to stress (Olson & McCubbin, 1982). Balanced families generally go to an adjacent level, but may occasionally function at extreme levels. Extreme families either stay the same or go to the opposite extreme. Types may also change with movement through the life cycle (Olson & McCubbin, 1982).

Positive communication facilitates a balance of cohesion and adaptability (Olson, 1986; Olson & McCubbin, 1982). The positive communication skills of balanced families include "clear and congruent messages, empathy, supportive statements, and effective problem-solving skills" (Olson & McCubbin, 1982, p. 57).

Beavers-Timberlawn Model

The Beavers-Timberlawn model also classified families according to their levels of cohesion and adaptability. Cohesion is referred to as "family style" in this model, and ranges from "centripetal" to "centrifugal." Centripetal families have very high levels of cohesion, whereas centrifugal families are low in cohesion. Although Olson and McCubbin (1982) conceived of increased adaptability as movement toward chaos, Beavers (1982) viewed increased adaptability as functional

change, or growth. Therefore, adaptability is considered to be a linear function by Beavers (1982), as opposed to the curvilinear function posited by Olson and McCubbin (1982). Thus, family functioning is optimized as adaptability increases (Beavers, 1982).

These dimensions yield eight categories of families (Beavers, 1982). Severely dysfunctional families are low in adaptability and either centrifugal or centripetal. Midrange families have moderate levels of adaptability and may be either centrifugal, centripetal, or a combination of the two. Healthy families tend to have high levels of adaptability and a mixture of family style.

Kantor and Lehr's Systemic Approach to Family Process

Kantor and Lehr (1975) developed a family typology based upon the distance-regulation patterns in families (Strauss-Leonard, 1981). According to Kantor and Lehr (1975), "members of families gain access to targets of affect, power, and meaning through the way in which they and their families regulate the media of space, time, and energy" (p. 37). This regulation is achieved through positive feedback loops, encouraging morphogenesis, and morphostatic negative feedback loops, encouraging morphostatis (Strauss-Leonard, 1981).

The dimensions of space consists of interior and exterior spaces, i.e., the spatial relationships within the family and between the family and its environment. Time concerns the family's "basic rhythmic patterns" (Kantor & Lehr, 1975, p. 43), or temporal boundaries. The energy dimension is composed of static, or accumulated, energy and

kinetic, or spent, energy. An imbalance between these two types of energies produces stress for the family.

According to Kantor and Lehr (1975), "affirmative intimacy and nurturance are the primary targets of the affect dimension of family life" (pp.46-47), and failure to achieve these goals may result in fusion or alienation. The power dimension is concerned with achieving the goals of the system through "freedom and restraint" (Kantor & Lehr, 1975, p. 49), involving such issues as "status in the family hierarchy, decision making, concepts of property, of rights and responsibilities, and attitudes of dominance and submission" (Kantor & Lehr, 1975, p. 49). The meaning dimension facilitates the development of purposeful identity at both the individual and family levels by focusing on the degree to which meanings are shared or unshared. These meanings involve "ideas, credos, values, ideologies, world views, and a sense of good and bad and right and wrong" (Kantor & Lehr, 1975, p. 51).

The resultant family types are closed, random, and open. The closed family type is oriented toward morphostasis, or "stability, continuity and uniformity" (Strauss-Leonard, 1981, p. 7). The flow of information is tightly controlled, and moral standards are traditional. Power is authoritarian, and emotions are reserved (Strauss-Leonard, 1981).

The random family type maximizes "change, variety, and non-uniformity" (Strauss-Leonard, 1981, p. 8). This type is characterized by individualistic values, permissiveness, "spontaneous and capricious" (Strauss-Leonard, 1981, p. 8) emotional communication, and freedom (Strauss-Leonard, 1981).

The open family type reflects a more balanced system. Information, power, and feelings are shared, effecting interdependence between the individual and the family (Strauss-Leonard, 1981).

These family types may be enabled or disabled. Enabled family types move the system toward balance and achievement of the goals of the individual and subsystems. Disabled family types tend to sacrifice the individual, exacerbating conflict and moving the system toward crisis (Strauss-Leonard, 1981, p. 9).

Barnhill's Model on the Dimensions of Family Functioning

Another model of family functioning groups eight dimensions into four family themes (Barnhill, 1979). This model is based upon concepts of family functioning found in the family therapy literature. The first theme is that of identity processes, which includes individuation versus enmeshment and mutuality versus isolation. Secondly, change incorporates the dimensions of flexibility versus rigidity and stability versus disorganization. The third theme, information processing, is composed of clear versus distorted perception and clear versus distorted communication. The final theme is role structuring and is comprised of role reciprocity versus unclear roles or role conflict and clear versus diffuse generational boundaries (Barnhill, 1979). These dimensions are interrelated in a "mutually causal system" (Barnhill, 1979, p. 97). Barnhill (1979) posited that improvement in functioning in many of the areas will likely lead to improved functioning in other areas.

The Balance Between Separateness and Connectedness

Scarf (1987), utilizing a marital developmental framework developed by Nadelson, Polonsky, and Mathews, described the post-parenting years as highly rewarding for married couples if they have mastered the essential tasks associated with flexibility in intimate relationships. She described this stage as a time of reassessing the successes and disappointments of the past and preparing for the future and its inevitable process of aging. During this time, "couples can either comfort one another and be true companions, withdraw and distance themselves, emotionally, or rail at each other about the disappointments and resentments of a lifetime" (Scarf, 1987, p. 19).

According to Scarf, the achievement of a balance between closeness with one's mate and the retention of one's individuality is the primary dilemma facing married couples. The resolution of this dilemma is necessary in order maximize the health of the relationship. Scarf (1987) underscored the significance of this process as follows:

> In [a healthy, loving system], each of us is left to struggle with his or her own individual, difficult, seemingly irreconcilable internal dilemmas, but to do so in relationship to a mate who honors the legitimacy of the pain and who does not confound the partner's problems with his own. It is out of this mutual acceptance of each person's right to deal with what is genuinely his or her own that resolution of their separate conflicts may eventually come--but not at the cost of the relationship. (p. 336)

The Need for a Mid-range Model of Family Strengths

Schumm (1985) cited a variety of reasons for developing a mid-range model of family strengths. First, there is the need to determine

which variables are prerequisites for others in order to give appropriate direction and focus to family practitioners. It may be counterproductive to begin working with families in an area for which the prerequisite need has not been addressed. Secondly, programs which focus on specific areas of family strengths, rather than the interrelated concepts, are limited in their applicability. Different families have different needs, which are most adequately addressed by a comprehensive approach to family strengths. Thirdly, the development of a model of family strengths would allow practitioners to educate families as to how these strengths work together instead of presenting them as nonrelated entities. Finally, the development of a model of interrelationships among family strengths would allow for more effective evolution of theory in this area (Schumm, 1985).

Schumm (1985) has developed a model based on the work of Stinnett. In this model, religious orientation serves as a " 'prime mover' that, at least indirectly, influences all the variables in the model" (Schumm, 1985, p. 4). Religious orientation is related to "appreciation, commitment, time together, and the ability to deal with crises" (Schumm, 1985, p. 3). Commitment and appreciation are related to time together, but there is not relationship between commitment and "appreciation, communication, or dealing with crises" (Schumm, 1985, p. 3). Appreciation is related to time together, weakly related to crises/conflict resolution, and unrelated to communication. Schumm (1985) posited that the strongest link may be between communication and time together. Communication also is related to crises/conflict resolution.

Due to the religious bias of Stinnett's sample, the effect of religious orientation may be exaggerated. Also, it would seem more appropriate to develop a mid-range model on a broader base than the work of one researcher. However, Schumm's (1985) model does, indeed, serve as a basis for the evolution of a model of family strengths.

Qualitative Approach

Qualitative research played a crucial role in the beginnings of family research (LaRossa & Wolf, 1984). In 1855, Frederick LePlay's study of families, Les Ouvriers Europeens, was published. LePlay's methodology included participant observations, in-depth interviews, analyses of family budgets, and case studies. The Polish Peasant, by W.I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, is a seminal piece of qualitative research written between 1918 and 1920. Although family research recently has been dominated by quantitative techniques, qualitative methodology has a significant role to play in the generation of theory in family research.

A number of studies relevant to the area of family strengths and enduring marriages have used qualitative techniques. Cuber and Harroff's (1965) classic study, as well as Marks'(1986) study of marital relationships, incorporated lengthy, unstructured interviews. The Berkeley Older Generation Study, a longitudinal study which resulted in the analysis by Weishaus and Field (1988), utilized an interview schedule with many open-ended questions, diaries of a typical week, home interviews, observational notes, and clinical inferences (Maas & Kuypers, 1974). Lauer and Lauer (1986) employed

questionnaires, personal accounts, and interviews. The flexibility afforded by qualitative techniques enables the researcher to become immersed in the subject's experience of marriage. Thus, the researcher may discover not only an important fact but also "how the subject felt about it, how much he had previously thought about it, what factual basis he thought he had for his judgment, or what, if anything, he intended to do about it" (Cuber & Harroff, 1965).

Through further qualitative study of enduring marriages, it is hoped that a deeper understanding of the processes inherent in functional, long-term marriages will emerge. As stated by Sporakowski and Axelson (1984):

> The stage has been set for potentially important work in the development of long-term marriages. It is time to go beyond speculation, conjecture, and editorializing about enduring relationships, and instead begin to fit some of the pieces of the puzzle together to build a comprehensive and comparable data base on long lasting marital relationships. (p. 91)

The objectives of the current study were to develop a deeper understanding of enduring marriage through the perceptions of the individuals involved. Through a phenomenological approach, the characteristics of these marriages were revealed as well as the impact of these characteristics upon the marriages. Thus, increased understanding of the process and degree of functioning in enduring marriages was gained.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach to the study of enduring marriages is appropriate for a variety of reasons. One of the strengths of qualitative research is its ability to "break theoretical ground" (LaRossa & Wolf, 1984) as concepts and hypotheses emerge from the data rather than from a priori assumptions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser and Strauss (1967) refer to this process of theory development as "grounded theory." Accordingly, a substantive theory is generated from the data, and the researcher must then determine how this theory fits with existing formal theory. Through this process, the researcher avoids forcing the data into existing theory at the expense of "relevant concepts and hypotheses" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 34). Therefore, qualitative research lends itself well to areas in need of exploratory research.

A review of the literature indicated that research in the area of marital strengths in enduring marriages is limited. The studies that exist focus on variables which are related to marital satisfaction, but few suggest how these variables may be interrelated. Thus, our understanding of the process involved in marriages that endure is very limited. A qualitative methodology allows for a richness which may not be achieved through more quantitative means at this relatively early stage of research in enduring marriages.

Secondly, the study of a couple's marital relationship entails the exploration of very personal, intimate areas of their lives. No two

couples will have experienced marriage in the same way. Indeed, it is quite likely that no two spouses experience their own marriage similarly. Therefore, it is essential that the subjects be allowed to express their own unique experiences in a manner that reveals the meaning of those experiences for the individuals, along with the concomitant emotions and motivations (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979). This phenomenological approach captures the process by which individuals interpret their own world, allowing for an understanding based upon the individual's unique perspective (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). The ability to facilitate this type of exploration is the "tour de force" of qualitative methodology (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979). Bogdan and Taylor (1975) summarize this capacity as follows:

> Qualitative methods allow us to know people personally and to see them as they are developing their own definitions of the world . . . qualitative methods allow us to explore concepts whose essence is lost in other research approaches. Such concepts as beauty, pain, faith, suffering, frustration, hope, and love can be studied as they are defined and experienced by real people in their everyday lives. (pp. 4-5)

A qualitative approach was used in order to gain the greatest amount of insight into the perceptions of these individuals. This approach allowed hypotheses to arise from the data itself, suggesting possible directions for the evolution of theory in marital strengths.

Sample

Although many studies of enduring marriages have included marriages of shorter duration, the findings of Weishaus and Field (1988) suggested that marriages which have endured into the latter

stages may experience an upswing in marital quality. This conclusion suggests that some marriages of shorter duration which may be experiencing a low level of functioning may be at a higher level of functioning should they endure past the middle stages. Information from couples who have experienced such an upswing in marital quality would be valuable to research in this area. Therefore, the population of interest in this study consisted of couples who had been married for 30 years or more and who considered their marriages satisfactory.

A purposive sample of 15 couples was generated through referrals by faculty, staff, and students in the Department of Child and Family Studies of a southeastern university as well as other community contacts. One couple was referred by another couple in the sample.

A demographic profile of the couples was filled out by each couple addressing the following areas: age, years married, education, income level, previous marriages, number and ages of children, whether children still reside with the couple, number and ages of grandchildren (see Appendix).

These couples had been married between 35 and 48 years, with a mean of 40.4 years. The husbands' age ranged from 55 to 70, with a mean age of 63.5. The mean age for wives was 61.7, with a range of 54 to 67 years.

For the most part, they were a highly educated sample. All had graduated from high school, and two wives had attended a vocational college. Three husbands and four wives had attended college without receiving a degree. Five husbands and six wives had culminated their

college education with a bachelor degree, and four husbands and one wife had received a masters degree.

The socioeconomic level of this group was also high. All families had an income of at least $15,000, and 11 families had an income of at least $35,000. One couple declined to reveal their income.

Many of the couples were recommended by a fellow church member, and the other couples also were affiliated to some degree with a church. Therefore, all couples were somewhat religiously oriented. However, the community from which this sample was drawn has a high degree of religious orientation so that this characteristic may not be far from representative for this community. Ten couples were Protestant, one couple was Catholic, and one couple was non-denominational. Three marriages were mixed.

All couples had at least one child. Only one couple still had a child, who is an adult, living at home. None of the families had grandchildren living with them.

Instruments

Interviews

Unstructured, in-depth interviews were conducted with each spouse separately. The couples were interviewed separately so that each individual could freely discuss his or her ideas about the marriage with a guarantee of confidentiality. Also, whereas the investigator has not been trained as a marriage therapist, it was deemed advisable to avoid the potential for exacerbating pre-existing marital tension. The individuals were asked to share their perceptions of their

strengths of the relationship as well as their spouse's and their own individual strengths. They also were asked to talk about the times in which they felt close to the spouse as well as times that were difficult. Finally, the subjects were asked what they felt were the most important things to know about marriage. As an individual began talking about a significant area in their relationship, probing questions were used to explore the area in greater depth.

