

UNTYING THE KNOT:  
A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY INTO THE ENDURING MARRIAGE

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## **Abstract**

A qualitative analysis using a modified grounded theory approach was performed on 11 interviews from one representative of 11 marriages, including examples of both happy and unhappy marriages, in order to generate a participant-informed account of the enduring marriage. The heuristic model created through the qualitative analysis was contrasted and compared to the existing body of literature on lasting marriage in order to identify areas of convergence and divergence. The qualitative analysis identified a core category termed Emotional Anchoring and seven defining categories that thematically united all examples of lasting marriage in the present study. Results suggest that there are different ways of remaining married but that each example of a lasting marriage is a testament to participants' ability to balance the competing demands of autonomy and connection in their union.

## **Dedication**

**To my parents, for their unending support**

**To Steve, for inspiring me**

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction and Literature Review

#### Introduction

The institution of marriage has been a hallmark of society for a long time. Historians date emergence of the word marriage to the 1300s. Author Kay Hymowitz (2006) says “Marriage exists in every known society, no matter how poor or rich; it is what social scientists call a ‘human universal. (p.16)” The first recorded evidence of marriage dates back some 4000 years ago, in Mesopotamia. The human proclivity to marry suggests that there is something intrinsically appealing about marriage, regardless of its challenges. Even with all the recent instability of marriage, it is still deeply woven into the social fabric. However, despite the value placed on marriage in our society, the numbers of marriages that last are dwindling.

The 1980’s have been termed "the age of divorce" because marital breakdown reached an all-time high of 41% in North America. Since then, it has moderated slightly (38%) and it is currently hovering at approximately 39%, according to Statistics Canada, based on information taken from the 2006 census. The central question guiding the present study was how do married people in *modern Westernized* society account for remaining married in this age of divorce? The italics highlight the importance of the present context in shaping this inquiry. As “a human universal” marriage is both static and dynamic. Therefore, there is a need to understand the narrative of today’s long married couples; past research may not map on to current realities.

The ways that people in long marriages once accounted for remaining married may no longer hold true; divorce is not the stigma it once was, and being single is a lifestyle

choice made by many today. Indeed, one could almost contend that today, divorce has gone from being *accepted* to being *expected* (Putnam, 2011). Even remaining together for the sake of the children is an idea that is being challenged by recent research suggesting that raising children in contentious marriages does more damage than divorcing does (Amato & Keith, 1991). Despite the relative ease of divorce, and the number of lifestyle options available today, people still long to connect, and aspire to be in a long-term marriage that lasts. There is a need to reinvent marriage; to infuse it with new life in order to keep it relevant. The ambivalence society harbours toward marriage was reflected in a recent magazine article that rated weddings according to how 'unwedding-like' they were. This illustrates the current conundrum perfectly; we want to retain the notion of marriage, the ritual of weddings but we want to rescue them from their historical entailment, make them 'different' and in doing so, reclaim them as uniquely ours. In our collective desire to differentiate today's marriage from the marriages of years gone by, the pendulum has swung away from traditional notions of gender roles and division of power and moved toward incorporating the current preoccupation with individual happiness and self-sufficiency. This leaves us with the task of having to redefine an old idea to better reflect current realities. The people who have managed to straddle two worlds - remain married in the age of divorce - likely have something important to add to this conversation, and this was the impetus for the present study, which utilized interviews and qualitative analyses to create a model of the enduring marriage.

## **Literature Review**

Classic psychological studies have shown that connection and attachment are as important to survival as actual sustenance (Harlow, 1958). Relationships matter deeply to people and researchers' efforts to understand the dynamics of these all-important bonds have spanned many volumes. Indeed, when psychiatrists Holmes and Rahe (1967) compiled their famous list of life stressors that precipitated illness, divorce was in the number two spot, second only to the death of a spouse.

Researchers ask many questions in their attempts to get at the heart of lasting love. What is love? What components must a "good" relationship have to succeed? What kind of communications, interactions and behaviors are associated with relationships that last? How do people in lasting relationships describe them and what can we learn from their relationship narratives? What are the ominous harbingers of divorce and dissolution and how can we use this knowledge to safeguard our significant relationships? Is there a way to reliably distinguish a relationship that will thrive from one that will not?

Despite the complexity of marriage, most people marry, most people aspire to a marriage that lasts, and divorce, although increasingly prevalent, is still an outcome most people seek to avoid. Working from the premise that the stories, theories and meanings people give to their experiences help shape those same experiences (Angus & Hardtke, 1994; Angus & McLeod, 2004; Greenberg & Angus, 2004), in this chapter I will review the body of literature on enduring relationships with an eye to exploring what lies at the core of the experience of a lasting marriage.

## **A Brief History of Marriage**

Stephanie Coontz (2005), a family historian, makes the case that love proved to be the death of marriage. In her book, *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage*, Coontz argues that our common notion of marrying for love would have been absurd to our ancestors, who married for economic reasons, survival reasons, or social reasons. She attests that the addition of love enhanced the personal relationship at the heart of marriage while endangering the institution of marriage. Coontz traces the history of marriage throughout the ages and notes a great deal of diversity in the various expressions of marriage across the ages; in fact, she claims that there is no form of the union that has not been tried at one time or another by some culture. She also notes that social norms and context surround marriage, and embedded within the idea of marriage are political and social realities around the notions of power, gender and family dynamics.

Coontz also argues that for much of the history of marriage, the idea of complementary roles prevailed; this was very evident in the traditional marriage of the 1950's, often considered the heyday of family values in North America, characterized by the stay at home mom and the bring home the bacon dad. Coontz claims however that the division of gender roles tended to be a feature of all marriages throughout history, dating back into the hunter-gatherer societies, wherein men hunted while women stayed back to tend to children and gather. She concludes that historically, marriage contracts were arranged by families to further survival goals, tribal goals, and later, in feudal and pre-capitalistic society, as means to ensure security, power or money.



## **Love and Relationships**

Initially, marriage and love were not necessarily connected and in fact the idea of seeking happiness within marriage is a very new idea, historically speaking (Coontz, 2005). After the Renaissance however, the idea of growing to love one another after marriage began to gain popularity, although by and large, marriage was still an arrangement, a means to an end. As secular ideas about individuality, equality between the sexes and the right to happiness took hold, the idea of choosing to marry for love became the norm in Western industrialized culture (Coontz, 2005; Gilbert, 2010; Parker-Pope, 2010).

Researchers interested in relationships have defined love in a number of ways, and in some cases, they have neglected to define it all (Shaver & Hazan, 1988). Shaver & Hazan (1988) point out that “love” can be used to describe “a discrete and fairly short-lived emotional state (e.g. a surge of passion, a surge of affection) and can also be used to describe a continuing disposition to experience that state in relation to a particular person” (Shaver & Hazan, 1988, p.475). Alternatively, developmental researchers have increasingly referred to love as an attachment process that implies “an enduring affectional bond” (Bowlby, 1969; 1979; Hazan & Shaver, 1988) between two human beings.

Theorists have made attempts to distinguish love from mere liking (Rubin, 1975) and they have distinguished types of love from other types of love, by creating love typologies, such as Lee’s famous division of love into “eros”, “storge”, “pragma”, “agape” and “ludus” (Lee, 1973,1988). Eros is described as an open and reciprocal style of loving wherein intense feelings are enjoyed but not insisted upon and where trust and

commitment are evident alongside intimacy and passion. Ludic love is conceptualized as a more distant stance toward the beloved that is marked by a reluctance to settle down and feel too much for the partner. Love is regarded as a game and Ludic lovers enjoy the challenge, or the thrill of the chase. Ludic lovers are loath to talk about the future, avoid intense emotion, and prioritize many other aspects over their intimate relationships.