The Marital Comparison Level Index

Description of the Instrument

In order to verify the self-reports of marital satisfaction, the Marital Comparison Level Index (Sabatelli, 1984) was administered to each individual following the interviews. This measure also was used as a means of validating the interviewer's subjective impression of the marriage. The MCLI is a unidimensional measure consisting of 32 items which explore the fit between the spouses' actual relationship and their realistic, as opposed to ideal, expectations of marriage (Sabatelli, 1988).

These items were derived from Lewis and Spanier's (1979) mid-range theory of marital quality and stability and reflect "the various relational dimensions proposed to be related to marital quality and marital functioning" (Sabatelli, 1988, p. 906). The reliability of the instrument, assessed through Cronbach's alpha, is .93. Construct validity was assessed by comparing MCLI scores to the respondents' scores on measures of commitment and relational equity. The results

indicate positive correlations between MCLI scores and perceptions of equity (r = .62 for husbands and .65 for wives) and between MCLI and commitment to the relationship (r = .58 for husbands and .59 for wives) (Sabatelli, 1984).

The underlying assumption of this measure is that the failure to meet expectations results in fewer rewards from the relationship and more complaints (Sabatelli, 1984). Therefore, a low score on the MCLI, indicating a high degree of marital complaints, matched with the spouses' global assessment of marital satisfaction would imply that the global assessment might be biased by social desirability. Such occurrences would suggest that these relationships may be low-quality enduring marriages. The instrument was administered after the interview in order to avoid biasing the interviews. Two couples declined to fill out the instrument.

Results of the MCLI

Group means and standard deviations for husbands, wives, and the total sample were calculated (see Table 1). Whereas the husbands' mean score was lower than that of the wives, the Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed-ranks test was calculated in order to determine whether this difference was significant. The Wilcoxon is a non-parametric test for related two-sample cases at the ordinal level (Siegel, 1956). The t value of 32 indicated that the difference between husbands' and wives' mean scores was not significant at the .05 level. This result suggests that, as a group, the husbands and wives had similar perceptions of the congruence between their expectations and their experiences in marriages.

TABLE 1

Husbands' and Wives' Perceptions of Congruence between Their Expectations of Marriage and Their Experiences of Marriage

Group[a]	M	SD	t
Husbands	172.846	33.503	
Wives	182.846	22.423	
Total	177.846	28,393	32

[a] n = 13 for each group.

Although the majority of individuals were within one standard deviation of the mean, a few were more than one standard deviation below the mean. This finding suggests that these individuals may not perceive their marriages as being as rewarding as the rest of the subjects. The researcher had anticipated that this would be the case for one of the individuals. However, the other two individuals were not expected to fall into this category. One of them, a husband, was not below a standard deviation for the men's subsample, indicating that he does not deviate greatly from the husbands. The other individual, a wife, indicated on her questionnaire that she had expected her relationship to be very rewarding and that she had not been disappointed. Therefore, she answered all questions at the midpoint.

This incident raises an interesting question about the validity of the subjects' responses. Whereas many individuals indicated that their marital experiences had greatly exceeded their expectations, it may be that their expectations of marriage were not very high. However, it also may be that the respondents answered the questionnaire as if it were assessing the quality of an experience rather than the fit between expectation and experience. In that case, the answers could be skewed toward the positive end. Indeed, some of the respondents expressed frustration in distinguishing between these two different phenomena. Others stated that they had no expectations or could not remember what they might have been.

However, the couples generally tended to have marriages in which they felt their expectations had been fulfilled. Thus, it appears that they are satisfied in their marriages.

Procedures

Referred couples were contacted by telephone to determine whether both spouses would be interested in participating in the study. Of the 23 couples contacted, six couples refused to be in the study and one couple was not able to schedule an interview.

The interviews averaged one hour in length. Two subjects were asked to schedule a second interview to expand on some of the issues that were discussed in the interview. One person refused, and the other was unable to schedule a second interview.

The interviews were tape-recorded and eventually transcribed. The transcriptions were then coded by the interviewer. In order to establish reliability in coding, the first interview was coded by a second coder also. A ratio of disagreements to agreements was calculated, resulting in intercoder reliability of .95.

Coding was aided by the use of Ethnograph, a computer program which stores the researcher's codes. This program allowed the researcher to retrieve all references to a specific code across all subjects. Thus, the program served to organize the data.

After the coding for each couple was completed, an analytic memo was composed for each individual and for the couple, for a total of three memos per couple. These memos summarized the salient issues raised by each spouse and incorporated the interviewer's impressions. The couple memo synthesized the spouses perceptions as well as those of the interviewer, facilitating data analysis.

Data Analysis

In keeping with the precepts of grounded theory, data analysis was intertwined with data collection, coding, and theory development (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979). According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), "The generation of theory, coupled with the notion of theory as process, requires that all three operations be done together as much as possible" (p. 43). This process allows for mutual support and validation among the various analytical levels as well as for the development of increasingly higher levels of abstraction (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979).

The coding process entailed reviewing the transcripts of the interviews for passages dealing with marital characteristics and strengths. Similarities among these concepts began to emerge, suggesting categories into which the concepts were grouped. As analysis proceeded, suggested relationships among the various concepts and categories began to evolve.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The results of this study suggested that the following characteristics are salient in enduring marriages: commitment, intimacy, autonomy, congruence, communication, and religious orientation. Commitment and intimacy tended to be central in these marriages. The marriages have endured out of the couples' commitment to marriage and, for the most part, out of the closeness the spouses share. Intimacy appeared to be a central characteristic in these marriages, being related to all the other salient characteristics.

Intimacy

Intimacy is a feeling of closeness or connectedness to another human being which diminishes one's sense of loneliness and isolation. This connectedness encompasses the emotional, physical, and spiritual aspects of a relationship. Intimate partners may share interests, activities, thoughts, feelings, values, joys, and pains. Some couples report that, through the years, they get to know their spouse so well that they begin to think alike, indicating a high level of attunement. Thus, couples who have been together for many years have a shared history which enriches the intimacy of their relationship.

However, a marriage is made up of two unique individuals who are subject to singular experiences. Although the partners may have many things in common, they also may have many differences. Therefore, it

is no surprise that each marriage is unique and the quality and degree of intimacy in long-term marriages varies greatly. Whereas some couples perceive their spouse to be their best friend and privy to their innermost thoughts and feelings, other couples rely on family, friends, and outside interests to fill whatever voids there may be in their marital relationship. Thus, marriages exist along a continuum of intimacy, from highly intimate to minimally intimate. Also, marriages may move along this continuum at different points in time as the level of intimacy ebbs and flows.

Intimacy is an outgrowth of involvement with another person, through good times as well as bad. In discussing what they perceived to be the strengths of their mates, people revealed the qualities that have been meaningful to them during these times. Thus, much is imparted about the intimate dynamics of marriage. As an example, one's spouse is often considered a source of support, whether instrumental or emotional, in dealing with the stresses and crises of life. Therefore, supportiveness becomes a means of increased intimacy in the marriage.

Friendship appeared to be an important component of these long-term marriages. These spouses shared many common interests and activities. They enjoyed being together, and seemed to focus on their spouses' strengths rather than their shortcomings. For the most part, these relationships were highly rewarding.

Although couples may experience a high degree of connectedness, this does not imply that they are dependent upon one another. On the contrary, these couples placed a high value on autonomy or individuality. The intimacy of their relationships was tempered with

autonomy, resulting in an interdependent relationship. These couples often were willing to put the needs of their spouse ahead of their own, but this selflessness was, for the most part, reciprocated by the spouse. Thus, these relationships were characterized by a high degree of mutuality.

Development of Intimacy

Although couples who marry typically do so out of love for their partner, true intimacy develops gradually in a relationship. For these couples, it grew out of shared experiences as the couple faced good and bad times together. Thus, the quality of intimacy changed as the relationship developed.

> You think you're in love at first, but you really don't know love until you live with somebody. And the longer you live with them, the more you respect them.
>
> You have to grow in a relationship. Sexually, you're one, but emotionally you're not one. . . . You don't have that closeness when you first start out. You have to build that relationship. And it grows sweeter as the years go by. . . . You have passion at the beginning of marriage, but it grows into something greater than passion as the years go by. . . . It's not so much passion as it is a comfortableness, a satisfying relationship.

However, this development was not necessarily linear. Young couples begin their relationship with grand hopes and dreams for the future. Yet the responsibilities of married life, such as career and family demands, require a great deal of energy from the couple, which may affect their level of intimacy. One man reflected on the difficulty couples may face in adjusting to married life:

> You've got problems in a young marriage. . . . You got bills to be paid, and you got this and you got that. And you got the adjustment of trying to agree on just about everything, and you're not necessarily going to learn that overnight. . . . It's a big adjustment. I think, possibly, if you're lucky enough to get over the adjustment period--and I don't know how long that is--it's several years, though--that you can have a successful, long marriage.

Many of these couples indicated that the level of intimacy in their relationship had remained fairly constant through the years. This constancy suggested that family and career demands may not necessarily overwhelm spouses. However, many of them also stated that the latter years of marriage, after the children had left home and they had achieved greater financial stability, were more relaxed years, in which the partners were able to enjoy more time alone together. One husband described this process as follows:

> [The past] five to seven years has been, without a doubt, the very finest years of our marriage so far. They're closely parallel to the early years. In other words, it's back to where it was before. It's like this, then it's kind of like this, now it's levelled out again [indicated a u-shaped curve]. . . . We've got more financially stable. We don't have those kinds of worries and so forth. And, too, the fact that you realize that you just don't have as long left as you once did. So I think all those have a tendency to affect your thinking and your priorities and everything else. And you obviously kind of mellow out a little bit, and maybe those things that five years ago were vitally important to you are no longer important, or not as important. But very definitely, this latter part of our marriage has been the best part, I think.

Although the comments of many of the spouses tended to support the pattern related by this husband, one woman seemed to deviate:

> Some of the happiest times were when the kids were little. We didn't argue about the kids when they were little, not much at

> all. There was no problems. All you did was feed them, take care of them, love them, put them to bed.

However, for the most part, it appeared that couples often become closer in the latter years of marriage. As the children left home and demanding careers moved toward an end, couples were able to enjoy more time together. Many realized greater financial stability at this point in life than in previous years. For some, the realization that their remaining time together was limited brought about a reassessment of priorities. Thus, the latter years proved rewarding for many marriages.

> Getting older together brings you closer. Looking forward to retirement in two years, I think, has already brought us closer.
>
> I'd say our relationship has gotten stronger. We understand each other more now than we did when we first got married, and I'd say our marriage gets stronger every day.

Intimate Experiences

The previous comments suggested the role of shared experiences in the development of intimacy in a marriage. These couples were partners as well as friends. They enjoyed spending time together and shared many interests and activities. The experiences that they had shared through the years appeared to be enriched by their friendship.

> We like each other, and I don't know anybody that I would like nearly as well for any reason.
>
> [Wife] and I are doing things together, not because it's a habit, but because, I guess, we like to be with each other. He's a good friend to me as well as being my husband. . . . We've been together now longer than we were ever apart, and I really can't imagine how it would be to be without him.

When asked to share the close times of their relationship, many of the respondents were able to pinpoint times of greater closeness to their spouse. However, many others indicated that no particular time stood out in their mind because they had always felt close to their spouse. For these people, their marriage had existed on a fairly even keel, with no great highs or lows. It may be that these individuals had forgotten specific instances of special closeness with the passage of time, or they may have been uncomfortable sharing these experiences. Yet, the validity of their perception cannot be discounted.

> I felt close to her mostly all the time. . . . Difficulties are not really going to change your overall perception of each other. If they fester and go on and on and on, it will, I think. . . . No it's been relatively a pretty easy-going thing.

> Well, it's hard to pin-point when you've been together as long as we have. . . . Let's just say there are highs and lows, but other than the birth of the child and watching some other family relationships develop and so forth, as far as any great highs versus great lows, I couldn't say there are any. I think that's the way it is in a long-term marriage, or it wouldn't have gotten to that point, I suppose.

One woman suggested that, although she and her husband were close most of the time, the everyday closeness was qualitatively different from the periods of special closeness. Apparently, the relief from occasional stress in the relationship brought a flood of good feeling that was on a higher plane than the general closeness they shared on a daily basis. However, the extreme closeness did not appear to diminish the average closeness.

> Oh, that's grand! It's just good. It's great. And if anybody tells you you stay on that plane all the time, they're telling you a story. . . . Oh, I don't mean that there's that

> much difference in the highs and lows. It's just that it's great. . . . No, most of my days are good. . . . Well, always after you've had a little strain in your relationship, when that ends, it's a relief. . . . I feel very close to him most of the time.

An interesting finding in talking to these couples about the close times in their relationship was that the experiences of closeness involve not only shared joys but also shared pain. The joyful times centered on events such as the birth of a child, travel and vacations, and time alone together.

Childbirth and Parenting

Typically, the birth of a child was a joyous occasion for these couples who valued the family and their parental role. Childbirth was a time filled with anxiety and awe as the couple faced the magnitude of bringing a new individual into their lives. For some, it appeared to be the culmination of their union as husband and wife.

> Well, any time one of our children came along, it was a wonderful time for us. We always wanted a family, and we got it.

> I think it is just because for the nine months, although you don't say anything, you're concerned about each other--whether the child will be all right--whether you'll be all right. A token of your love. Just a fantastic miracle. . . . To watch them grow and see each other in that child--personalities and so forth.

Although most couples indicated childbirth as a particularly close time in their marriage, some referred to the closeness instilled by the common goal of working together to give their children a solid basis in life. One man described the closeness he and his wife experienced as

they helped their children prepare for college. For them, this was a time of reassessing their own values:

> We were quite close when we were working with our children about their education--college education. We had to make trips to different places and talk at length to them about what they might want to do and this sort of thing. We spent a lot of time together and tried to reevaluate our own values as to what we should or shouldn't do with them, and I think it helped us get closer.

Most of the subjects referred to the spouse's parenting ability as a quality that they admired in the spouse. This consensus among couples indicated the impact of the parenting role upon the marital relationship. Many couples spoke of the satisfaction they received in raising their children together. Others mentioned the closeness that developed between the mates as they faced the difficulties associated with parenting. To many of the subjects, family closeness was an important facet of their lives, and this closeness was facilitated by positive parenting.

> She was a very competent, dedicated mother and wanted the kids to get to do all the things she thought they should do.

> She's probably the best mother that a child could have ever had, and then, as being my wife, I was so proud of that.

> He has taught [the children] honest and integrity. . . . I think that he has given all three of our children an ideal of strength of character. I think that they have always known they could count on him and they still do if they need financial help or anything or just an ear.