"Storge" is akin to brotherly or sisterly love, similar to the kind of warm affection one might have for sibling but with none of the passion or intensity of Eros. However, despite the difference in intensity, Storge is a securely based love arrangement that closely mirrors true friendship. Storge lovers do not talk about having "fallen in love" but neither do they exhibit the anxious and troubling fears that their lover will leave. Pragmatic ("Pragma") lovers are inclined to view love as a "satisfactory arrangement" and evaluate the success of their union in business-like terms. Agape lovers, which are apparently rare in their pure form, idealize the self-sacrificial aspect of love and represent the care giving part of love. Lee located these "love styles" in childhood experiences with caregiver figures, extended family, and subsequent character development (Lee, 1973). Lee arrived at his theory of love based on very detailed interviews with over 100 adults about their relationships. On the basis of these interviews and he created the typology of love discussed here, that attempted to isolate different components of love, name them and combine them in ways that can account for a number of different "styles" of love. While Lee's typology has decreased in popularity over the years, his identification of different "love styles" still has merit and the tradition has been carried forward by researchers such as Sternberg (1986,1998) and attachment theorists (Shaver & Hazan, 1988), who have identified different love styles based upon Bowlby's (1969,1979) attachment model.

Sternberg followed in the tradition of Lee, and dedicated a large part of his career to understanding love. His theory of love also attempted to describe different love styles by combining the elements differently to arrive at different types of love (Sternberg, 1986). He began with a triangular theory of love that used three components (passion, intimacy, and commitment) in various combinations to account for a number of different love styles (Sternberg, 1986). Subsequent empirical testing of his work showed that only passion and intimacy were highly predictive of marital satisfaction, while commitment was indicative of duration of marriage but not satisfaction (Silberman & Robinson-Durpui, 1997). From this tripartite theory of love, Sternberg became interested in the different “stories” or narratives people use to make sense of their relationships. In his book, *Love is a Story; a new theory of relationships*, Sternberg (1998) identifies 26 different “stories” or narrative plot lines that people construct in order to explain their relationships. He asserts that these stories exert a powerful unconscious influence on reality because they serve to shape our expectations and interactions, and as such, they are tantamount to reality. Sternberg argues that understanding how people “story” their relationships can help us appreciate why people who fight constantly stay together; or why people who appear to have ideal relationships split up unexpectedly. Conversely, when stories don’t match, unions are fragile and destined to break apart.

Empirical testing of Sternberg’s love story model on Yale University undergraduates, set out to establish internal and external validation for Sternberg's love story model (Sternberg, Hojjat, & Barnes, 2001). The results of both studies were published in the same paper (Sternberg, Hojjat, & Barnes, 2001). The first study attempted to establish internal validation for the story clusters identified by Sternberg (1995, 1997, 1998) by

recruiting 105 individuals enrolled in an introductory psychology course at Yale University. Study participants completed a questionnaire called the "Love Stories Scale" (Sternberg, 1996) designed to assess for internal consistency and reliability of the typology of love stories identified by Sternberg (1995, 1997, 1998). The study demonstrated internal consistency across story types, and produced evidence for the grouping of stories into adaptive and maladaptive clusters; however, while maladaptive stories were shown to be productive of dissatisfaction, adaptive stories were not always linked with increased relationship satisfaction. Sternberg, Hojjat and Barnes (2001) suggest that this might be due to the small sample size and note that future research with a larger sample size might demonstrate a correlation between satisfaction and adaptive story type.

The second study involved 86 Yale University undergraduates, representing 43 heterosexual couples in a relationship for at least a year and was intended to measure external validity. The study found a statistically significant correlation between the love stories of relationship partners. Furthermore, the study also found that partners with more similar love stories were more satisfied with their relationship, based on assessment with paper and pencil questionnaires.

Overall, empirical testing shows promise for the love story theory as a helpful way to understand relationships and the patterns of satisfaction within relationships, although the authors (Sternberg, Hojjat, & Barnes, 2001) caution that the theory does not offer a complete account of love and requires the addition of structural theories such as Sternberg's (1988) triangular theory of love as scaffolding.

## **Attachment Theory**

Developmental researchers have looked at love as an attachment process that mirrors the parent-child bond (Ainsworth, 1978; Bowlby, 1969, 1979). Alternatively, social psychologists have also defined love as being akin to friendship (Barelds & Barelds-Dijkstra, 2007). In particular, Barelds and Barelds-Dijkstra (2007) explored whether relationships that begin in friendship are stronger than those that begin with passion, and whether partners who are more similar to each other have better relationship outcomes. In their article, *Love at first sight or friends first*, Barelds and Barelds-Dijkstra (2007) examined whether similarity is important in marital satisfaction. Although they found that "friends first" relationships are more similar in personality, this similarity was not related to higher relational satisfaction. In addressing this conundrum, Barelds & Barelds-Dijkstra (2007) suggest the most important aspect of whether a relationship works is not the personality traits of partners, or whether the relationship is high in passion or high in companionate love, but rather the shared sense of similarity between partners. It appears that *perception* of similarity is more important to outcome than *actual* similarity. As well, their research suggested that the presence of passion may play a mitigating factor in dissimilar partners, leading to greater satisfaction overall. It may be that as Sternberg (1998) suggests, many different stories or narrative plot lines can work, if they are shared and co-constructed by loving partners. Thus it may not so much be a formula or a winning combination but perhaps some common meaning making strategies that lead to lasting/satisfying relationships.

Attachment style has also been used extensively to explain different "love styles" within our significant relationships. Drawing from Bowlby's (1969,1979) and Ainsworth,

Blehar, Waters, and Wall's (1978) work on how early patterns of mother-infant interaction translate into adult love styles within intimate relationships, researchers Shaver & Hazan (1988) begin by asserting that "Love, in particular, is more than a feeling; it is complex tendency to think and act in certain ways toward another person" (p.477). They noted that the three different patterns of attachment identified by Ainsworth and et al. (1978), namely, secure attachment, anxious/ambivalent attachment and avoidant attachment, are also evident in adult romantic relationships and impact significantly on the trajectory of these relationships (Hazan and Shaver, 1987; Shaver & Hazan, 1988). In their studies, Hazan and Shaver (1987; Shaver & Hazan, 1988) studied the three types of attachment style identified by Ainsworth et al (1978) in adults using two adult samples, one averaging 36 years of age and the other a sample of 18-year old college freshmen. They predicted that if the theory of attachment and research performed on infants and young children held true, adults in their study would vary in significant respects based on their descriptions of their relationship with their parents, self and others and accounts of their meaningful romantic relationships. Their findings (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) supported their predictions and they found that securely attached individuals tended to describe their love relationships in terms of friendship, happiness and trust, while anxious/ambivalent individuals fell in love easily and experienced relationships characterized by highs and lows, fears of abandonment, jealousies and intense sexual desire, and avoidant individuals tended to fear relationships, romanticize independence and believe that relationships rarely last (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Shaver & Hazan, 1988).

Attachment theory may provide a good basis for understanding adult romantic attachments as it is represented in the romantic styles of adults in romantic relationships

in similar ratios as it is found in the initial attachment patterns of infants and mothers (Kobak & Sceery, 1988). Additionally, proponents of the attachment model (Shaver & Hazan, 1988) attest that their “attachment-theoretical” approach to understanding love offers several advantages over existing theories, such as the ability of the theory to address numerous research questions about the function, dynamics, origins and developmental trajectories of love; the ability to address the connection between love and anxiety and love and loss; the ability to place love within a biological context and make the link between human love and other primates; and finally, offer a broad perspective on love that encompasses many different forms of love found in human relationships and thus can be utilized to understand the many facets of love over the lifespan.

Although attachment theory draws attention to role that personal history plays in the formation of close relationships, and can help us understand how pre-existing vulnerabilities contribute to marital problems, one criticism leveled at attachment style is that an analysis of attachment styles does not shed much light on how marriages change over time. Importantly, attachment style also does not predict divorce or marital instability (McNulty, O’Mara & Karney, 2008). However, attachment theory does figure prominently in empirically supported couples’ therapy approaches, such as Emotion focussed therapy, (Greenberg & Johnson, 1988; Johnson, 2008) which draws upon knowledge of the attachment system to bring attention to the underlying dynamics that couples present with in therapy.