> When [the children] call, he's ready to help. It doesn't matter what time of the day or night. . . . The most important thing that we had to do when they were children was to take care of them, to nurture them . . . and he was that way as much as I. Having that same kind of a feeling about the rearing of children has . . . been a very interesting thing to be a part of, to experience.

Time Alone Together

There was a great deal of consensus regarding the importance of time alone together. The relevance of time alone was apparent, given the fact that these couples were consumed for many years by the demands of family and careers. For most couples, these responsibilities were beginning to abate as their children had left home and retirement was impending, allowing for more privacy and spontaneity than these couples had since the birth of their children.

> I think, really, that after the children were gone was the closest time because we seemed to be freer to give to each other. We were no longer pulled to give to this one or pulled to give to that one. . . . There was no expectations that we had anything to deal with or had anything to do. We could just totally enjoy one another. . . . So if we want to go, "Let's get the clothes, and let's go!"

Some couples referred to simple shared pleasures, such as the comfort of being in the room together at the same time.

> Oh, I think it's really great when he can wake me up in the morning and say, "Come see this beautiful sunrise." And we either look out the window if it's too cold, or we go out on the deck. And we watch it and we marvel at all that beauty and the glowing colors and how they change. That's a very good time. I don't know, I can just look across the room at him, and I feel very close to him. I should hope that he would feel the same way.
>
> On Friday nights, we will hot tub and I will cook Chinese, and we will eat here with candlelight and so forth.
>
> But I guess that the characteristic that I would say of the times we felt closest were the times that we had more time to talk because, just the way that our lives were arranged, we could. . . . This is something that we used to do, but we can't do it right now because of the [family demands]. We've got our deck outside the bedroom and, particularly in the summertime, we sit out there in the evening and we have a beer or something, which will be nice. . . . That's something that I hope to get back to eventually.

Perhaps the most popular shared activity was travelling. Most of the couples talked of the closeness they experienced in travelling together, adding fun-filled times to their shared history. Vacations were often a means of family closeness as well as spousal intimacy.

> Well, I think that we tremendously enjoy taking trips together, and I think that's one of the times that I feel closest. We get to spend time together, do things together that we don't ordinarily get to do and see things together. I think some of the happiest times for us have been the times that we've been able to travel together.
>
> We took our family west for three weeks, and it was one of the highlights of our lives. We travelled across the country, and we had a great time. We were very close. All three children were with us, too. What we did was real family closeness as well as being close. We just had a great time. And other times were close, visiting our daughter. We went white-water rafting and all. We were very fortunate there. These were times of closeness.

Some of the couples derived great pleasure from planning a trip together, whereas other couples enjoyed the spontaneity of interesting side trips.

> We enjoy seeing places, and my wife always does a little research project when we're travelling so we know what to expect. And she knows what to look for, and basically, I get us there.
>
> We'll be driving down the highway, and we'll see a sign that says somebody's home or some lake or whatever. And we'll just go off the highway and go see it. . . . We'll start out and say, "Well, okay, we're going to California for six weeks." We don't have any specific itinerary. We just head that way and whatever happens, happens.

One wife described how she and her husband, who did not like to travel as much as she did, plan a theme party for their friends after a trip featuring the husband's slides. This approach allowed both of

them to derive satisfaction from an activity which they did not enjoy equally.

> He likes photography. . . . When we come back, we put together a slide show with some narrative. We have our friends in or his work people and we do a party and have our little themes. Like that's [a table arrangement] supposed to be a rain forest because we went to Australia and Hawaii last summer.

Apparently, vacations allowed people to relax as they leave their daily responsibilities behind. One woman spoke of the limited opportunities adults have to play, suggesting that vacations may offer therapeutic benefits:

> We have spent an awful lot of our time working, and we're looking forward to a time when we can play, because we do have a good time. We take the children to the beach every summer. The children all love him [husband], and it's just a big gregarious time that we play games and we shop. It's just all play, and those are just wonderful times. It's just during the work . . . the scheduled periods that you don't have time to think and you don't have time to play and you don't have time to do things very much. It all builds up and you think, "Well, hell, I'm tired of this life anyway". . . . People need more play time. They really do.

Another wife, whose time with her spouse was extremely limited, mentioned that travelling together gave her and her husband an opportunity to get back in touch with one another:

> When you don't see a lot of each other, you have to get reacquainted each time. And the kids gave us some tickets to Disneyworld last year, and we went down there. We had a four day pass, and it was marvelous! . . . One of those periods when he didn't have anybody to pay attention to but me, and it was grand. Like I say, you settle for what you can get.

Besides travelling together, the couples shared a host of activities, including sports, eating out, cultural events, music, reading, and gardening. Many spouses enjoyed outside activities, such as picnics, hiking, camping out, and trips to the beach or lake. Some of the couples engaged in volunteer work together, reflecting their common value of helping others.

> Both of us were involved in this program at one of the retirement homes for the poor and the elderly, and we were taking meals there on a Saturday noon. That was interesting.
>
> We have worked with [the deaf] for 10 or 15 years. We have a class at church. We also have parties for the deaf, or outings, about five or six times a year that we supervise. That is my responsibility to take care of the food for them.
>
> We're involved in . . . a community-wide senior citizens group. . . . And we both like that age. They're a little older than we are. . . . A week ago, we had a big fish fry for them at church. We took some of those trout that [husband] had caught. . . . [Husband] provided the fish and the ladies brought the vegetables and desserts and breads. . . . We enjoy working with that group.

Couples varied on the degree to which they were involved in joint activities or interests. Although most of the shared interests involved activities in which the couples could spend time together, not all couples were that closely involved with one another. One couple, whose level of intimacy appeared to be somewhat lower than most of the other couples, seemed to use work as a means of avoiding greater intimacy:

> I think our biggest thing is work. I think that's what we're the most compatible on, is that we enjoy working.

At the other end of this continuum are couples whose interests in a wide variety of activities was shared:

> We do lots of things together. We read a lot and like to garden. We like to fish. We fish together, play tennis together, travel together. For the most part have pretty common interests. Nearly all of our friends do things more independently. But they are together, too, after all these years, so that's not a requirement. But I think it makes it easier, especially as you grow older.
>
> Well, we enjoy playing golf. We enjoy travelling and being with one another--not necessarily doing anything but just being together. We enjoy movies. . . . We do a lot of taping of various things and we watch them together. Just life in general. We belong together.

Although sex, or physical intimacy, was supposed to be related to emotional intimacy, only a few of the subjects initiated discussion on this topic. It may be that people in this cohort are more reluctant to discuss their sexuality than are younger couples. However, some couples indicated that sex is not as important in their relationship now as it had been in earlier years.

> Well, of course, having a good sex relationship is important. That's very, very important in the early years. In the later years, it's not as important as companionship and oneness. . . . You've got a friendship, a closeness, that's far more important than that.

One couple had a very satisfying sex in earlier years, but experienced difficulty after an unplanned pregnancy. Although they still enjoy their sex life, it is not as rewarding as it had been in those earlier, carefree days.

> As we became older and after that third pregnancy, I think we had a little bit of reluctance because it was definitely not planned. . . . I think we both missed it, but . . . we feared

> to communicate with each other at all in a sexual way. . . . I guess I look back to younger days. It isn't as active now as it was then, but we still have our sex.

For others who had difficulty initiating sexual interaction, their sex life improved over the early years.

> We had a difficult time initially establishing a good sex relationship . . . and that was just because we were inexperienced and didn't understand that part of our lives very well. But after about two to three years, that began to work itself out. It has certainly not been a problem since.

Still others indicated that their sex life had always been a satisfying, possibly even healing, part of their intimate relationship.

> Oh, I must say he's a great lover. Very affectionate. And . . . that's always been a great part of our relationship.
>
> It's always been smooth. I've always been taught not to say no to your husband, and I don't. And he's very gentle with me, so I just have no qualms on that respect.
>
> I've always wanted to be [the partner] physically that he wants me to be. He is certainly sweet and considerate that way, too. . . . Even in spite of the stormy times we've had . . . I think [our sexual relationship] probably helped keep us together and helped to heal the hard feelings we had toward each other.

In general, it appeared that sex was a fairly positive component of intimacy for these couples, although it was not the most important component.

It appeared that having time alone together, whether simple shared moments at home or carefree vacations, afforded couples an opportunity to nurture or reestablish their bond of connectedness. These times allowed couples to talk and to share common experiences, enhancing their shared history. The chance to focus attention on one another may

be vital for couples whose responsibilities take priority over their relationship. It may be that these times also leave couples feeling rejuvenated, allowing them to deal more effectively with daily stresses.

It is obvious why these positive situations would make a couple feel closer together. What is more intriguing is the question of why couples feel closer during times of stress or adversity, such as death, illness, or family problems.

Times of Adversity

It appeared that these stressful times afforded the couple an opportunity to support one another. Recalling that support was highly valued by these couples provided some justification for this conjecture. Some of the subjects addressed this question directly:

> I think you really and truly feel the greatest closeness during times of crisis. When you're one in times of crisis, that's when you really feel the closeness.
>
> Stress and difficulty bring you close together so many times if the closeness is there in the first place.
>
> I think we can let circumstances break us or we can let them make us stronger. And I'm just thankful that I feel like we were made stronger through that experience.

Many of the couples had been touched in some way by a traumatic event. Some of the couples lost a child or a child's mate, whereas others lost a parent or sibling. A few of the couples experienced a life-threatening illness of one of the partners. Still others faced serious difficulties with their children. For some, these experiences served as a means of redefining their values:

> I think the main thing is that it gives you a platform or an opportunity to stop and think, where usually you're going 90 miles an hour and don't take time to think about the past and close relationships. It brings those things back to mind.
>
> Well, [husband] had a growth in his throat. Of course, the first thing you think of is cancer, and that was very frightening. . . . If you have any sense at all and any love for each other, you just decide that you're going to accentuate the love and forget the bickering. The older you get, the more people your age and younger die. . . . These things are helpful in that they make you feel what is really important.

Others focused on the adaptation process involved in dealing with a crisis. They suggested that times of crisis pull a couple together as they pool their resources to cope with the situation. This joint effort, then, may result in increased intimacy.

> I've heard a lot of people say this over the years: it seems like the hard times are always the closest times. And I suppose that's really true because you really have to decide what you're going to do in order to survive.
>
> There were deaths in the family--her mother and her father, my mother and my father--this sort of thing. We were pretty close there because of the change of circumstance and adapting and working with her family, my family, and working through the situation. So we were pretty close in those times of crisis.

As important as spousal support appeared to be, it did not seem to be consistent in the experiences shared by these couples. Some couples were able to turn to each other, whereas other couples sought comfort from other sources, such as religious faith or other family members.

> One of our sons ran away from home and he was gone for 10 days, and we didn't know whether he was dead or alive. We were told by several people not to let that break up our marriage. I kept wondering, "How could that break up our marriage?" We weren't blaming each other. I think we were blaming ourselves. But I think even that brought us closer

> together. . . . Because we turned to each other more for comfort. I think we both turned our son over to God. . . . I think we both knew we were praying together, so I think it brought us closer together.
>
> He came back to bed and said, "Oh, [wife], we can't even help our own son. I can't do anything. I'm helpless." I said, "No, you're not. . . . I've just prayed, and I've given it to the Lord, and He will take care of it. I'm going to sleep." . . . And so we just went off to sleep. . . . And we just cried together and went off to sleep. Now see, that's closeness.
>
> I don't think we dwelled on it, but on the other hand, I don't think we just tried to ignore it either. Plus, we had another little boy in the house, and so things needed to go along for him. It was a very difficult time. . . . I feel like a strong faith is the main thing.

Still others seemed to bear their grief privately. One woman, whose husband was devastated by the death of their daughter-in-law, described how her husband's grief was an expression of his sensitivity and sincerity:

> I think that our daughter-in-law's death was one of the most devastating things that he has ever experienced. And there are times yet . . . that, when we're talking, he is emotional about it. He's a very sensitive person in some respects, and I appreciate this in him. He can cry, and he makes no excuses for it. He's not a wimp by any means, but he lets his true feelings show. And again, that's part of his sincerity and his honesty.

This wife's comments suggested that her husband's sensitivity was an admirable quality, so that his grief enhanced her positive feelings about him. Another husband indicated that times of illness give one an appreciation for the spouse's strengths as well as support:

> I guess an illness would make me feel pretty close, too-- to know there's somebody there who is going to help you through that type of thing and keep things going. The strong points come to bear then. You appreciate those.

Therefore, it may be that grief brings couples closer through the support that they share as well as through the validation of the spouse's strengths.

Although adverse times often can bring couples closer together, at other times they may cause some degree of relational stress. Even couples with a great deal of intimacy may be unable to function well together during stressful periods.

Relational Strain

In general, these couples spoke of their marriages in positive terms. However, the intimacy in their relationships did ebb and flow through the various experiences they shared. For some couples, this fluctuation was slight. They indicated that their marriage had been fairly constant, with few high or low points. Other couples were able to talk of specific periods in which their relationship seemed greatly strained. Thus, periods of stress in these marriages ranged in intensity from minor daily irritations to more traumatic, disruptive events.

These stressful periods suggested that these marriages had not been perfect. Several of the spouses experienced great pain in dealing with these difficulties, and some considered ending the relationship. Also, some of the couples still struggle with issues that may never be resolved. However, they did seem to be relatively happy in their marriages. It appeared, therefore, that these couples perceived their marriages to be more rewarding than costly. As one husband stated:

> If I had the opportunity, . . . I doubt I'd even change the low points. You've got to have both, I believe, at sometime or another. You can get strength from the low parts. You don't get much strength from the high parts. That's fine to have. But you get strength most of the time from the low parts.

The more common sources of relational strain in this sample included career demands, the death of a child or other loved one, and parenting.

Career Demands

Several of the husbands had careers which necessitated their frequent or prolonged absence from the family. Some of them did a great deal of travelling, and others had jobs requiring late hours and/or weekend commitments. These husbands appeared to be heavily invested in their career and had consequently given priority to career over family.

> I guess with a man this is the way he is identified, by what he does. You know, they say, "He's a coach," or "He's an executive," . . . and that's what he probably gets a lot of satisfaction out of. And it takes care of the competitive spirit, I guess you'd say.

These demands often created stress for the couple. Many of the women stated that their husbands had not been involved enough with the family. They had been concerned for their children as well as frustrated at not having the support they needed. In later years, one woman worried about the effect of her husband's schedule on his health.

> Well, at times she expressed her dissatisfaction, and I think a lot of it was she was concerned about me. I think it went from one stage when I was younger, you know, "You don't see the kids enough," which was true, and "We just don't have a

> lot of time with you." But then after that, I think that it developed into the fact that she was probably concerned about me and my health and the way I was driving myself. So I think her concerns changed.

Although the wives were generally supportive, many of them referred to times of resentment. For some, the demands had eased with retirement, but others still struggled with the mixed emotions engendered by this infringement upon their time together.

> Well, of course we had so many early years when I had three little kids and he worked all the time. His mother even told him he needed to take some [time] off and spend it with his family. I think I resented some of that. . . . I'm reconciled to the fact now. Job was number one. I was number two. I think if he had to give up one or the other, I bet it would be me. I know the things that I can't change. I've either got to learn to live with them happily or make myself very unhappy because I know that . . . the amount of time he spends on his practice is not going to change any. . . . I just have finally learned to live with that. Every once in a while, it gets to be too much and then I'll blow my stack. And then I'm all right for a while again.

Death of a Child

Perhaps the most traumatic event that a couple faces is the death of a child. For some couples, it can be a time of mutual support. However, for others, the couple support system breaks down, leaving each mate to face their grief alone. Some people have difficulty facing and dealing with such intense pain. For other people, the grief is so intense that it becomes emotionally debilitating. The experiences of these couples varied, but several of them felt some degree of isolation from the mate during their time of grief.

One husband stated the following when asked how he had dealt with the death of his child:

> I don't know what to say. She died and was buried. We were very unhappy about it. And we realized that there was nothing we could do, and we continued living. . . . After it was over--months--we were back to living normally. There wasn't much change due to that.

Another man described the difficulty he had supporting his wife after their baby was delivered stillborn.

> It was difficult for me to communicate with her at that time, and I'm sure that she would have liked for me to have been a better communicator. That would have helped her through that crisis better. And as a result, while it didn't cause any real separation, . . . I wasn't as close to her as I should have been. . . . It was just difficult for us to work our way through that at the time.

One wife's comments suggested that her husband was unaware of the extent of her pain and that they were unable to communicate about their grief over their child's death. She seemed to have perceived his inability to share their grief as a lack of support and apparently still harbors some resentment concerning his lack of sensitivity.

> I don't think he ever knew or even knows to this day how much difficulty I had adjusting to that. . . . We didn't discuss it. . . . I should have made him aware of it, but he should have been perceptive enough to know.

Another wife seemed to have understood her husband's inability to communicate. Although they could not support one another directly, they did manage to find other ways in which they could deal with their grief together.

> He's a very private person, and I finally realized that he . . . wasn't going to talk about it as such a lot. We just came to understand one another, and we tried to think of ways to make it a meaningful experience. . . . We supported things

> like [a children's home] . . . with the memory in mind of the child we might have had and helped somebody else's child.

Finally, one wife referred to her husband's devastation during their time of grief. Because he was unable to offer her support, she depended upon other family members during this time. However, she understood her husband's reaction, perceiving it as sensitivity.

> He was just out of it so. He couldn't give me any support. That's the one time in our married life he has not been able to give me any support because he was so devastated.

Although all of these husbands had difficulty communicating with and supporting their wives after their loss, the wives' reactions to this difficulty differed. The reactions appear to be related to their overall level of intimacy, suggesting that a higher level of intimacy between spouses buffered the times in which one was unable to support the other.

Parenting

For several couples, parenting proved to be a mixed blessing. As was discussed previously, these couples were family-oriented and valued their role as parents. They related times of great joy associated with their children. However, there were other times in which the demands of parenting adversely affected the relationship between the spouses.

One common difficulty cited by several couples was the effect of differing views on how problems with the children should be handled. Whereas one spouse might have believed in an authoritative approach, the other spouse might have opted for a more lenient tactic. As a

result, the couple became locked in conflict, which was not always dealt with effectively.

> One thing, if one sees the problem from this side, and the other sees the problem from this side, then obviously you're going to have differences between yourself. . . . And it's almost impossible, I think, to try to raise a child with a husband and wife and they both see the problem from the same aspect. . . . That was that time I'm telling you between ten and 25 [years of marriage] when it's most difficult. That was the time when he was growing up, and it was just one thing after another.
>
> You want to mold [your children] and want them to share the same values, and when they don't accept the same values, it is very troubling. . . . One of the things we failed--one of our biggest failings--too often was to argue before the children and not simply between us. And resolution took a much longer period of time than it should have. I'm sure that some of the arguments that occurred before the children had an impact on them. That is one of our failings.

Some of the frustration experienced by the parents was centered on the child's refusal to adopt the parents' values. Whereas the developmental task of adolescents is to seek one's own identity separate from the parents, it is evident why the period of their child's adolescence was so stressful for some of the couples.

> You see, it gnaws at you so bad because you know how it ought to be. You know how you want it to be, and you're giving every doggone ounce of energy in your body to make it work, and then it doesn't work.

Some of the difficulties faced by these parents extended past adolescence into young adulthood. One woman told of the strain she and her husband experienced when their adult son moved back home.

> [Son] always had a tendency to pull one against the other, . . . and he still does. . . . He's very intelligent, and he knows how to work everybody.

The adult son of another couple has had emotional problems for several years and still lives with the couple. Because the wife had emotional problems years ago, she is able to empathize with the son, whereas the husband is less tolerant.

> About eight or ten years ago, he was suicidal. . . . He had such conflicts within himself and with us. We just did not know how to deal with him. I'm not sure we could have anyway. I can deal with it and have sympathy for it, but [husband] can't, since I've gone through some of this myself.

However, not all parenting strain was related to adolescence. Although these couples wanted children, one wife described the problems her husband had accepting her third pregnancy. It appeared that she may have overcompensated for her anxiety over his ability to accept the child, and the bond between her and the child made it difficult for the husband to take over some of the parenting responsibilities.

> The farthest apart that we ever were was when I got pregnant with [third child]. I think possibly it was a feeling of frustration, probably a little bit of fear of "How in the world are we going to do this?". . . . I say this was the only child we had that was my baby. The other two were our babies. . . . Maybe I overcompensated for maybe the fear that maybe [husband] wouldn't show that love. He did, but . . . she wouldn't let him hold her.

These examples indicated the negative effect that childrearing had for a few couples. However, in general, the difficulties experienced by couples in raising their children did not have long-term effects upon the marriage.

The "Sandwich Generation"

A phenomenon which is becoming more prevalent in our society is that of the "Sandwich Generation." Couples are faced with the responsibilities of sick or aging parents in addition to the demands of their own children and careers. Although several couples in this study were in that situation at some point, it apparently did not result in significant relational strain for all couples.

However, for one couple in particular, the familial demands may have taken precedence over their marital relationship. Although the husband tried to support the wife when he could, she had, by far, the greater share of responsibility.

> It's had a major impact on our lifestyles and again it has been harder on [wife] that it has on me because she is the one who has to be here and look after them all the time. . . . She really does sort of sit at the center of the extended family right now.

The difficulty they had finding time to be together was exacerbated by his career involvement. Although there may not have been any overt marital difficulties, their lack of time together kept them from being able to nurture the intimacy in their relationship.

> It, I guess, makes it harder for us to have time together to talk. That's the thing you lose in this situation because usually one or the other of us is tied up. And generally I'll try to stay here in the evening, but then I get up pretty early and go to work in the morning. So, after they go to bed, we're not in any shape to talk. We're both shot at that point. . . . Lots of times when we talk now, it's sort of to let her relieve her frustration with the things that she has had to go through.

Whereas the wives did appear to have more responsibility in caring for elderly parents than their husbands did, this responsibility was greater for some than for others. One wife referred to her religious faith as a source of strength in dealing with her mother-in-law:

> You can handle anything because God's grace is sufficient for anything. And if you rely on Him, He will see you through it. But now, don't think I didn't want to say snappy words. I did. Don't think I didn't want to strike back. I did. But He gives us self-control. And so it was self-control that enabled me to love and not strike back.

Another wife poignantly described the stress that she deals with daily.

> I've sort of drawn into a shell. I'm not doing much now. . . . It kind of burns you out. You look for something like a tranquilizer. You look for something to just white it out. . . . The doctor said [her parent] could live to be 100. . . . I remember the shock. I thought, "Gosh, I'll be 70 years old. . . ." It's not as happy as it was. You keep waiting for the other shoe to drop. And also, you're on the skids yourself. . . . You're getting older. You watch what happens to them and you know you're next. . . . We don't have a lot of time for each other.

Qualities Facilitating Intimacy

Many qualities appeared to facilitate the development of intimacy in marriage. Putting the needs of the other ahead of one's own desires appeared to strengthen the couple bond. Communication was essential in helping couples maintain connectedness. Also, subjects perceived a variety of strengths in their mates that they believe had strengthened their relationship, particularly supportiveness and caring.

Mutuality

Several of the subjects indicated the importance of give-and-take in a relationship. This phenomenon entails putting the spouse's needs ahead of one's own needs. Ideally, both partners consider the needs of the mate, so that neither partner is doing all of the giving or all of the taking.

> He always wants to please me, and I always want to please him.
>
> I think just love and respect and being considerate and trying to make each other happy is what counts. . . . My husband will often say, "You want to go take a ride?" and I'll think, "Oh, I'd rather stay home," or "I'd rather do something." But I'll say, "Sure," and we'll just go. And I know he does the same thing with me.
>
> I think we have both been willing to give the other more than 50%, if you know what I mean. . . . When you get married, you don't really know what 50% is. You don't know what the demands are going to be on you and that you have to change your lifestyle in some ways to accommodate others.
>
> Love is being willing to do some things that you would really rather not do, that maybe are not your responsibility to do, but you want the best for that person.

One husband described the reciprocal effect of pleasing his wife:

> It's just more pleasant to please somebody than it is to give displeasure because if I give you displeasure, I'm usually going to get displeasure back in return. . . . And if I please you, you're going to be a pleasant person, too. It's hard to not be pleasant around people that are pleasant all the time.

A common observation was that, by doing things for the spouse that one may not want to do, one often began to share the spouse's enthusiasm.

> We had a great time then [on a river trip]. I never thought I would like doing anything like that. I went because I knew how much it would mean to my husband and to my daughter.
>
> Also what's helped me, too--and I think this is very important--that is if you don't feel a certain way, try really hard to do that thing anyway. Even if you don't feel it to begin with, do it and then you find yourself feeling it. We love to go to the [social club] events. [Husband] has more or less broken me into that. I didn't care for it that much at first, but I went because it meant a lot to him. But in going, I have gained a lot, too. Made a lot of new friends, enjoyed a lot of activities that I never knew that I would be interested in until I started doing it. But he does the same for me. Things that I enjoy doing that he doesn't particularly care for, he goes along.

One wife shared that she joined her husband on fishing trips to please him, but engaged in activities that she enjoyed while he fished.

> We have a mobile home down in [park] where [husband] goes trout fishing. And although I don't fish, sometimes I go along and I'll take something to read or take some handwork to do. I'm a walker, so I walk. So rather than oppose what he wants to do, and rather that join in because that's not something I enjoy, sometimes I'll just go along and do my own thing.

According to one husband, one must know the spouse very well in order to anticipate the spouse's needs. This husband assumed responsibility for becoming aware of his spouse's needs and minimized the responsibility of the spouse to communicate those needs appropriately.

> Well, I think it's give-and-take. And I think you've got to know the individual. And you've got to really get them in your mind and study them as to what their needs are. And I think that you as a partner are responsible for that. . . . You've got to understand their nature. You've got to understand their personality. You've got to understand when certain things need to be said and when they don't need to be said. You've got to understand when things need to be done and when they don't need to be done. . . . You're trying to please and make the other person

> happy because it satisfies yourself . . . I know for myself, I respond greatly to that kind of treatment. . . . But if you really are intent to make a better life for both of you, then, by golly, you've got to work on that person. You've got to watch them and think about them and look at them and see what they do and see what their needs are because you marry and enter into a relationship because of need. One needs the other.

Some of the subjects inferred that mutuality was fostered by commitment.

> Oh, I suppose when you have what you consider to be the right person and the one that you want to be with or stay with, you'll find a way to work it out if you want to.
>
> If you want something to work for yourself, I don't think that you can depend on other people to do it a lot of times. You have to see to it that it's done, and you have to do it. . . . I think you have to have compassion for the person. You've got to want to make the marriage work.

Another husband suggested that mutual give-and-take, in which the spouse stands up for his/her beliefs, facilitated the development of respect between mates.

> I really and truly believe that you have to learn to give and take in order to be successful. I really think so because you really don't want somebody that you just tell what to do all the time. Then you lose respect for them. I believe that if the person really feels strong about something, they ought to stand up and tell you.

Interdependence

The knowledge that one's spouse has one's best interests at heart facilitated intimacy as well as a healthy mutual dependence. Interdependence involved the couple's mutual dependence on one another. It was a functional dependence in that they relied on each other, but they did not relinquish their individual identity.

> I think we realized that, you know, my life now is [wife], and I think the reverse is true, also.
>
> When it comes right down to it, you don't have anybody else but that person to live with. You've left your mother and your father. You can't go back. You have friends, but . . . they're not like that one person that you have. . . . I think that we respect each other and we try not to hurt each other. And yet . . . he's got to live his life and I've got to live mine. . . . We can do it together by loving each other. . . . If you haven't got God and you haven't got your husband, who do you have?
>
> Wife: It amazes me when I look back on it and say, "I'm so independent." It just absolutely scares me to death if I think I'd ever be without him.
>
> Interviewer: What scares you about that?
>
> Wife: Friendship. Comfort. Not having him [eyes fill with tears].

Some of these couples were married during World War II or the Korean Conflict, necessitating their leaving family behind as they began their life together. A common comment among these couples was that military service during the early years of their marriage facilitated the development of interdependence.

> During the first year or so of our marriage, we were sort of on our own. And it probably strengthened our marriage, I guess, because we were thrown with people that neither of us knew, so we came to depend on each other.

Support

Spousal support was manifested in a variety of ways. Physical support was given in such areas as childcare and household tasks. Emotional support was exemplified by listening to problems and being dependable. Knowing that one can count on the spouse to be there when needed enhanced one's sense of security, helping one to feel less

isolated in the world. It also appeared that support, particularly emotional support, may have served to validate one's sense of worth.

> I can always count on him. If, for some reason, he's having car trouble or there has been some kind of delay beyond his control, really, he would always call and say, you know, "I'm 15 minutes late," or whatever. So I think knowing where I have stood with him and knowing that he was there. . . . He'll be there when he says he'll be there. . . . And you know, it's just been such a secure kind of thing for me.
>
> She does things that help make me feel good and reinforce my ego and praises me when she thinks I've done something good, and that is certainly very positive.