### **Self-Differentiation and Love**

In contrast to attachment theory, psychologist, sex therapist and researcher David Schnarch (1991, 1998) suggests that the enduring and passionate relationship requires

that partners become adults and learn to soothe their own feelings through adaptive self-regulation strategies and retain a sense of self in the presence of the other. His relationship model, based on Bowen's (1976, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988) theory of differentiation, encourages partners to develop a sense of separateness that allows for the sustenance of a passionate bond and supports individual growth over the imposition of sameness, which often kills passion. Schnarch drew upon Bowen's theory, which is a systemic approach to family therapy that encourages autonomy seeking (differentiation) in family members in order to promote healthy functioning, to advise couples looking to regain the passion and intimacy in their marriage to take responsibility for their own happiness and differentiate themselves in order to truly connect with each other. While attachment theory might be construed as a bid for partners to have an emotionally corrective experience that compensates for childhood disappointments, Schnarch's model of marriage prizes the quest for autonomy and freedom over the need for security and safety that characterizes many relationships. In Schnarch's view, sexual dysfunction and intimacy issues in couples are deemed a result of emotional fusion, which refers to overly enmeshed patterns of interaction within couples that reflect a lack of differentiation. His theory calls for couples to develop healthy self-differentiation within their primary relationship which involves emotional risk taking in order to grow and expand intimacy (Schnarch, 1991, 1998).

### **State of the Union**

Some researchers have noted that despite the proliferation of research into marriage, the accumulation of studies has done little to advance an understanding of how marriages endure, become more or less satisfying over time, or how they unravel, because they lack



a unified knowledge base (McNulty, O'Mara & Karney, 2008). Taken as a whole, more than 200 variables have been postulated by researchers as being potential indicators of marital satisfaction and stability (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). This speaks to the lack of consensus within the field regarding what factors contribute to marital success.

Researchers have looked at cognitions, emotions, attitudes, behaviors, and key concepts such as “we-ness” (Reid & Fergus, 2001; Reid et al, 2006 ) spousal support, (Verhofstadt, Buysse, Ickes, Davis & Devoldre, 2008; Pearlin & McCall, 1990), love narratives (Sternberg, 1998; Buehlman, Gottman & Katz, 1992; Carrere, Buehlman, Gottman, Coan & Ruckstuhl, 1999) and the predictive role played by marital interactions (Gottman, 1991,1993, 1995; Gottman, Coan, Carrere & Swanson, 1998; Gottman &Notarius, 2000) to understand how marriages endure or decay over time.

### **Determinants of Divorce**

Despite the difficulties inherent in determining how marriages will grow and evolve over time, the predictors and ramifications of divorce remain a frequent focus in marriage research. Gottman (1991, 1993, 1994; Gottman & Silver, 2012) has made extensive use of ‘love labs’ and game theory in an attempt to isolate spousal behaviors that are predictive of divorce; his research culminated in the creation of “a trust metric,” which is a mathematical formula based upon observation of thousands of couples that he claims is highly accurate in predicting which couples will break up and which will stay together. Gottman argues that “trust” is critical to a successful relationship and that “betrayal,” (which he defines broadly as disloyalty that takes the form of placing other things such as family, work, friends, hobbies, or another lover above the needs of the spouse and marriage) is the culprit when relationships falter (Gottman & Silver, 2012).

Gottman and his colleagues have isolated certain key behaviors that are reliably associated with divorce, such as the ‘contemptuous gaze’ of the wife, which apparently is 90% accurate in predicting which couples will divorce. Four specific negative interactional patterns were identified in couples who would likely divorce: Criticism, defensiveness, contempt and stonewalling (Gottman, 1993, 1994; Gottman & Levenson, 1992, 2000). The ratio of negative to positive interactions also proved to be highly predictive of divorce and marital dissatisfaction (Gottman, 1993, 1994). It was also found that the ability of the male to engage in primarily self-soothing behaviors was more predictive of positive marital outcomes than female self-soothing behaviors or other-soothing behaviors (Gottman & Levenson 1992). In particular, Gottman and colleagues (1998) isolated a specific sequence of events in angry spousal exchanges that were linked with the likelihood of subsequent divorce, which they termed cascade theory. Two sequences were identified in the study, termed “negative affect reciprocity”, meaning that couples either responded negatively in *kind*, which referred to meeting anger with anger, or negatively in *escalation*, which meant that anger was met with contempt. Negativity in kind was common to all marriages, but negativity in escalation was only found in couples who were likely to end up divorced.

There is a growing body of research that suggests that the way the members of a couple talk about their past is predictive of the future of their union (Buehlman, Gottman & Katz, 1992; Carrere, Buehlman, Gottman, Coan & Ruckstuhl, 1999). Specifically, Fincham and Bradbury (1987) found that people are most likely to retrieve memories that are congruent with their current mood. This type of ‘state dependent’ memory recall suggests that the way a couple describes the history of their marriage is colored by their

current feelings about it and thus is both an accurate representation of how they presently feel and a reliable tool for predicting the future of their marriage. Indeed, researchers working with an oral history interview (Krokoff, 1984a) have produced evidence that a couple's view of their past is predictive of their future (Buehlman & Gottman & Katz, 1992). In their article, *Predicting Marital Stability*, Carrere, Buehlman, Gottman, Coan & Ruckstuhl, (2000), report that the perceptions of newlywed spouses, as measured by the oral history interview (OHI), predicted marital stability with 87% accuracy at the 4-6 year point and 81% accuracy at the 7-9 year point. This lends credence to the notion that the way spouses construe and make meaning of the story of their relationship is highly predictive of the course of their relationship.

Gottman and his love labs have made important contributions to our understanding of how marriages evolve and devolve by studying the moment by moment interactions of actual married couples in order to understand how different kinds of marital interactions are connected to the cognitions, emotions and attitudes that play such important roles in marital satisfaction and longevity. By linking interactional patterns with physiological arousal and marital outcome, Gottman and colleagues have been able to show that certain patterns of couple interaction are reliably predictive of whether couples will divorce or remain married (Gottman, 1991, 1993, 1994; Gottman, Coan, Carrere & Swanson, 1998; Gottman & Notarius, 2000; Gottman & Silver, 2012).

In contrast to Gottman's focus on interactional patterns within marriages, social exchange theory, which draws from Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) theory of interdependence, states that relationships prosper and fail as a consequence of an 'unfolding social exchange process' in which individuals are constantly evaluating the

costs and benefits of remaining in a particular relationship. Social exchange theory would predict that marriages would endure so long as the attractions for remaining in the marriage outweighed the costs (barriers) to leaving the marriage. This theory accounts for the possibility of couples remaining in marriages that are unsatisfying, but stable. It can also explain the phenomenon of couples opting to end marriages that are satisfying if the barriers to leaving are insignificant and other opportunities outside the relationship appear more attractive.

### **Positive Illusions and Benevolent Cognitions**

In addition to noting how social appraisals contribute to marital outcomes, researchers have also studied the role cognition plays in marriage. Both positive illusions (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996; Shackelford & Buss, 1997; Huston, Caughlin, Houts, Smith & George, 2001) and benevolent cognitions (McNulty, O'Mara & Karney, 2008) have been posited as factors that increase and maintain marital satisfaction. Essentially, it is proposed that couples who tend to "idealize" their spouses and see them in a more positive light tend to report higher levels of satisfaction over time (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996; Fowers, 2000; Fowers, Lyons, Montel & Shaked, 2001). In a similar vein, attributional theory (Kelley, 1973, Weiner, 1986) suggests that spouses who are able to see their spouse's behaviors and actions in a benevolent manner tend to build up less resentment and remain happier in their relationships (McKulty, O'Mara & Karney, 2008). However, Fincham and Bradbury (1987) contend that spouse's judgments of responsibility mediate the impact of negative attributions on marital satisfaction; in other words, spouses are more inclined to forgive each other when they do not judge hurtful actions as being intentional and deliberate.