Support often was conceptualized as loyalty, a quality which many of the spouses deemed admirable. However, this loyalty was not necessarily unconditional. It may be related to the particular circumstance, such as the degree to which the spouse believes one is right.

> She's just solid . . . just a solid person. Somebody that, you know, if you ever got in any trouble or anything, why, you'd want them on your side because she'd go to bat for you. . . . She's supportive only to the degree that she feels you're right. But then, other times, she'll support you when you're wrong, but that's not all the time. But yeah, she's always got your best interests at heart. She'll hang right in there.
>
> We may have differences. . . . She may not absolutely agree with things that I do at times, but she's always been very supportive in public, and I try to do the same with her.

Husbands were especially appreciative of their wives' ability to manage the home when they were involved outside of the home. Some of these men were obligated in the service, and others had jobs requiring a great deal of travel or work involvement. To many of these husbands, the wife's management of the household freed them to pursue their

career goals. Whereas very few of the wives expressed resentment, this appears to have been a common goal for which the wives were willing to assume more responsibility for the household than might have been the case otherwise.

> I think that she has kept a lot of responsibilities off of me and made it easier for me to do my job as I felt my job was, to be successful and do the things I wanted to.
>
> She has learned through my travels to be self-sufficient. If I'm on the road and the heat goes out, there's no need to call me . . . I think that it's made her self-sufficient, and I like that in a woman. I like that. I don't want her to be just so dependent that she can't make a decision and do things. I like her that way.
>
> She has a good managerial ability to organize things and get things done, and that has certainly taken a great burden off me. She handles all the family finances. She keeps the checkbook and the financial records.

Although many of the subjects appeared to depend on their spouses for support, they were at the same time very independent, competent people. One wife spoke of her dependence upon her husband in times of stress, yet she seemed puzzled by the paradox of an independent person depending upon someone:

> I feel I can rely on him for anything. If something bad happens to me, the first thing I think of is "I need to tell [husband] about this." I just feel like he's support, and I don't know if that's good or bad. [Laughter] Because, basically, I feel like I'm a very self-reliant person.

Some subjects mentioned that the spouse may not have been consistently supportive, but had become more so over the years.

> In the latter years, he has been an extremely good help around the house. He helps me a great deal. I don't have this whole house to do by myself. I don't have all the

> responsibility. . . . He has just made it easier for me to work and to keep the house also.

One woman, whose spouse had been extremely involved in his work over the years, shared the following:

> He has been very supportive in my work. I don't know whether he was when he used to have to babysit some when I went out at night to classes, but he would do anything now to. . . . In fact, immediately when I got this offer for [a commissioned work], he said, "Well, you tell them you'll be there whenever they want you." And I said, "Well, when are you going to work?" He said, "It doesn't matter." For once, I came out first.

Caring

Another important quality that the subjects perceived in their mate was the ability to care for the partner, the family, and the people around them. This quality seemed to endear the spouses to one another, effecting a bond of connectedness. It also appeared to raise the esteem in which the partners hold one another.

> The way she cares for people is very strong. She cares for her family, her children, cares for me I know, and just cares for everybody that she meets. Everybody can see this and everybody likes her, just everyone.
>
> She's a very caring, compassionate person. She watches after me and takes care of me. She's a very loving and understanding person. She's just a good wife. [contented smile]

Very few respondents labelled caring as love. However, one couple both referred to the spouse as loving. Their descriptions of caring, or loving, included the importance of actions bearing out the words of love. Also, the wife alluded to the development of trust through knowing that one's spouse cared.

> She, hopefully, loves me. And I feel very strong about that. One of the worst things in this world--I can't think of hell being any worse--is going through life without somebody loving you. So that's very, very strong. I put a lot of emphasis on that. And I think she does because I can see it not only in her words but in her actions.
>
> Well, I know that he always has my interests at heart, and he would never do anything to hurt me purposefully . . . ever, ever, ever. . . . If I need him, he will always be there, whether it's leaving work or whether it's helping me put up bulletin boards at the beginning of school. . . . Two years ago, I had three operations in two years, and he really just had to kind of take over for me. And he did. And it just keeps you with a good feeling that you've got somebody to love you.

Communication

Perhaps the greatest facilitating factor of intimacy within the marital relationship is communication. Effective communication directly enhances the level of intimacy as couples share their thoughts and feelings. It also aids couples in decision-making and allows couples to resolve conflict. Poor communication, on the other hand, has the opposite effect, blocking intimacy and locking couples in conflict.

Several of these couples mentioned communication as a strength of their relationship. However, many seemed to have used positive communication skills inconsistently. Whereas they may have eventually sat down and discussed an issue, many times it was only after a heated argument or period of silence. Also, some seemed to believe they were communicating when they actually were manipulating the partner.

Whereas the interviews were conducted separately, the communication patterns between couples were not observed. The

conclusions about communication have been derived from the way the subjects described interactions.

Communication and intimacy. Positive communication skills involved discussing problems together and listening to the other person's point of view. Thus, it evolved out of mutual respect between the partners. It appeared that couples with higher levels of intimacy had more positive communication than couples who were less intimate. Positive communication and intimacy seemed related bidirectionally in that communication fostered intimacy and intimacy fostered communication.

> I think that we've been able to sit down and talk things out. If we have a problem or have to make a decision and come to a conclusion on it as to right or wrong or what's causing it, we see each person's side of the problem. . . . We understand each other more now than we did when we first got married, and I'd say our marriage gets stronger every day.

> She is very supportive and helps me in many ways when I want to discuss things. . . . That's helpful to me, I think, to have her serve as sort of a sounding board to me and to have someone to talk to because often times the things you want to talk about are very private and things that you can't talk about to many people.

Several spouses related instances of not being able to talk with their mate. Typically, these were couples who appear to have more difficulty with intimacy than some of the other couples. Husbands generally appeared to have more difficulty with communicating their feelings than their wives did.

> Well, this is one of my weaknesses, I guess, that I am not as good a communicator, one on one, with her as I should be. . . . There have been times of crisis, such as when we

> lost [a child], that . . . it was difficult for me to communicate with her at that time. And I'm sure that she would have liked for me to have been a better communicator. That would have helped her through that crisis better. And as a result, while it didn't cause any real separation or parting of the ways, . . . I wasn't as close to her as I should have been.
>
> He doesn't really express things. . . . He had a heart attack one time, and it just scared the hell out of the both of us, you know. The doctor said to let him talk things out, that he holds it inside too much.

One woman indicated that, although her husband did not initiate communication, he was willing to talk after she brought an issue out into the open.

> [His displeasure] has come out through me. It's when I would approach it that he would go ahead. . . . He was willing to discuss it. He just never brought it up. It just sort of laid dormant until I finally said, . . . "I've had enough. I've got to talk about this."

Conflict resolution and decision-making. Another important function of communication was the facilitation of effective problem-solving or decision-making. Couples who were able to communicate constructively were able to avoid possible conflict and were able to resolve difficulties when they arose. Many of the subjects claimed that they talked problems out together. One couple described the system that they used to resolve conflict.

> We've gotten to the point--and it's solved a lot of problems for us--if we have a disagreement, . . . if I feel very strongly about it I will say, "I feel very strongly about this." If I don't feel strongly about it, I'll say, "If this doesn't go my way, it won't make any difference." And we solve most of them at that level. . . . So we compromise and give-and-take.

Conflict can cause a great deal of negative emotions between spouses, particularly if it remains unresolved. Dealing with conflict before it was allowed to fester helped minimize anger and resentment.

> Once the discussion was out and we got it out in the open, we parted right then as friends. . . . It was a mutual understanding.
>
> Well, when we first got married, we talked things over and decided that arguments are useless, but that if we did argue it had to be straightened out before you went to bed, because I don't believe that there is anything more uncomfortable than lying in bed along side of a person that doesn't want to be along side of you. That has worked out very well. There have been differences, but there have never been big fights.

Several of the subjects referred to the importance of give-and-take in dealing with conflict. When asked what process she and her husband went through during conflict, one wife related the following:

> A big fuss [laughter] and then calming down a little bit. And putting forth our viewpoints, and each of us giving a little bit. . . . I think maybe I've done some things that he has resented, and vice versa. But we've tried not to have bad feelings about it. It's evened out over the years.

However, some couples experienced conflict which, for one reason or another, cannot be resolved. One husband revealed his resignation to this fact as follows:

> Sometimes it doesn't work too well, either. You have to get off awhile and cool off and think about it and sometimes, like other couples, just push it out of sight and it gets buried and doesn't come up. Maybe that's not the best way at all, but sometimes that happens. Sometimes that's the only way when there's a continuing difference of opinion.

When asked how he communicated his needs during conflict with his wife, another husband shared the following:

> Now that's a good question, because that quite often is extremely difficult. . . . We've got a problem, so consequently, quite often I don't. I do speak my piece, but as far as it really having that great an effect, I'm not sure that it does. . . . It's hard for me, quite often, to really speak my mind and really tell them just exactly the way I feel and what I'd like to say, because I know if I do that, probably it won't help me at all. And if the person I'm talking to is sensitive at all, it could hurt their feelings and so forth. And it's not worth the effort.

Some of the subjects reported times in which they had to vent their emotions. Apparently, these people waited until the problem had become unbearable rather than discussing it in a calm manner earlier. Also, because the emotions were so high, there was little productive outcome.

> Every once in awhile it gets to be a bit much, and . . . I have to let off steam. . . . He doesn't do that. . . . I get mad and blow my stack. Then he says, "Well, I don't blame you." And that's as frustrating as if we had a full-blown argument because he doesn't argue. It's too distressing for him. . . . It doesn't happen very often, but when it does, it's just a pressure valve letting go.

It may be that some of these couples did not fully understand how to communicate effectively. It seemed that some of them believed that, by telling the spouse what they thought, they had communicated with their partner. However, some of the examples given suggested manipulation rather than true communication.

> I don't want you taking your vacation that you should spend with me and the children and go do volunteer work. I'm telling you how I feel, but I'm not telling you what to do. I'm going to let your conscience be your guide. If you think that it's okay to take that leave and do something away from your family, that's your decision. But I'm telling you what I think is right, and I'm going to leave it up to you." And he said, "Well, I just won't go." And I said, "That's your choice."

This wife may have gotten her husband to stay home, but she missed an opportunity to discover why he felt compelled to be away from home so often.

Several of the couples stated that their communication had improved over the years.

> I try to listen and try to understand what it is that she is trying to tell me because sometimes it's very easy to misinterpret the words. The longer you are together, the easier it is, I think, to understand what the other person is saying. Particularly when you are in the early years of marriage, there is a problem with interpretation which can lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding.
>
> I think over the years if you really want to keep your marriage together, you start communicating. You have to. . . . I didn't use to tell [husband] why things bothered me, so he had no idea why I was upset. As I look back now, I can see the expression on his face. How can he do something if he doesn't know what's going on? And I'm sure that hurt him and frustrated him.
>
> I think I've learned how to talk with him without upsetting him, making him think you're attacking him instead of the problem. I have not always known how to do that really well.

Decisions were made by these couples equitably. They discussed the issue involved together so that both partners had input into important decisions.

> If there's a problem, or if there is a decision to be made, we both like to sit and talk this out, and any decision we make is a joint decision.
>
> When we designed our house, I'd work and make one whole layout. He'd say, "I don't like this," and "I don't like that." And then the next week, he's made a layout and I'd look at it and say, "Well, I don't like this," . . . or "Do like this." . . . And so after a year, we finally . . . got it planned. But we had worked a long, long time. And we'd go and pick out all the materials and discuss it, and we did it all together.

Although their communication skills were not always effective, most of these couples seemed to work through the difficulties that face them in their relationship together. They did seem to be aware of the importance of communication in fostering a more positive relationship.

This discussion of intimacy highlighted its central role for the majority of these couples. However, many of them also valued their autonomy. These couples were aware of the need for separateness to balance the sometimes intense connectedness of marriage.

Autonomy

One of the greatest paradoxes in relationships may be the need for distance from the very person with whom one is the most intimate. As much as couples thrive on the connectedness they share with their spouse, they also yearn for a certain degree of separateness. This paradox was apparent in several of the couples in this sample. Many of them believed that time alone was essential to a good marriage. They indicated their comfort with separate interests and activities. It appeared that the ability to be comfortable with their separateness was related to the realization that they were, indeed, separate and unique individuals. They were secure within themselves and within the intimate bond they shared with their mate. Therefore, they were not threatened by time apart from their loved one or by their individual differences.

Separate Interests and Activities

Although these couples shared many interests and activities, they also engaged in interests separately. Some of the wives who were often willing to share some of their husbands' interests indicated that this was not always the case:

> There's still some things he does that I do not care for and cannot get interested in. But I don't object to him doing those because they give him pleasure. . . . I don't mind him going and enjoying them, and he doesn't mind me staying home and doing my thing. . . . I can be home reading a good book while he's enjoying the ball game.
>
> If I want to stay home, which I often do, that's alright with [husband] too. . . . He really doesn't mind that. . . . I have lots of female friends. He has lots of male friends, and he does things with them. But we still have some common interests.

A couple of people mentioned that this issue had come up early in their marriages. One man gradually began to include his wife in the things he had shared with his friend, but another insisted on his time alone.

> A lot of times I wouldn't be around, and she would want me to be around. . . . Most of it related to things that I did when I was single . . . hunting and fishing, going to football games and what have you. As you go on through the years, you say, "If I want to go to a football game, I take my wife."
>
> When we were first married, he was in the . . . Chess Club. And one of the things he said to me, "I play chess on every Friday night, and I'm not going to stop." I said, "That's all right. I'll do something on Friday night." So, his mother and I used to go to the movie. We'd do something, or a girlfriend and I would go do something.

Some of the subjects posited that time apart from their spouse enabled them to become rejuvenated and to gain a new perspective on

their relationship. This finding suggested that having time to oneself prevented the partners from becoming enmeshed.

> Well, I think that you can be together too much of the time. . . . That might sound crazy. You say, "Hey, we love each other, and love says that you want to be together all you can." I don't believe that. I think that you need to have your time to yourself.
>
> I think some people mistake what togetherness is, at least in my mind. Because if you do everything together all the time, you really get weary of each other. You never give each other a chance to be alone and sort of revive yourself, so to speak. And there have been times, like when he's gone on trips, I think we both enjoy it because it gives you both a different perspective. And then, when you get back home, it's just better again. Everybody needs a break, and it's good to have a break from each other.