McKulty, O'Mara and Karney (2008) also highlight the role that the severity of problems may play in making a determination of the usefulness of benevolent cognitions. Benevolent cognitions are helpful relationship builders when they are directed toward 'small stuff' such failures to take out the trash or remember an anniversary, however benevolent cognitions are a less adaptive strategy when they are used to mask bigger or more persistent problems, such as addiction or emotional abuse which might lead to relationship issues down the road (McKulty, O'Mara & Karney, 2008). Similar caveats are in order regarding the helpfulness of positive illusions in maintaining marital bliss.

Neff and Karney (2005) have identified the dangers inherent in idealizing one's spouse over having a realistic appreciation of them.. While "global adoration" is a feature of all early marriages, "specific accuracy" is more variable and predicts whether the love that exists in the beginning is founded on a firm foundation. The presence of specific accuracy (i.e. whether or not the spouses see each other as they see themselves) is correlated with lower rates of divorce down the road. Thus, it appears that positive illusions are adaptive in a marriage provided they are based upon a kernel of truth; enhancement is advantageous, but utter deception is not (Neff & Karney, 2005).

### **We-ness**

The concept of "we-ness" has also been posited by researchers (Fergus & Reid, 2001; Reid et al., 2006) as an important component of marital success, longevity and adaption over time. In essence, the notion of "we-ness" suggests that the relationship is greater than the sum of its parts and that individual identity encompasses being part of a couple and is constructed within and informed by the context of the relationship. We-ness can be identified in couples' narrative accounts of their relationships and researchers have

devised ways to code transcripts and interviews to assess for the presence of we-ness (Fergus & Reid, 2001; Reid et al., 2006). Fergus and Reid (2001) report that couples who have a strong sense of “we-ness” report higher marital satisfaction and an enhanced ability to be themselves within the marriages (Reid et al., 2008).

Reid et al. (2008) describe the interpersonal processes involved in the creation and maintenance of “we-ness” as being essential to creation and maintenance of strong relational bonds and strengthening these processes within couples is the goal of Systemic-Constructivist Couples Therapy (SCCT) marital therapy. Within SCCT therapy, “we-ness” involves two essential and reciprocal components, which are respectively, reducing one’s tendency to see one’s partner in terms of their differences and increasing one’s tendency to see their relationship as operating as a single unit. Reid et al. (2008) argue that paradoxically, the interconnection of individual identities within an overarching identification of couple identity leads to greater comfort with being “oneself” within the relationship. Reid et al., (2008) conclude that the ability of a couple to draw on a strong sense of “we-ness” tends to promote marital satisfaction and reduce conflict, as partners are adept at being able to “externalize” problems, which leads to increased ability to resolve them.

### **Developmental Perspectives on Marriage**

Marriage has also been conceptualized as series of developmental tasks or stages that must be mastered (Wallerstein, 1994; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996). In an analogous fashion to Erikson’s (1979) psychosocial stages of development, the “good marriage” has been conceptualized as one that is able to rise to the challenge of each “phase” in the marriage without becoming stuck at any given stage. An ability to move through the

inevitable phases of marriage, some of which involve a lessening of passion and excitement, without clinging to the previous phase, is predictive of positive marital outcomes and enhanced satisfaction over time (Wallerstein, 1994, 1996; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996). Conceptualizing marriage as a series of processes instead of essential ingredients represented an alternative to previous views that highlighted the role of key characteristics, such as shared values or the presence of children (Kaslow & Robison, 1996) in creating lasting marriage. Wallerstein & Blakeslee (1996) identified four basic types of marriages, romantic, rescue, companionate and traditional from their qualitative study of long marriages. The four types were described as follows: The "romantic" marriage, which was characterized by ongoing attraction and passion; the "rescue" marriage, in which partners identified strongly with each other because of similar histories which enabled them to understand each other and transcend their pasts; the "companionate" marriage, which was epitomized by equality in all aspects of life; and finally, the "traditional" marriage, which was described as offering comfort and taking care of each other. They also identified nine tasks every marriage must accomplish, regardless of type, culled from observations drawn from their interviews of happy marriages. The nine developmental tasks of marriage are as follows: Separating from family of origin, building togetherness and creating autonomy, becoming parents, coping with crises, making a safe place for conflict, exploring sexual love and intimacy, sharing laughter and keeping interests alive, providing emotional nurturance and preserving a double vision, which refers to the past and present images of the marriage partners hold in their minds that serve as reminder of the good times during difficult times and enable

marriage partners to retain a view of what is good about each other and their marriage even when present reality challenges it (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996).

Other researchers have used a developmental perspective and focused on understanding the emergence of distress and dissatisfaction within marriages (Kurdek, 1999; Huston et al., 2001). Huston and colleagues (2001) studied newlyweds and tried to understand what predicted the state of their marriage 13 years later. They evaluated three models that attempted to predict the course of marriages: the disillusionment model, the emergent distress model and the enduring dynamics model.

Huston's et al. (2001) disillusionment model is based upon the notion that couples begin marriages with 'rose colored' glasses on and see their partner in an idealized way. When the glasses come off and disillusionment sets in, it sets off a dangerous dynamic of doubting the veracity of their initial attraction and decision to wed. This model predicts that in the early stages of courtship, couples behave in ways that are consistent with each other's idealistic views of them, but over time, the mask comes off and mates show their true colors. If the true color varies significantly from the mask, the relationship is vulnerable to dissolution. Huston et al. (2001) assume that the loss of love and the waning of the initial attraction are normative events that are not, in themselves, responsible for the demise of marital satisfaction. Instead, this model suggests that it is the expression of negativity over time that contributes to the emergence of marital dissatisfaction. Essentially, the expression of negativity begets more negativity until couples find themselves trapped in a negative spiral.

Finally, the enduring dynamics model (Huston et al., 2001) holds that the early dynamics of a couple are predictive of the course of a marriage. The key idea here is that



the seed of trouble will be there from the start; thus, the beginning predicts the end. A close analysis of the dynamics of the early interaction style of a couple will foreshadow their ultimate path.

Developmental perspectives have also been used to understand the ebb and flow of satisfaction within marriage. Anderson, Russell, and Schumm (1983) focused on tracking the course of satisfaction over the trajectory of marriages in terms of key events and developmental milestones and found that marital satisfaction tended to decline with the birth of the first child and then edge up (although not to original levels) when the last child leaves home. The finding that children are not linked to greater marital satisfaction is relatively robust within the literature (Bradbury, 1998, Bradbury, Fincham & Beach, 2000). Research studies have also established that marriages that endure tend to get better over time, “in old-old age, almost all of these people said their marriages were as good as or better than earlier” (Weishaus & Field, 1988, p.771). Similarly, Gagnon, Hersen, Kabacoff, & Van Hasselt (1999) report that marital satisfaction tends to follow a curvilinear pattern, with a high peak in satisfaction initially, a dip in the middle period and a spike back up in later years (1999). O’Rourke & Cappeliez (2005) also find a tendency to “aggrandize” satisfaction with marriage in later years, but they also found a strong tendency for older married adults to dismiss negative memories and positively skew their recollections of marriage to fit with their idealized views.

In contrast to the previous studies (Weishaus & Field, 1983; O’Rourke & Cappeliez, 2005; Scarf, 2008) citing increases in marital satisfaction over time, Lasswell & Petersen (1981) reported mixed patterns of satisfaction in older marriages. Weishaus and Field (1988) reported on popular press surveys of married couples who were asked if they

would do it again, and noted that the results of such informal surveys have often been negatively skewed, with the majority of long married people responding that they would not do it again, given the chance.