Independence

Apparently, many of the subjects valued independence. As was related previously, several of the husbands appreciated their wives' independence because it served as a means of support during times of involvement away from home. However, in one situation, the wife's independence resulted in ambivalence when her husband returned from two years in the service. After having sole responsibility for herself and their baby for two years, she resented the fact that he took her for granted. Her autonomy eventually led to positive change in their relationship.

> I guess when he came back from the service--our son was almost two years old--and I guess that was really a hard adjustment for both of us because I had had a baby for two years completely by myself. I did stay independent. . . . I did not go back home to my mother. . . . And I pretty much went and did as I pleased. . . . I guess, in a sense, I sort of resented his coming back. . . . I was tickled to death to have him back. But then after he was there for awhile, I

> thought, "I don't care much for this at all." . . . I sat down and wrote him a long, long letter. I gave him some of my concerns and how I felt. . . . After I wrote the letter . . . we sat down and talked about it. . . . It just seemed like from that day on we just worked a little bit harder and . . . before we knew it, we had evolved into an entirely different relationship.

Individuality

Appreciation for the individuality of each partner appeared to be related to the degree of comfort these couples exhibited in their separateness. Most of them seemed to realize that individuality enhances, rather than threatens, a relationship. They were able to focus on the complementary nature of their differences. Although they may have had strengths and weaknesses in different areas, they were aware of the ways in which these differences may have worked together to strengthen their marriage. Thus, they generally respected their differences.

> One strength in the marriage is that he does not put the same goals for me as he has for himself. . . . He's not as critical of me. He really thinks he's got to be perfect, but he doesn't expect me to be. . . . He lets me do what I can. He lets me do the best I can at what I'm at.

> Well, people are a mixture of strengths and weaknesses. And with [wife] and I, my weak points are areas in which she excels. . . . I excel in the areas that she is deficient in. . . . So we're able to cover a wide spectrum of problems and conditions from our two experiences without being a really whole lot alike.

> One partner may be stronger like in financial areas, or one may be stronger in social areas and so forth. So I think that we try to help each other in those areas, and I think it makes for a more stable marriage. You can always find weaknesses in somebody that you can criticize if you would like to. But I think you just have to realize that some people have certain weaknesses and strengths and other people have some that are

> altogether different. That, I think, is an important aspect for us.

However, differences may also be a source on conflict within a marriage. One wife described the frustration she experiences because she and her husband approach tasks differently:

> We are two opposite creatures. I am a go-getter. I am a worker. I want to get it done. He's slow-moving. I can have the bedroom cleaned up and breakfast started, and he has put on his shoes. So that's how opposite we are. And that's the only thing we've ever had trouble with, is our being opposite.

Other comments made by some of the subjects suggest a relationship between autonomy and respect. Respect for one's mate appeared to grow as the mate expressed his or her individuality. Also, it may be that one's tolerance for individual differences is an outgrowth of positive self-esteem or respecting oneself as a person.

> You start to learn that she is not me and I am not her. And we aren't exactly alike. We never will be. Once you recognize that, I think the respect thing just builds over the years as your relationship grows.
>
> And, too, you can't always look to other people for your happiness. You've got to find it within. And when two people who are married . . . are constantly looking toward their partner for their happiness, I think it's going to fail. . . . I think to achieve anything, you have to have a certain amount of self-worth. . . . You have to feel good about yourself.

In giving each other permission to be oneself, these couples have been rewarded by increased respect for their mates. Also, the time they spent apart in separate pursuits tempered their intimacy, preventing enmeshment. Therefore, many of these couples appeared to have achieved a healthy balance between separateness and connectedness.

The balance between intimacy and autonomy facilitates a rewarding experience for couples in marriage. Too much intimacy may leave one or both partners feeling stifled, whereas an excess of autonomy may prevent a true bond between the partners. Therefore, this balance between separateness and connectedness may effect the commitment between spouses to some degree.

Commitment

There was a great deal of consensus among couples regarding the role of commitment in long-term marriage. Several of the subjects expressed that they had never considered the possibility of ending the marriage.

> It never dawned on me that there would be anything else. . . . I guess we just never went into it with the idea that if we didn't like it we could get out of it.
>
> We never even considered divorce. That was never even a consideration, not ever!

Cohort Effect

The degree to which these couples held that view is due, in large part, to the times during which they were married. At that time, there was a societal expectation that marriage was forever. Divorce was uncommon and stigmatized. Some of the respondents compared those days to the present, citing the ease with which couples today end a marriage.

> We were married in a time when you married with the idea that it was going to be forever. Divorce was just not as

> acceptable or as easy to get, or done as often, when we were married.
>
> When something doesn't go exactly the way [young people today] planned or the way they want it to, then they want to chuck it and get on to something else. Their idea of marriage is a totally different concept than it was when we were young. We felt like it was truly a bond that you took, and you didn't take it lightly, and almost short of death and total misery, you stuck with it.

This cohort effect may have given these couples a secure foundation for dealing with the difficult periods in their marriages. They were encouraged to persevere through marital stress, whereas couples today may be subtly discouraged from doing so by the prevalence of divorce. In our modern society, marriage often appears to be considered a disposable commodity.

> And I guess at the time we got married, there was a very strong feeling that this should be a lifetime commitment, so that sort of created a framework which tended to help you get over some of the rough spots that came along.
>
> We took the vows with every intent that we would make the marriage work. I think that's a solid foundation to build on.
>
> We've had some hard things to go through . . . but we both came out of it fine. . . . I've always felt like that I was pretty secure in our relationship.

The couples cited a variety of resources that helped strengthen their commitment, including family orientation, religious faith, and the desire for the marriage to work.

Family Orientation

These husbands and wives placed a high value on family, reinforcing their commitment to marriage. As was stated previously,

sharing in the upbringing of their children helped many of the couples grow closer together. For some, children may have served as a deterrent to divorce as well as to the thought of divorce.

> We both feel that whether the marriage is a happy one or not, it probably is wrong to separate and divorce from the standpoint of children. I think that's an ethic that we both have that caused divorce to hardly ever enter into the picture in the first place.
>
> Probably if we didn't have children, it might have been a different route. I don't know. I don't think so, but it could have.

One woman, who seriously considered divorce in earlier years, related how her children had influenced, in part, her decision to remain with her husband:

> Part of it was because of the kids. . . . I'm not the one who's supposed to be satisfied. I could change. Those kids can't. So I think that's part of it, and I think that's probably why it probably helped us.

Religious Faith

Religious faith appeared to have enhanced marital commitment through two means. First, from a religious perspective, marriage was considered to be a sacred bond, and divorce was often viewed as sinful. Couples who shared this view entered into marriage with the expectation of permanence. Their religious faith influenced their values, fortifying them in their commitment.

> I think that if you read your Bible, divorce is frowned upon. . . . To me, if you believe in God, then you work hard for a good marriage.

> I believe in the Biblical sense of marriage. I believe that you truly become one and you should stay one.
>
> I think it was our faith in the Lord that kept us faithful to each other. . . . It didn't enter into our minds or occur to us that there was someone else out there to fool around with [while husband travelled]. We were content to wait. So I feel like it was our faith in the Lord that really made us that kind of a person.

Secondly, religious faith served as a source of spiritual support and guidance during times of difficulty.

> If you both really seek the Lord's guidance, you can work that difference out in your marriage.

Determination

A significant factor in commitment is the desire for the marriage to work. This factor keeps commitment from being merely an obligation. Marital success becomes a common goal, and the partners extend great effort toward that goal.

> I think that you have to make a tremendous number of sacrifices if you want the marriage to last. And you have got to have that foremost at the top of your priorities if you want to stick together. . . . You have to want it to work, and you have to make a tremendous number of sacrifices.
>
> We both decided at the start that we were going to make it work and we did. . . . It takes a person with a lot of determination and intestinal fortitude to make it go. . . . So, we intended to make it work, and we did.

Commitment to the Spouse as a Person

It was obvious from some of the comments made that there was a great deal of admiration for one's spouse in this sample. For the most part, they seemed to appreciate the strengths of their partners and to

downplay their shortcomings. It may be that focusing on the strengths of one's mate enabled one to endure the difficult times that occurred in most marriages through increased commitment to the spouse as a person.

It also seemed that the degree of closeness between the mates was influential. The more spouses enjoyed being together, the greater the likelihood that they would want to stay together. Therefore, the attraction to the spouse as a person augmented the commitment to the marriage.

> When you get somebody that you can work with like that, well, you better enjoy it. And we have . . . I don't know anybody else I've even been interested in trying this with.
>
> He's the sort of husband that, if my daughters had the same type of husband, I would be pleased. I think that's saying a lot because you want your daughters to have the very best.
>
> She's just a fine person and always has been.
>
> I don't think anyone that has any thought of the other person could turn their back on such kindness. He has just been good.
>
> Oh, I suppose when you have what you consider to be the right person and the one that you want to be with or stay with, you'll find a way to work it out if you want to.
>
> I think the fact that we care deeply for each other has made us want to work things out instead of . . . divorce or separation.

As was mentioned previously, a religious orientation appeared to be related to commitment in marriage. However, religious faith served many other purposes for these couples.

Religious Faith

Religious faith was cited by a majority of couples as being an important component of their marriage. They indicated that they derived social, emotional, and spiritual support from their faith. Also, they stated that their faith had provided them with moral guidance, facilitating decision-making and minimizing conflict within their marriage.

Some of the subjects indicated that their church involvement had decreased over time. Others referred to faith as being essential to their marriage.

> To me, it would be like being inside a room with no air not to have God in a marriage.
>
> We have an absolute unshakable faith in God. That is first and foremost in both our lives. He comes first. Everything we do is around God and the church and what we do for Him. And that makes a lot of difference. We believe in prayer, and we pray every day.

It did not appear that religiosity ensured a high-quality marriage. Some of the apparently less-functional marriages involved partners with a high religious commitment. On the other hand, some of the more-functional marriages involved couples whose religious faith was not as all-consuming.

Social Support

Church involvement provided friends and activities for these couples to share. Indeed, some believed that this was one of the most significant sources of friendship.

> That's where most of your [friendships] are going to develop. . . . After several years, that's where they're going to be.

> For a few months . . . we lived away from home. And of course he was flying. But I . . . just went to church wherever we were. . . . Church members were always willing to accept you.

Couples spoke of engaging in many church activities jointly, such as discussion groups and church dinners. However, some couples also joined in some activities separately, giving the spouse an opportunity to develop stronger ties with friends other than the mate.

> We were in groups of young married couples that came to the house, and we went to their house. We went on a group [outing] once a month and had a lot of fun together. And that was a good support group for me, too.

> [His Sunday school class] would take time during the early spring, and they would take off and go for a weekend of fishing. . . . By the same token, our Sunday school class then would take off for a weekend, and it was their responsibility for the children.

Emotional Support

Several subjects reported that they received emotional support through increased commitment, spousal intimacy, and family togetherness. As related previously, religious faith encouraged marital commitment through the value that was placed on the marriage bond and through spiritual support in times of difficulty.

> We're both Catholic, and we have been brought up to believe that when you get married, you get married for life. No matter what happens, you don't just say, "Oh, I'm going to get a divorce."

> I think it was our faith in the Lord that kept us faithful to each other. . . . It didn't enter into our minds or occur to

> us that there was someone else out there to fool around with. . . . So, I feel like it was our faith in the Lord that really made us that kind of a person.

Other people pointed to the increased intimacy that resulted in sharing such an intimate thing as one's religious faith.

> I think we both knew we were praying together, so it brought us closer together.
>
> Well, it has kept us close. . . . It has been a strengthening bond, the fact that we both believe in something that big.

For some families, the impact of shared faith extended into the relationship with the children, enhancing family togetherness.

> At the end of the meal, nobody would leave. And we would push the plates back, and we would have some type of a religious reading. . . . We did that for many years.

Spiritual Support

Many referred to the spiritual support and comfort they received from their faith during periods of difficulty. In some instances, this appeared to be an individual experience, but one which eventually impacted upon the dyad. Also, faith directly benefitted the dyad when the partners shared this belief together or when they were dealing with marital crises.

When asked what impact their common religious background had on their marriage, one woman replied:

> It just made it stronger. . . . Knowing that whatever happened, we would have support.

One man shared his thoughts on how his faith enabled him to cope effectively with the death of his child.

> You could almost get bitter when you have a child die. . . . If you didn't have a faith that is taught by the teachings of God for the future, eternal life, it would be easy to get pretty bitter. And I don't think that either one of us did, and we were able to face it and without too much difficulty.

One of the wives expressed how her faith sustained her during a time of intense grief.

> At that time, I knew I belonged to God and I do today. Whatever happens to me is meant to work out for good because I'm His child.

Moral Guidance

Many of the subjects turned to their faith for guidance in dealing with decisions and conflict. One of the wives mentioned that she used prayer to help her define a problem and consider the options. Several stated the relevance of Christian morals to a quality marriage.

> If you believe in God, both of you, you have a common ground, and that's helpful in marriage. There are a lot of things in Jesus's teaching that help you have a good marriage, I think. You know, "Do unto others." Things like that.
>
> I think having a good sound Christian foothold or foundation is very, very important. . . . You know, whatever situation comes up, that there is a right way to do it and a wrong way.

One husband suggested that, through sharing their faith earlier in their marriage, he and his wife had been able to avoid conflict. It may be that, through sharing faith, couples move toward harmony which they would not want to disturb with conflict.

> When we were first married, we prayed together, read together, and studied together for a long time. It certainly was helpful. It's hard to sit there and read together and pray together and all that if you have enmity.

Mixed Marriages

Although most of the couples were of the same denomination, several couples were in mixed marriages. For couples who were both Protestant, the difference was not as great as it was for couples in which one was Protestant and one was Catholic. However, they all respected the spouse's faith.

> Naturally, you're gonna have some problems where there's a difference in denomination. And so I've always just trusted the Lord to give me the patience, to give me the wisdom to work out any difficulties that we might have. . . . I've never in any way run down the differences in our denominations. I've always respected my husband's way of belief, and he has always respected mine.

However, one husband spoke of the limitations of differing denominations.

> It's not something that I see as a major obstacle. It cuts off one channel of communication that I wish wasn't. But it doesn't cut off other channels of communication.

Congruence

Every couple had congruent perceptions of their relationship to a degree. However, the depth of congruence varied among couples. Some couples perceived the strengths of their relationship similarly and were aware of their spouse's perceptions of the marriage. Yet, there

were other couples in which one spouse seemed unaware of the partner's frustration with some aspect of the relationship.