Journalist Maggie Scarf (2008) wrote a book based upon a series of in-depth interviews she conducted with seven couples, all married for over two decades. In her book she reveals the surprising benefits of remaining married later in life. What Scarf found was that couples who were able to successfully navigate through the difficult times in their marriage to arrive at the “golden years” reaped many benefits in terms of increased happiness, meaning and even passion. Much like accruing interest, investing in a marriage appears to “compound” over the years and pay back the partners in rich dividends. Scarf challenges some of the cultural trends that disparage the value of marriage in favour of less conventional arrangements. Remaining married allowed the participants in Scarf’s study to share some of the wisdom and enhanced ability to live in the now that middle age and beyond brings to people. Many of the bumps in the road smoothed out and couples that once did not find time for each other moved into a new phase of really valuing their partnership again and encouraging each other toward the accomplishment of new goals and passions.

### **Spousal Support**

The importance of receiving support in marriage has been well documented (Bradbury & Karney, 2004) but research has yet to identify the specific micro level processes that either advance or hinder the provision of spousal support. In order to enhance understanding of the complex, sequential steps in the giving and receiving of support identified in the literature (Pearlin & McCall, 1990), Verhostadt et al. (2008) wanted to

identify the specific contributions of both emotional similarity and empathic accuracy to the provision of spousal support in their study of spousal support.

Verhofstadt, et al. (2008) addressed both concept and process variables in spousal support by using marital interactions to investigate the role of emotional similarity and empathic accuracy to assess how they impact upon the provision of spousal support. Using a laboratory experiments, researchers randomly assigned 30 couples to 1 of 2 conditions in a factorial design to examine the micro processes that aid or inhibit the provision of spousal support. “Emotional similarity” is defined as the tendency for a target to experience similar affective states when observing a distressed person’s emotional response to stimuli. Emotional similarity should culminate in support provision by alerting spouses to the need for support when they observe distress in their spouse (Verhostadt et al., 2008). As well, emotional similarity will make it more likely that the interventions offered by spouses will be fitting and well timed. “Empathic accuracy” is a cognitive construct that draws upon the ability to accurately infer another’s emotional state by correctly identifying the specific content of their thoughts and feelings (Ickes, 1993). Empathic accuracy contributes to spousal support by giving support providers accurate information regarding the feelings and thoughts of the support seeker, thus facilitating the likelihood of helpful support provision. Both emotional similarity and empathic accuracy were identified as being important in the provision of helpful spousal support while the lack of emotional similarity & accuracy were correlated with the provision of “negative support” (Verhostadt, et al., 2008).

## **Narrative Perspectives**

Narrative perspectives and conceptions of narrative truth inform the present study and will be discussed here to orient the reader to the implicit assumptions that guide this research. There is a growing body of research suggesting that people understand and make meaning of their lives in a storied form (Bruner, 1986, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988; White & Epsen, 1990; McAdams, 1993; Angus et al., 1999). Thus, when asking people to account for having remained married, we are asking them to create a cogent narrative that organizes their experience of being married in time and makes meaning of it, as such, in telling about how they have remained married, people “create” the reasons more than they “discover” them. In his paper, *The Narrative Creation of Self*, Bruner (2002) poses the intriguing question: ‘Why do we tell ourselves about ourselves? What function does such self-telling serve?’ Bruner is quick to dismiss the cherished notion that there is some essential, core self, awaiting discovery. Instead, he boldly proposes that the thing we refer to as our ‘self’ is continuously constructed and reconstructed according to the demands of the moment. In fact, one could argue “telling oneself about oneself is like making up a story about who and what we are, what’s happened, and why we’re doing what we’re doing.” Through narrative, human beings are able link events together temporally and create a sense of self coherence (Angus & Kagan, 2013). Narrative practices are intimately connected with identity because “a person’s self-narrative provides the context in which the happenings and events of his or her life takes on meaning” (Polkinghorne, 2004). The collaborative nature of selfhood is highlighted by Bruner (2002) who notes that self-making is very much a public endeavor.

An important assumption in the narrativist tradition is the idea that people construct personal meanings, and Mascolo and Pollack (1997) put forth the following definition of constructivism: “Constructivism consists of the proposition that meaning is a constructed product of human activity rather than an innate characteristic of the mind or an inherent property of objects or events in the world” (p.1). Narrative informed therapy (Angus & Greenberg, 2011) rests on the notion of ‘humans as meaning seekers’, which is to suggest that our interaction with the world is based upon the significances and interpretations we accord to our experiences. Thus, our lives acquire purpose via the selection and placement of events within a self-devised thematic framework of meaning. From a narrative, constructivist perspective (Angus & Greenberg, 2011, McAdams, 1993; White & Epsom, 1990) we are always involved in the recursive loop, anticipating possible endings and going backwards to create coherent chains of significance that will ground the possible outcome. We produce chains of evidence to make the case we want to make, and pick the clues according to what we have decided the mystery is (White & Epsom, 1990; McLeod, 2001; Angus & Greenberg, 2011).

Ever since the narrative or “interpretative turn” (Angus & McLeod, 2004; Geertz, 1973, 1983), the search for meaning has been viewed as central to human endeavours by social scientists. The outcome of this move toward the power of human perception to shape experience resulted in a deeper appreciation for the role of creative interpretation in human affairs (Kelley, 1955; Gendlin, 1962). To some extent, the question of ‘what’ constitutes reality was replaced by an interest in ‘how’ people go about constructing their worlds and with this shift, processes replaced entities as the subject of research. New metaphors for the self reflect this primacy of process by referring to a self that is

dynamic, evolving and fluid (Hoskins & Leseho, 1996; Greenberg & Angus, 2004). Increasingly, the narrative view of self has focused upon the multiplicity of the self, and the self as an author of all possible selves (Kelly, 1955; Gergen, 1985; Hermans, 1996). As such, the post modern and constructivist models view the self as an active, agentic participant in the co-construction of identity and meaning (Mahoney, 1991; Hoskins & Leseho, 1996; Greenberg & Angus, 2004). Greenberg & Angus (2004) suggest that a narrative process model addresses the "narrative organization of emotional experience." As such, it is the articulation of personal intentions, purposes, expectations, hopes and desires in relation to emotionally salient personal stories that allow us to give sense to our experiences in terms of what they represent to us and reveal about us (Greenberg & Angus, 2004). Emotions acquire full meaning when they are storied; stories attain significance when they contain important emotions (Angus & Greenberg, 2011) and it is the integration of both narrative and emotion processes that engenders new meaning making and adaptive action tendencies. A given marriage narrative reflects different options for meaning making and in turn, helps to create the meaning that key events and concepts hold for the narrator.

Bruner refers to the self as a co-construction. Self making, he attests, is a public endeavour, mediated by the individual and the society and their combined influence (Bruner, 2002). More and more, the interplay of connected systems has been factored into our growing understanding of the narrative construction of the self (Mahoney, 1991) and its endeavors and relationships. This viewpoint is shared by many proponents working within the narrative (Angus, Hardtke & Levitt, 1999; Bruner, 1986, 2002; Polkinghorne, 1988, 2004) and social constructionist tradition (Gergen, 1985; Mahoney,

1991). Essentially, the narrative position is that identity is a project people work on their entire lives (McAdams & Janis, 2004) and that the self functions like a story we tell in order to make meaning and achieve a sense of coherence (Bruner, 2002; McAdams, 2006). As applied to how people tell other people about the story of their marriage, this means that the accounts people offer about their marriage reflect a co-construction of experience that takes place between the interviewer and the interviewee (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Angus & Hardtke, 1994; Angus et al, 1999; McAdams & Janis, 2004). The newer, constructionist paradigms refer to the self as a 'system' that serves to organize, filter and make meaning of experience (Kelly, 1955; Rogers, 1961, 1980; Greenberg & Angus, 2004).

### **Narrative Truth**

Narrative theorists, in the main, hold two divergent views on the nature of the relationship between event and meaning. Some theorists (Freedman & Combs, 1996) maintain a completely arbitrary relationship between events and interpretations. The strong position of social constructionism favored by Freedman & Combs takes a pragmatic view of truth as being whatever works to help author a more life-giving reality for people. No one story has a greater truth claim than any other, but some stories are more 'useful' than others (Angus & McLeod, 2004).

Other theorists (e.g. White & Epsom, 1990) place more limits on the scope of interpretation, suggesting that events contain a range of meanings that can be attached to them, but we do not have unlimited freedom to re-story our experiences; each 'picture' can only accept a given selection of reframes. Nonetheless, regardless of whether narrative theorists uphold a strong or weak sense of social constructionism, the narrative

therapy perspective maintains we are still free to trade constrictive, limiting narratives for more empowering and liberating alternatives and further, that all “truth” is derived from narrative. Our interpretation of events impacts upon past, present and future events and thus we are always engaged in the creation of self-fulfilling prophecies that serve to shape the stories we tell.

### **Qualitative Studies on Long Term Marriage**

Although there has not been a great deal of qualitative research into the factors associated with long term marriage, there have been a number of qualitative studies that used interviews as part of their methods to examine enduring marriage and marital satisfaction (Klagsbrun, 1985; Lauer & Lauer, 1986; McKey & O'Brien, 1995; Alford-Cooper, 1998; Sharlin, Kaslow, & Hammerschmidt, 2000; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996; Banchard & Carron, 2001). While there are qualitative components to the previously listed studies, most have been mixed methods, with interviews nested within studies that also incorporated questionnaires and relationship inventories to assess marital satisfaction and account for longevity. Even the strictly qualitative study by Banchard & Carron (2001) based some of their interview questions on factors identified from previous research (i.e. age at marriage, children, religion, parental role models).

Klagsbrun (1985) interviewed 87 middle-class married couples and reported eight characteristics of the long married, which included luck, the ability to change and adapt to change, the ability to live with the unchangeable, assumption of permanence, trust, balance of dependencies, enjoyment of each other, and a cherished shared history. Lauer and Lauer (1986), using a similar criteria and method to Klagsbrun (1985) interviewed 351 couples of mid to upper socio-economic class, married for at least 15 years and



identified seven characteristics of the happily married, common to both genders, which included: spouse as a best friend, liking spouse as a person, marriage as a long-term commitment, marriage as a sacred institution, agreement on aims and goals, spouses becoming more interesting to each other, and wanting the relationship to succeed.

Mckey and O'Brien (1995) interviewed 60 couples who married during the 1940s 1950s and 1960s, with the aim of understanding how their marriages had progressed and developed over the years. They found no relation of satisfaction to gender, age, years married or number of children. Husbands tended to be more positive about the relationship than wives. Mckey and O'Brien identified five factors that were common to the marriages they studied: Containment of conflict, mutuality of decision-making, quality of communication, relational values of trust, respect, understanding and equity, and sexual and psychological intimacy.

Alford - Cooper (1998) studied 576 couples in Long Island New York who were still married after 50 years in order to gain an understanding of the components of the enduring marriage. Alford-Cooper gathered life stories about how couples met and married, dealt with difficulties and obstacles and how the relationships had survived and their advice to young couples getting married today. They found that love kept happy couples together while children kept unhappy couples together. This finding was echoed in the research by Sharlin, Kaslow and Hammerstein (2000) who interviewed a non-clinical sample of 610 married or cohabiting couples in Sweden to identify which attributes of lasting marriage contributed to their ability to surmount challenges and obstacles. 21% of spouses in Alford-Cooper's (1998) study reported that they had contemplated divorce at one point in their marriage but it wasn't an option. Alford-

Cooper (1998) identified three groupings of related characteristics from eight relationship components that emerged from their study. Group one was comprised of trust, a loving relationship and the willingness to compromise. Group two was comprised of mutual respect, need for each other and compatibility. Group three was comprised of children and good communication. The most frequently added characteristic not contained within any grouping was a sense of humor.

Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1996) used an alternative approach to previous research that had focused on identifying the factors and components of enduring marriage and conceptualized marriage as a series of processes rather. Their research represented a shift away from static unchanging attributes and ingredients toward a view of marriage as a set of dynamic and changing processes. In their study (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996) they interviewed and observed 50 married couples who were married for at least nine years, had a least one child, classified their marriage as happy and were willing to be interviewed both individually and jointly. The average age of their participants was 48 years, the average length of time married was 21 years. Their study identified four types of marriages. They also identified the nine tasks of marriage that were listed earlier in this chapter, under the subheading of developmental models of marriage.

Parker (2002) critically reviews the existing literature on enduring marriage and highlights the diversity of studies on marital longevity and the inherent complexity of identifying a core ingredient found in all instances of lasting marriage. She also suggests that conceptualizing lasting marriage as a series of processes better captures the variety of ways to stay married that are depicted in the literature.

## **Rationale for the Present Study**

As this literature review shows, the body of research on lasting marriage is vast and addresses many common sense notions about what might underlie the lasting marriage. The contributions of trust, support, marital interactions and the role of conflict and negativity have all been studied, primarily quantitatively by utilizing a battery of questionnaires, and self report inventories (Gottman, 1991, 1993; Karney & Bradbury ; Lauer & Lauer & Kerr, 1990;1995; Verhofstadt, Buysse, Ickes, Davis & Devoldre, 2008; Weishaus & Field, 1988). Developmental models that conceptualize marriage as a series of tasks to be mastered (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996) have also been put forth. Gottman and colleagues have added to an understanding of marital dynamics by looking at marriage in terms of the micro-processes that underpin communication and conflict resolution (Gottman, 1991, 1993; Gottman & Notarius, 2000).

The other avenue of inquiry is to actually interview people in lasting marriages and inquire about what they believe accounts for their ability to remain married. Although a number of researchers have interviewed married people in order to develop an understanding of the factors that contribute to lasting marriage (Alford & Cooper, 1998;Klagsbrun,1985; Laurer & Laurer, 1986; Mackey & O'Brien, 1995; Sharlin, Kaslow & Hammerschmidt, 2000),what distinguishes the present study from previous qualitative studies on marriage is the focus on asking couples what they feel accounts for the longevity of their marriage in the age of divorce, the focus on longevity alone, apart from considerations of happiness, and the choice to interview only one representative from each marriage in order to maximize the potential for candor. The homogenous, Caucasian, Western, educated, mid-upper class socio-economic demographic sample was

chosen deliberately because high divorces rates are very prevalent in this group and thus studying examples from this demographic who have remained married promises to help us understand how they are able to do so when so many others in this group are not able to remain married.

By contrast, other qualitative studies on lasting marriage have conflated happiness with longevity by interviewing couples who identified as being happy and focusing on how partners achieve a happy marriage, and what factors spouses identify as having been important in good marriages (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996; Banchard & Carron, 2001). Conversely, the present study is interested in whether there are dimensions of longevity that apply to *all* instances of long term marriages, irrespective of perceptions of happiness. Researchers Hicks and Platt (1970) highlighted the fact that researchers had focused on measuring the marital bond by assessing only happiness in marriage and ignoring the theoretical importance and interest of the stable, but unhappy marriage. In order to tap into these dimensions, the present study has endeavoured to include representatives of both happy and unhappy marriages in the sample. One of the research questions underpinning the present study is whether there is a common element that unites every instance of long term marriage, apart from estimations of marital satisfaction, or whether there are distinctly different paths to the same destination.

### **Rationale for a Qualitative Study**

While quantitative research is crucial for the measuring of pre-defined constructs, qualitative research helps to assess the validity of our instruments, enabling the accounts of those in long term marriages to create their own definitional categories of the phenomenon in question. An inquiry into the nature of the enduring marriage is well

served by in-depth explorations into the manner in which people account for, make sense of and express their long-standing marriages. A qualitative study of enduring marriage is beneficial for several reasons. Firstly, to gain a better grasp of the multidimensional character and complexity inherent to marriage, greater focus on the meaning structures of people in long marriages is required. Secondly, given that the existing indicators currently utilized to predict or identify enduring relationships fail to give a sense of the gestalt of the experience of an enduring marriage for those in them, a qualitative account promises to enrich our understanding of the actual experience of being in a long marriage and its meaning to the participants. Thirdly, great attention has been accorded to the components hypothesized to contribute to lasting marriage, but less research has been focused on understanding the stories and themes and narrative structure that underlie the individual experience of being in an enduring marriage. There are some exceptions, (Klagsbrun, 1985; Lauer & Lauer, 1986; McKey & O'Brien; 1995, Alford-Cooper, 1998; Sharlin, Kaslow, & Hammerschmidt, 2000; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996; Banchard & Carron 2001) and these studies are examples of qualitative studies that have attempted to look at the narratives and meanings that married people assign to their union. Further, while there has been some speculation and inquiry into personality variables that increase the likelihood of a remaining married over time (i.e., attachment style, neuroticism, openness to experience), the goal of the current study is to highlight the recurrent themes in narratives of enduring marriages, tease apart notions of longevity and happiness by including unhappy lasting marriages within the sample under scrutiny and trace common trajectories.