Areas of Congruence

Areas in which spouses exhibited a high level of congruence concerned the impact of communication, commitment, intimacy, family orientation, and religious orientation on their relationship. A few of the couples had similar perceptions regarding mutuality and the balance between intimacy and autonomy. The spouses appeared to have the greatest degree of congruence regarding intimacy and religious orientation.

One husband intimated the depth of his feelings for his wife when he stated, "[Wife] is my life." The wife echoed his sentiment by referring to him as "my rock, my life." The congruence in perceived enjoyment of one another was evident in another couple as follows:

> Husband: We like each other, and I don't know anybody that I would like nearly as well for any reason.
>
> Wife: All of the sharing . . . has been very, very important. Knowing that I had a good friend.

Religious orientation was important for many couples, although they sometimes differed on how it was important in their relationship. Some couples spoke of the ways in which their faith had been a source of spiritual support.

> Husband-1: I don't consider myself an overly religious person . . . but I do have a faith I think is strong. I think that helps you through a lot of situations.

> Wife-1: I think we both turned our son over to God. . . . I think we both knew we were praying together, so I think it brought us closer together.
>
> Husband-2: If you didn't have a faith that is taught by the teachings of God for the future, eternal life, it would be easy to get pretty bitter.
>
> Wife-2: At that time, I knew I belonged to God, and I do today. Whatever happens to me is meant to work out for good because I'm His child.

For some couples, their perceptions of how their religious orientation had impacted upon their lives differed somewhat. For instance, one spouse might focus on the social aspects of religious involvement, whereas the other spouse might consider the moral guidance offered by their faith. In one couple, the husband mentioned how their faith enhanced their intimacy, and his wife spoke of the social and spiritual support derived from their religious involvement.

> Husband: When we were first married, we prayed together, read together, and studied together for a long time. . . . It's hard to sit there and read together and pray together and all that if you have enmity.
>
> Wife: I never felt alone. . . . Church members were always willing to accept you. . . . [Their faith] just made [their relationship] stronger . . . knowing that whatever happened, we would have support.

Congruence was not limited to the positive aspects of the relationship. Some couples appeared to be aware of their limitations as well as their strengths. A couple who had difficulty communicating after the loss of their child shared the following:

> Wife: He's a very private person, and I finally realized that he . . . wasn't going to talk about it as such a lot.
> Husband: It was difficult for me to communicate at that time, and I'm sure she would have liked for me to have been a better

communicator. That would have helped her through that crisis better.

Lack of Congruence

Although the level of congruence among these couples was fairly high, some couples also appeared to lack congruence in key aspects of their relationship. Typically, these couples tended to have lower levels of intimacy than most of the other couples. For these couples, there seemed to be a sense of resignation on the part of one spouse and denial on the part of the other spouse.

One man, whose spouse had indicated there were no serious problems in their relationship, mentioned that there was one area of difficulty in their relationship which kept him from being fully satisfied. He also stated that he did not believe this problem would ever be resolved. He declined to discuss the problem, but his frustration at the futility of the situation was obvious.

Another case involved the husband who discussed his difficulty communicating with his wife during times of conflict. His assessment of this difficulty indicated a feeling of powerlessness in getting his needs met:

> It's hard for me, quite often, to really speak my mind and really tell [his wife] just exactly the way I feel and what I'd like to say, because I know if I do that, probably it won't help me at all. And if the person I'm talking to is sensitive at all, it could hurt their feelings and so forth. And it's not worth the effort.

This man's wife gave no indication that she was aware of his feelings, yet she did refer to times of conflict between them.

Although both spouses spoke of their friendship and common activities, there seemed to be unresolved tension in the relationship. Apparently, the husband had resigned himself to the fact that he will not be able to get his needs met as frequently as he could were he more assertive.

Another couple who may have had incongruent perceptions of the relationship had extensive familial responsibilities. The husband had always been career-oriented, which compounded the stress in their relationship. Although the husband was aware of the stress this situation caused for his wife, who had the majority of responsibility for the family, he did not appear to be aware of the degree of that stress or the impact it may have had on their marriage.

> Husband: I don't think it has created any major problems. It certainly has not created any animosity in our relations that I can see unless she feels something that she is hiding from me.
>
> Wife: It's not as happy as it was. You keep waiting for the other shoe to drop. . . . I've sort of drawn into a shell. I'm not doing much now. . . . It kind of burns you out. You look for something like a tranquilizer. You look for something to just white it out.

The wife did not appear to be resentful toward her husband, but the family demands did seem to be exacting a toll on the intimacy of their relationship.

All three of these couples seemed to be dealing with differing expectations regarding the level of intimacy in their relationship. One partner was resigned to his or her frustration, whereas the other partner did not appear to be fully aware of the spouse's dilemma. These examples intimated the role of congruence in enhancing the quality and functioning of a marriage.

Adaptation to Incongruent Expectations

A fourth couple appeared to have begun their marriage with congruent intimacy expectations, but eventually experienced divergence in that area. They both were raised with a high degree of work ethic, and at the time of their marriage did not appear to desire a high level of intimacy. However, the wife's intimacy needs seemed to have grown during the marriage to the point where she considered divorce. With the help of counseling, she came to realize that she did not want to leave her husband, but she did need to find fulfillment in other directions. Against his protest, she went to work and established herself in a successful career.

She stated that she never regretted her decision to remain with her husband, and both partners seem relatively satisfied. Thus, by facing the incongruence in their relationship, she was able to adapt to their level of intimacy by rechanneling her needs into other areas.

Summary

The results of this study indicated that intimacy, autonomy, commitment, religious orientation, congruence, and communication were salient to this sample of couples in enduring marriages. Intimacy appeared to be a central element related to all other concepts. Many of the couples balanced this intimacy with autonomy, allowing them to maintain their individuality within the connectedness of marriage. Although commitment is a predisposing factor to an enduring marriage, it became evident that commitment as well as intimacy varied both

qualitatively and temporally. Religious orientation impacted upon these relationships through a variety of dimensions: emotional support, social support, spiritual support, and moral guidance. Finally, congruent perceptions of the relationship appeared to be indicative of higher levels of marital intimacy and/or satisfaction.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Discussion

The analysis of these data suggested that the following characteristics were key elements of enduring marriages: intimacy, autonomy, commitment, congruence, religious faith, and communication. Supporting characteristics included time together, time alone, shared interests and activities, family orientation, support, mutuality, interdependence, caring, respect, trust, and positive regard. These key elements have been identified in the marital strengths literature.

The literature on enduring marriages suggests similar characteristics, but includes some characteristics that were not as salient for this sample. Lauer and Lauer (1986) found the following traits key to enduring marriages: friendship, commitment, consensus, and humor. The current study strongly supports friendship, commitment, and congruence, but evidence for humor is not as great. Sporakowski and Axelson (1984) identified the following variables as common across studies of enduring marriages: "endurance, tolerance, enjoyment, perseverance, [and] fulfillment over the years" (p. 88). It appears that these traits are related to most of those characteristics identified as salient in the current study. Endurance would be subsumed under commitment, whereas tolerance, enjoyment, perseverance, and fulfillment are related to intimacy and the qualities that facilitate intimacy, such as support. Also, tolerance may be related

to autonomy in that the spouses are able to appreciate their individuality and tolerate their differences.

The variables posited by MacKinnon et al. (1988) to be unique to enduring marriages were not as strongly supported by this study. These couples did manage their finances well, but they had higher-than-average incomes. Some personality traits, such as caring and easy-going, were important in this sample, but have been subsumed under intimacy. Very few subjects discussed their sexual relationship, although those who did seemed to be satisfied. The importance of health was related to intimacy in that their health crises had brought about increased closeness.

Therefore, it appears that the traits that have been identified as key characteristics in the current study are, for the most part, supported in the literature on marital strengths in enduring marriages. What becomes of interest at this point is to hypothesize possible relationships among these characteristics.

Commitment

Obviously, one cannot have an enduring marriage without commitment. Many respondents referred to the fact that they had never considered divorce. They spoke of marriage as a permanent relationship which is not to be abandoned when difficulties emerge. Some of them referred to religious factors, some to the fact that children were involved, and others to the societal expectation at the time of their marriage that it be forever.

However, commitment does not necessarily ensure quality in a marriage (Cuber & Harroff, 1965: Goldberg, Green, Hof, Treat, & Westfall, 1985; Luckey, 1966; Weishaus & Field, 1988). In order for a marriage to be vital, it appears that there must be commitment to the spouse as a person as well as to the marriage (Lauer & Lauer, 1986; Swensen, Eskew, & Kohlhepp, 1984; Swensen & Trahaug, 1985; Weishaus & Field, 1988). This form of commitment involves acceptance of the other person as he or she is (Lauer & Lauer, 1986). In this sample, the majority seemed to appreciate their spouse's strengths and to minimize their weaknesses. Although it is conceivable that one could accept one's mate without having true intimacy, as in a passive/congenial type of marriage, it would seem that this degree of acceptance of one's strengths and weaknesses would provide a fertile ground in which intimacy could flourish. Therefore, commitment to the spouse as a person may facilitate the growth of intimacy.

Intimacy

Although intimacy may not be essential to an enduring marriage, it appeared to be a central characteristic related to all the other characteristics. In the current study, intimacy was operationalized as closeness between the spouses along three different dimensions: physical, emotional, and spiritual.

Intimacy and the Family Life Cycle

These couples often spoke of the friendship they experienced with their potential mate during courtship, suggesting that some degree of intimacy is typically present before the commitment to marriage is

made. This intimacy is then fostered through their common values, interests, and experiences as the couple develops a shared history. As was seen in a number of couples, the demands of family and career may cause intimacy to decline during the middle years of marriage. Indeed, many couples indicated that their time together and closeness had increased after the children left home. This finding suggested support for the curvilinearity of marital quality and validates the contention that the postparental phase of marriage is often a time of renewed freedom for spouses (Schram, 1979; Spanier & Lewis, 1980; Weishaus & Field, 1988).

Intimacy, Communication, and Problem-solving

As the literature indicates, spouses who enjoy one another are more willing to work through their difficulties (Gottman, 1982; Lauer & Lauer, 1986). The couples in the current study who seemed to have a relatively high degree of intimacy often referred to the friendship they shared with their mates. These couples typically worked together to solve their problems, reinforcing their commitment. A key factor in their ability to do so was communication. Although the level of self-disclosure varied greatly, it appeared that the majority of couples were able to reach a satisfactory solution to their difficulties together most of the time. Thus, a lack of self-disclosure does not necessarily preclude effective problem-solving (Lauer & Lauer, 1986). It appears, therefore, that communication may foster intimacy which, in turn, nurtures commitment. This hypothesis is consistent with Gottman's (1982) contention that friendship enhances the bond between mates, providing impetus for conflict resolution.

Intimacy and Autonomy

Intimacy without a balance of autonomy could very well lead to dysfunctional enmeshment (Beavers, 1982; Olson & McCubbin, 1982). Therefore, the balance between intimacy and autonomy is a crucial process in maximizing marital health (Beavers, 1982; Olson & McCubbin, 1982; Scarf, 1987). On the whole, these couples were able to achieve a balance of separateness and connectedness. Although they valued their time together, they also appreciated having time alone. Some suggested this separateness gave them an opportunity to put the relationship with the spouse into perspective and to experience a sense of renewal.

The wives in this sample appear to have a much higher level of autonomy than might have been expected, given their age cohort. They were married in a time in which women were encouraged to over-identify with their roles as wife and mother. However, most of these women worked outside the home at some point in their marriage. Many of them had complete responsibility for the household while their husbands were involved in military service or career demands. The degree of satisfaction with this arrangement varied, but many of these women seemed to be aware of their individuality and their strengths. Their husbands considered this an asset in the relationship because it freed them to pursue their own goals and needs. In most cases, the couples did not view one another's individuality as threatening.

For the most part, these couples were able to launch their children without undue grief or conflict, indicating a healthy level of individuation. According to Scarf (1987), the period of child-launching can be traumatic for couples who have unresolved separation

conflicts from their family of origin. For those couples, these conflicts may surface as their own children leave home. Therefore, the fact that most of the couples in the current study were able to launch their children without much difficulty suggested that they had dealt effectively with their own separation conflicts and, therefore, were able to balance their intimacy and autonomy needs.

The Variability of Intimacy and Commitment

The level of intimacy, as well as commitment, may vary temporally within a couple. Some couples stated that specific circumstances, such as the death of a child, blocked intimacy. For some couples, the commitment to the marriage was in jeopardy at some point in their relationship. In these situations, individuals garnered support from sources outside the marriage, such as family, friends, or counselors. The fact they were able to find other means of support when the spouse was unable to offer it suggested that these individuals had high ego strength or individuality (Ammons & Stinnett, 1980). Thus, in times of stress, these individuals utilized resources at the individual, family, and community levels (Dyk & Schvaneveldt, 1987).

Congruent Expectations Regarding Intimacy

Intimacy between spouses varied along a continuum from high to low, so that some marriages were characterized by a relatively low level of intimacy. Several couples in this sample appeared to have a lack of congruence regarding their spouse's perceptions of the quality of the relationship. In these couples, one spouse was dissatisfied with a facet of the relationship and somewhat resigned to the futility

of pursuing a solution. The other spouse seemed to be unaware of the spouse's frustration and resignation. It is possible that on some level the spouse is aware of this difficulty but does not acknowledge it in order to maintain homeostasis within the relationship. These marriages exemplified a lack of congruence exacerbated by a lack of communication and intimacy which appears to impact upon marital satisfaction (Arias & O'Leary, 1985; Fields, 1983; Weishaus & Field, 1988).

The impact of a lack of congruence may be mitigated by shared values. A case in point was the couple in which the wife considered divorce and then channeled her intimacy needs into her work. It is highly possible that the factor which enabled this strategy to succeed was their common work ethic. In talking about their compatibility, this wife indicated that their common enjoyment of working was the area in which they were most compatible. Also, it appeared that, by redirecting her emotional needs into her career, the couple may actually have been drawn closer. She referred to the incident in which her husband recently put her career demands ahead of his own, stating that she had finally taken precedence over his work. Thus, although there had not been a great deal of emotional intimacy in this relationship, their common work ethic enhanced the bond between them.

On the other hand, some couples had more difficulty dealing with the lack of congruence in their relationship. Recall the husband who was frustrated over his inability to communicate effectively with his wife in times of conflict. Because he often held back in communicating his feelings, his wife did not appear to be fully aware of the degree

of his frustration. They had a variety of common interests and a high degree of commitment to the marriage, but there was an unresolved tension which permeated the relationship, inhibiting the satisfaction of this couple (Lauer & Lauer, 1986; Roberts, 1979-80; Weishaus & Field, 1988).