To date, the majority of studies on marital satisfaction & longevity have been quantitative studies (Bradbury & Karney 2004) and the number of qualitative studies utilizing interviews and qualitative analyses (Klagsbrun, 1985; Laurer & Laurer, 1986; Mackey & O'Brien, 1995; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996; Alford -Cooper, 1998; Sharlin, Kaslow & Hammerschmidt, 2000; Banchard & Carron, 2001) remains relatively small. Thus, a further rationale for the present study is that more of such interview based qualitative studies are needed in order to keep pace with the changing perceptions and accounts of lasting marriage, as well as to validate or challenge existing qualitatively derived models of enduring marriage.

Given these considerations, an intensive grounded theory analysis of 11 interviews was conducted with the aim of achieving a greater understanding of shared marriage narratives.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Methodology and Method**

#### **The Relationship Between Methodology and Method**

It is important to articulate an understanding of what method consists of, as applied to qualitative research. It is particularly necessary to identify whether method is to be understood as a procedural prescription or a philosophical approach to understanding data or a combination of both. Given that all philosophical approaches to knowing and understanding have an implicit procedural message, it seems most fitting to view qualitative research methods as a combination of procedure and epistemology. However, while the specific methods and procedures I am using are derived from Strauss and Glaser's (1969) Grounded Theory, the overarching philosophical scaffolding I have utilized is disclosed subjectivity and reflexivity as described in Rennie's *Methodical Hermeneutics* (MH:2007; 2012). I am also drawing on the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer (1989) as it offers an excellent perspective on the nature of the interaction between researcher and subject that privileges the interpretative aspect of understanding. For Gadamer, hermeneutics is not as much a method as it is "a fluid set of guiding principles aiding the human search for truth in the concealed forgetfulness of language" (Regan, 2012, p. 291).

Throughout the analysis of my data, I was aware of my engagement in the hermeneutic circle of making meaning and then reflecting upon the meanings I have made and wondering about the assumptions I made to generate those meanings. This stance toward understanding follows the tradition of Gadamer's (1989) hermeneutics. Implicit within the notion of the hermeneutic circle is the supposition of circularity; there

is no beginning and no end. In fact, everything loops back on itself and it is not so much as search for first truths as it is a process of continually moving forward and backward within a circular process. All of these concentric circles around a subject matter amount to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under scrutiny. It is my hope that my repeated analyses of my data have yielded a more nuanced and satisfying understanding of the elements that married people feel are important to their having been able to remain married.

### **Methodical Hermeneutics**

In order to ask and answer the question of how those in enduring marriages account for their longevity, I wanted to choose a method that would privilege the personal accounts of participants and treat their stories as meaningful data to interpret. Qualitative research strategies uphold the idea that interviewing people about their experiences is a valid way to increase our knowledge of the human condition (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). In essence, the aim of this study is to extract the shared themes from within the personal accounts of respondents. In addition to Gadamer's (2004a) philosophical hermeneutics, the procedures of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) the comprehensive methodology I will be employing in the present study is what Rennie has described as 'methodical hermeneutics' (MH; Rennie, 1998, 1999, 2000a, 2007a, 2012; Rennie & Fergus, 2006).

Methodical hermeneutics has four main components: rhetoric, induction and abduction, critical realism and disclosed reflexivity (Rennie, 2000a, 2007a). Rhetoric is an aspect of all scientific discourse and all forms of argument; however, it is particularly crucial in subjective inquiries, such as qualitative research, wherein the reader is



convinced of the author's perspective through the employment of linguistic strategies that appeal to credibility. Although the term "rhetoric" is defined as "language designed to have a persuasive or impressive effect on its audience, but often regarded as lacking in sincerity or meaningful content," (Webster's New World College Dictionary) it is important to denote that this is not how Rennie is using the term rhetoric. In MH, rhetoric must be grounded in the researcher's conscientious intent to strive for honesty and rigor. The use of induction and abduction, disclosed reflexivity and the philosophical position of critical realism creates the scaffolding for the qualitative researcher's use of rhetoric.

Rennie's formulation of MH draws upon the work of Peirce (1965), who attested that science utilizes the processes of induction, which is the gathering of new facts about a phenomenon of interest, and the process of abduction, which involves using creativity to create plausible explanations to account for the surprising new facts researchers uncover through their inductive inquiry. For example, scientists discover that people who smoke frequently get lung cancer and hypothesize that nicotine is a carcinogen. Peirce's theory of inference runs counter to the commonly held belief that scientific inquiry proceeds through a reciprocal process of induction and deduction. In Peirce's view, deduction is a tautology, which is a form of logic wherein the premise contains the conclusion and thus cannot derive any new knowledge. The interplay of induction and abduction, by means of contrast, is a fluid and discovery-oriented process that allows for the acquisition of new knowledge and the creation of new theory. Given the reciprocal relationship between induction (the collection of new information about a phenomenon of interest) and abduction (the attempt to account for surprising findings and make sense of new information by creating/abstracting new hypotheses), there is a self-correcting capacity in

Peirce's theory of inference that ensures new theory is able to account for new facts and known facts, whilst staying grounded. In qualitative research, the interplay between the meaning of a specific passage and the gestalt of the text illustrates an analogous process, according to Rennie (2000a), who argues that grounded theory possesses an internally validating and self-correcting capacity inherent within the methodology that can be trusted to ensure a valid interpretation of the text. The qualitative researcher is constantly comparing the specific passages of text he is analyzing to the whole of the text in order to assess for the overall fit of a postulated category. If the category is deemed generally applicable, it is retained; if it has only narrow applicability it is revised, subsumed or discarded to better represent the meaning of the text as a whole. This is a similar notion to that of recapitulation in biology, wherein each species mimics the evolution of all species in its development, or to the hermeneutic circle, which suggests that interpretation of specifics is always informed by a sense of the whole and visa versa.

Epistemologically, MH expresses the mid-ground between realism and relativism best encapsulated by the position of critical realism, a position first put forth by Bhaskar (1975) which offers the soundest philosophical foundation for the grounded theory method, according to Rennie (2007a). Critical realism upholds the existence of an external reality that is outside of man's interpretative frame while rejecting the notion of a one-to-one match between any given perceptions of that reality. A grounded theory approach, governed by methodical hermeneutics, supposes nothing except that people are capable of telling us something genuine and important about a phenomenon they experience and that a conscientious researcher is capable of capturing some of this lived experience and expressing an understanding of it which will resonate with others who

share in a similar lived experience. There is no need to arrive at a “final” truth; the goal is to reach a plausible understanding of the phenomenon in question, by honoring and explicating the context of both the researcher and the phenomenon of interest.

The interplay between induction and abduction and subjectivity and objectivity is aided by the activity of disclosed reflexivity (Rennie, 2007a). In order to assure the disclosure of reflexivity and subjective bias, the researcher must locate themselves and their interpretative framework within the phenomenon they are seeking to understand. Disclosure of personal context, experience and vicarious experience all factor into the subjective lens of the researcher. To the extent the researcher is able to discuss how their own interpretative framework impacts on their analysis, the reader is able to understand and appreciate the interplay between the analysis, the researcher and the data. Rennie, (2000a) writes that there is a double hermeneutic quality to this methodology. The researcher interprets the text, but must also be sensitized to the lens through which the participant filters his or her reality. Thus, interpretation occurs at multiple levels and it is always looping back on itself, to observe how it is observing.