The difference between these two couples appeared to be their commitment to growth and their utilization of coping strategies and resources, or adaptability (Beavers, 1982; Kantor & Lehr, 1975; Lauer & Lauer, 1986; Mace, 1982; Olson et al., 1983). The first couple turned to marriage counseling when the stability of their relationship was jeopardized. The wife, over her husband's protest, decided to return to work in order to seek greater fulfillment. Their utilization of a community resource, i.e., therapy, and individual resources, e.g., ego-strength, enabled them to restructure their relationship, thereby adapting to their differing intimacy needs (Ammons & Stinnett, 1980; Dyk & Schvaneveldt, 1987).

In the second couple's situation, the husband's passivity seemed to prevent him from coping effectively with the stress engendered by their lack of communication and effective problem-solving. It appeared that this husband was reluctant to upset the equilibrium in the relationship, which would necessitate change for himself as well as for his wife. Thus, his reluctance may be interpreted as a lack of commitment to growth, which may impact upon his commitment to his spouse and to the marriage (Lauer & Lauer, 1986; Mace, 1982). Also, his perception that attempts to resolve their conflict would be futile suggested an external locus of control.

These marriages seemed to be either conflict-habituated, devitalized, or passive-congenial marriages as opposed to the vital marriages of more congruent, intimate couples (Cuber & Harroff, 1968). They had compensated for their lack of intimacy and communication by channelling their efforts outside the relationship in such areas as work, church, or family, or they have resigned themselves to a relationship in which there is a great deal of tension. According to Marks (1986; 1989), these couples would be considered loosely connected or family-centered.

Religious Orientation

For the most part, these couples perceived a religious orientation to be an important component in the success of their marriage. The high degree of religious orientation may be an artifact of the sampling procedure. However, this finding is consistent, although to a lesser degree, with the findings of Olson et al. (1983) and Stinnet (Schumm, 1985). The current study revealed the possibility of various dimensions of religious orientation: moral guidance, social support, emotional support, and spiritual support. It appeared that religious orientation fostered commitment through moral guidance and spiritual support. It also appeared to enhance intimacy through social, emotional, and spiritual support.

Cohort Effects

The study of long-term marriages must take into account the cohort effects for couples in varying stages of marriage. The marriages of

these couples appeared to be effected by a variety of factors which were unique to their generations, such as the Great Depression, World War II, and the Korean Conflict, and the societal expectation of marital stability. These factors impacted to some degree on financial management, work ethic, the development of autonomy and interdependence, and commitment. Thus, these marriages may be qualitatively different from marriages in earlier stages of the life due, in part, to the effect of factors which do not exist in our society today.

Implications

The results of this study suggested some directions for the areas of theory, future research, and practice in the area of enduring marriage.

Theory

This study served to underscore the need for more research in the area of enduring marriages in order to develop a deeper understanding of the process involved in marital stability. As researchers and educators, we have tended to glamorize marriage, presenting a picture of the ideal as the standard toward which all couples should strive when, in reality, most marriages are far from ideal. I have been particularly struck by the degree of variability in such concepts as intimacy, commitment, and adaptability.

Another need in this area is a greater synthesis of the various bodies of literature pertaining to marital stability and quality.

There appears to be a wealth of information in such areas as marital quality, marital stability, family stress and crisis, family functioning, family therapy, and psychology which could be tied together more effectively. For instance, more information on the intrapsychic factors which impact upon family functioning and coping could greatly benefit theory building in marital strengths. Thus, the area of marital strengths is prime for interdisciplinary research.

Research

Identified Concepts and Their Possible Interrelationships

There has not been a great deal of research in the area of marital strengths in enduring marriages, but the salient concepts revealed in this study generally supported the variables which have been identified to date in the literature. This study particularly supported the key concepts identified by Lauer and Lauer (1986) and Sporakowski and Axelson (1984). Points of consensus in these three studies included the salience of intimacy, friendship, and enjoyment as well as the importance of commitment, tolerance, and perseverance.

This study suggested possible interrelationships among the concepts, which future research could attempt to verify. A model depicting these hypothesized interrelationships has been suggested for further empirical investigation (see Figure 1). By definition, commitment is a prerequisite to an enduring marriage. Commitment was related to another key component, intimacy. It appeared that intimacy was a central concept related to all the other key elements. Intimacy is some amount of connectedness to one's mate, although the degree of

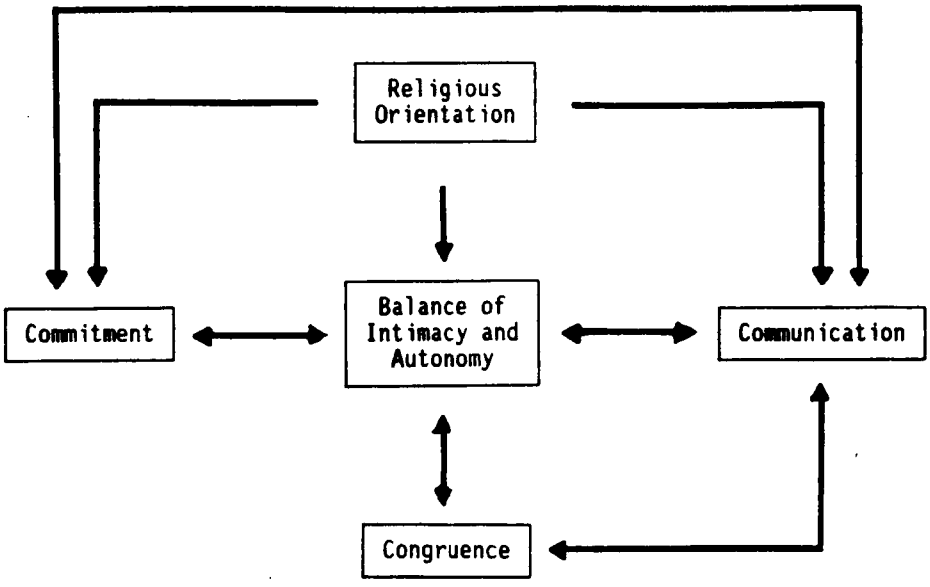


Figure 1. A hypothesized model of interrelationships among characteristics of enduring marriages.

connectedness varies widely. However, intimacy needs to be tempered with autonomy in order to avoid dysfunctional enmeshment. Intimacy fosters communication, which in turn enhances intimacy. Communication and commitment also appeared to be reciprocally related. Religious orientation influenced commitment as well as intimacy. Although religious orientation may have a positive effect upon communication, a moralistic posture may stifle communication.

One's satisfaction in marriage is also influenced by congruent expectations. Although most of the marriages in this study were characterized by a mutually acceptable level of intimacy in the relationship, a few were not. For these resigned couples, the relationship was predominated by unresolved tension for at least one of the partners. One's ability to adapt to this incongruence influences his or her degree of satisfaction with the relationship. Couples who are more loosely connected may turn to other sources of fulfillment, such as career or family. However, their satisfaction with this arrangement will depend upon their congruent expectations. A spouse who truly desires intimacy with a mate who channels his or her efforts into career may not be fulfilled by a less intimate arrangement.

Variations in Connectedness

The example of the wife who adapted to the lack of intimacy in her marriage by finding fulfillment through her work raises an interesting question regarding the desirability of rechannelling unmet intimacy needs. It appeared that this woman coped by seeking fulfillment in her work and art, or what Marks (1986, 1989) would call her third corner. Swensen et al. (1984) posited that the interaction among ego strength,

commitment, and active coping results in vitality and intimacy within the marital relationship. However, the increased vitality resulting in this case was more personal than relational. Although the wife stated that she never regretted staying in the marriage, the dynamics of the relationship did not change drastically. Thus, this marriage could still be classified as loosely connected or passive/congenial. Although this marriage appears to be leaning more towards autonomy than intimacy, the partners seemed to be satisfied and fulfilled.

This example suggested that some couples may be able to adapt to lower levels of marital intimacy and still be functional. According to Marks (1989), "There is a broad range of middle ground between the fluid evenhandedness of balanced connection and some form of fusion, and this is the territory we need to explore" (p. 21). Indeed, Marks (1989) argued for the consideration of outside interests as normative and sometimes functional as follows:

> I suggest that we conceptualize independent third-corners as ongoing facets of any marriage, sometimes negative, sometimes positive, sometimes neutral, and always in part constitutive of the marriage's quality. That is, when we "bargain" for marriage, our partner's independent third-corners are always part of the bargain, and how we handle those third-corners (both our partner's and our own) must enter into any analysis and assessment of marital quality. Specifically, in a high-quality marriage, part of what makes our partner more "attractive" (Lewis and Spanier's "intradyadic" factors) is his or her "alternative attractions" (the "extradyadic" factors). . . . In all four of the variants of connection considered here [balanced, couple-centered, family-centered, and loose], the spouses depend to some extent on each other's independent third-corners. (p. 24)

Although some family researchers might consider an intrinsic marriage to be the ideal, it behooves us to consider less-than-ideal

arrangements as viable alternatives. Thus, future research needs to focus on the variability of functioning and quality in utilitarian, as well as intrinsic, marriage types.

Curvilinearity of Marital Satisfaction

The variability in satisfaction over time suggested support for the curvilinearity of marital satisfaction. Many of these couples indicated that they felt closer to one another as the demands of parenting and career began to abate, indicating that the relationship between length of marriage and satisfaction may not be an artifact of less satisfying marriages ending in divorce.

The Need for Longitudinal Data

In order to gain more insight into the process involved in enduring marriages, this area would benefit greatly by more longitudinal data. Although their sample was extremely small by the end of the longitudinal study began in the 1920's, the conclusions derived by Weishaus and Fields (1988) hint at the wealth of processual information that could be revealed through more longitudinal work. Issues such as the temporal relationships between concepts would greatly enhance our understanding of long-term relationships and marital strengths.

Religious Orientation

Most of the couples referred to the value of religious orientation in their marriages. However, due to the probable bias toward religion of this sample and that of other studies (Olson et al., 1983; Schumm, 1985), the question of the salience of religious orientation needs to

be considered further. This area of research would benefit from studies in which the religious orientation of the sample is more representative of the population of couples in enduring marriages.

Also, the possible multidimensionality of religious orientation is another aspect worthy of consideration. Although couples agreed on the importance of religious orientation, many of them considered it salient for different reasons. It might be of interest to further explore the unique relationships of social support, emotional support, spiritual support, and moral guidance to marriage.

Practice

Education and Program Development

In educating people about marriage, we often give the impression that nothing short of a high level of intimacy and unwavering commitment is desirable. Marks (1989) posited that marital enrichment programs tend to relate vitality to couple-centered connectedness, inferring that other types of relationships cannot be satisfactory. However, individuals vary in their need for intimacy, and relationships may exhibit a wide range of balance between intimacy and autonomy.

The findings of this study suggested that couples who share a relatively low level of intimacy may, indeed, be satisfied as long as their expectations for intimacy are congruent. Also, the degree of intimacy and of commitment may ebb and flow at different times within a marriage. Couples could benefit by being made aware of the sometimes fluid nature of marriage, preparing them for changes in their relationship and ways of coping with those changes. By communicating

their expectations for marriage, specifically their needs for intimacy and autonomy, couples considering marriage might be able to gain valuable insight into their level of congruence and the effect their expectations may have on their relationship.

However, the communication skills of these couples were not always consistent. Therefore, family practitioners need to recognize that couples in enduring marriages may need assistance in learning to communicate more effectively. The difficulty that some couples had with active listening and initial negative affect suggests that it may be of value to include these areas in communication education.

Therapy

Couples also need to be made aware of the resources and alternatives available to them in dealing with such issues as low intimacy, incongruent expectations, or wavering commitment. Whereas our society tends to romanticize marriage, couples are set up for disappointment and disillusionment. Thus, some marriages which could be relatively functional, satisfying relationships may be terminated unnecessarily as the couples part in pursuit of the ideal. Other couples may suffer in silent resignation, frustrated by their perceived lack of alternatives. The awareness of therapists that functional marriages are not necessarily of the highest quality may enable clients to focus on adapting to a relatively functional, though less-than-ideal, situation.

Summary

The long-term marriages of this sample appeared to be characterized by commitment to marriage as well as commitment to the spouse as a person. The commitment to the spouse was evidenced in the friendship and intimacy shared by most of the couples. However, the commitment and intimacy of these couples varied both qualitatively and temporally. Also, intimacy was balanced in most cases by the autonomy of the spouses.

The fact that most couples considered communication to be a strength of their relationships, coupled with the variation in effective communication skills, underscored the need for continued education in this area. Couples need to be made aware of ways in which their communication may be enhanced, and they may need to be refreshed in these skills periodically.

Although religious orientation was greatly valued by this sample, its contribution to these couples varied. It may be that religious orientation is a multidimensional construct comprised of moral guidance, as well as social, emotional, and spiritual support.

As Schumm (1985) suggested, the area of marital strengths in enduring marriages is primed for theory development. The current study has reinforced some of the previous work in this area and has attempted to suggest directions for further research. Let us now progress toward establishing linkages between the strengths of enduring marriages.

Limitations of the Study

The generalizability of this study is severely limited by the methodology. The small sample size, coupled with the nonrepresentativeness of the sample, prohibit conclusions from being generalized outside of the sample. However, the study supports much of the work that has been done in the area of enduring marriage and raises some interesting points regarding theory, further research, and practice.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

ID#_____

Age: Husband_____ Wife_____

Date married_____

Education:	Husband	Wife
Less than 8th grade	_____	_____
Years of high school	_____	_____
High school graduate	_____	_____
Years vocational education	_____	_____
Years college	_____	_____
Degree(s) completed	_____	_____

Income level:

Less than $9,000	_____	$9,000 - $14,999	_____
$15,00 - 24,999	_____	$25,000 - 34,999	_____
$35,000 or more	_____		

Religious affiliation:

Husband_____ Wife_____

Previous marriages (please give number):

Husband_____ Wife_____

Number and ages of children:

From current marriage:_____

From previous marriages:_____

How many of these children reside at home with you?_____

Number of grandchildren:_____

How many of these grandchildren reside with you?_____

What are the ages of those grandchildren who reside with you?

_____

VITA

Linda C. Robinson was born May 12, 1952, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to David and Beverly Robinson. She is the mother of two children, Robert and Rebecca Selleck.

After eight years as a homemaker, she completed her B.S. degree in Home Economics at Louisiana State University in 1984. She received her M.S. degree in Home Economics from Louisiana State University in 1986. Since then, she has attended The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and will receive her Ph.D. in Human Ecology in the summer of 1990.

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