Further to that, the researcher must also be cognizant of how he is interpreting the material. A keen awareness of one’s own processes of interpretation is necessary for truly rigorous qualitative research. The more a researcher is willing and able to understand their own definitional categories, and the idiosyncratic ways they process information, the keener their analysis will be. Grounded theory and constructivist grounded theory in particular, acknowledges the inevitability of researcher subjectivity (Charmaz, 2000). Qualitative research as an enterprise offers a way of resisting the human tendency to seek premature closure and certainty by endorsing an open ended approach. It is a way of

straddling the paradox of needing closure while simultaneously seeking new ways for understanding our world by allowing for the emergence of new information. As such, a qualitative methodology is ideally suited for the present study which will attempt to look at the long-standing institution of marriage with new eyes, in order to evolve a more complete understanding of how the lasting marriage endures, apart from whether the marriage is deemed happy or not by those in it.

### **Use of Reflexivity Within the Current Study**

In the context of the current study, I began to wake up to the awareness that in my conscientious attempt to be objective and simply use description to represent client narratives and meanings, I was losing the texture and richness of the verbatim accounts. At this point, I paused in my analysis and, with the encouragement of my committee, I set out to capture what the data had announced to me when I first conducted and then read through the interviews. I began to sort the data again, focusing on what Gadamer (1989) calls “an aesthetic experience” which is best explained as the shared human experience of being struck or moved in a visceral manner. By respecting the call to notice the parts of the interviews that spoke to me at a deeper level, I engaged in the hermeneutic act of advancing my understanding by following what “announced itself”(Hillman, 1982) to me from the outset of beginning this project.

Jardine (2006) draws attention to the importance of the choice of topic in hermeneutics; within our topic of interest is the buried map for discovering how to traverse it. There is a recognition of the fact that housed within our fascination with a research topic is a world of ‘entailments’ –of subtle yet shared experiences that make up the world as we know it and feel it to be. With regard to the topic of marriage, I implicitly

drew on my experience of being married and divorced, which includes the sense of marriage being difficult and challenging to maintain. I also drew on my experience of being part of a society that views marriage as part of the natural order of things, a rite of passage, and a desirable state of being that people aspire to. All of these subtle and not so subtle entailments factored into my choice of topic and my approach to understanding the data I collected. This implicit world of entailments and relations that we all participate in, guides method. There is no view from nowhere and no way to escape the familiarity of a world that has its own narrative structure and announces itself to us through our shared human history of repeated ritual. Wittgenstein (1968) calls this shared understanding “family resemblance” and it unites us all through our familiarity in with analogous experiences, the sense of understanding we intuitively feel when hearing stories that resonate. There was no doubt to me that my interviewees had shared important knowledge with me and educated and informed me in ways I had not anticipated. Early in my theoretical memoing, I had written notes about the idea that the key paradox my participants were struggling to resolve was having chosen to restrict their freedom (through marriage) while at the same time valuing freedom. A common theme in all of the interviews was the assertion that marriage was not stopping my study participants from doing anything they wanted to do. This early observation continued to be grounded in the data as the GTM analysis continued and deepened and eventually it informed the core category. While there is no "rule" in qualitative research concerning at what point a core category emerges, I felt uneasy about coming back to what had first occurred to me and it caused me to doubt myself, necessitating some retracing of the ground I had already covered. My challenge was to embrace my own subjectivity, my idiosyncratic

way of knowing and understanding and to allow my 'horizon of understanding' (Gadamer, 1989) to guide my interpretation. The obstacle I faced was the naive belief that I could look at the narratives of my participants by detaching them from the web of meanings in which they were situated. Jardine (2006) cautions against this stance, "I don't know anything. I've never seen it before. It's not mine. It doesn't point to me. I'm not implicated. Severance has freed us from our kinships and dependancies. I'm just an anonymous, replaceable, controllable, predictable, method-weilder now. My only connection to this incident will be forged *after* and *as consequence of* and *solely within the parameters of* my "methodology." (Jardine, 2006, p.7, original italics)

Opening to subjectivity and situating phenomenon within the world they are born in and arise out of is both desirable and necessary in qualitative analyses. It is this complex interplay between objective "grounded" interpretation and the awareness of the inevitability of researcher bias that is the strength and defining characteristic of qualitative research. Initially, in attempting to eliminate my perspective, I cut off the main artery of my knowing and understanding - I conducted the first sort of my data, from a position of forced blindness, what Arendt (1969) termed "abandonment" and "betrayal", from any and all interconnections with my past and present lived experience that the interpretation of the data awoke in me, which left my interpretation absent. I did this because I was keenly aware of my interpretative slant and determined to 'park' all my assumptions. The attempt to do this taught me a number of things about method and methodology that I may not have learnt if hadn't engaged in this misdirected effort to be bias-free. Firstly, there is no view from nowhere. I stand somewhere, historically and personally vis a vis my research subject. Secondly, the attempt to manage subjectivity by

assuming I can control it and determine when it is welcome into my analysis is erroneous. The real control for subjectivity is reflexivity - the breaking down and explicating of my own perspective and its impact on the subject I am studying. Jardine (2006) argues that researcher bias is present from the selection of a research topic and that indeed every researcher is drawn to the topics that have importance to them and "announce" themselves to the research. Thus, from the very beginning, a research project has particular entailments and is located in between a past and present ongoing dialogue that contextualizes it. Intellectual honesty and methodological rigour demands that I respect the on-going dialogue my research question is situated within and the worlds of relations my participants draw upon in their narratives.

There is a complex relationship between respecting the uniqueness of an account and honoring the singularity of each story of lasting marriage while simultaneously noticing the common elements that unite distinct stories. For me, some of this paradox was evidenced through noting that participants used different words to indicate similar/analogous experiences which were nonetheless unique to each narrative. Throughout my analysis I had to continually "manage" my own desire to come up with some core category that unites all instances of marital longevity and encourage myself to continue to stay with the stories. I spent a lot of time memoing at the end of each interview and noting the most poignant and salient aspects of each participant account. These memoed summaries were helpful later in allowing me to creatively engage with my data and abstract some general features every story shared.

## **Parallel Process**

There is a view promulgated by Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggesting that the qualitative researcher ought to adapt the method to the research question. The notion of a 'bricoleur,' an artist, who creates with the materials available, was adopted as a term to express an appropriate stance from which to conduct qualitative research. The fashioning of method to research question also echoes the advice of Carl Rogers (1961, 1980), who believed that clinicians needed to invent a new therapy for each client in order to do justice to the idiosyncratic complexity of every psychological reality. The need to fit the method to the research question allows for creative freedom which facilitates fresh discovery. Accordingly, in my research I respected the methodology to lead me to the specific methods that would generate new understandings. As I reflected on the steps of my analysis, I realized that I had engaged in an analogous practice to my participants in enduring marriage by retracing my steps, going over the same ground and somehow getting deeper insight in tandem with circling over similar ideas. This circularity and repetition is captured well by the notion of constructing an emotional anchor that acts a placeholder, while allowing for a range of motion, which was expressed in the model as an engagement in both connection seeking and self-defining processes. Stated differently, the questioning and doubting that led me to repeatedly employ my method to perform new analyses continued to lead me to similar places, connected by shared conceptual bridges. This strikes me as ironic, as people in long marriages describe a similar process of doubting and revisiting their commitments, only to come back to them. This process revitalizes marriage and it also had a similar effect on my analysis. Initially, I faulted



myself for doubting and questioning my categories; ultimately I came to embrace my doubt and trust it as endowing methodological rigour to my analysis.

This kind of recapitulation is known as parallel process. Parallel process is often observed in psychological endeavors, such as supervision in psychotherapy when the dynamics of the supervisory relationship often mimic the client/therapist dynamic (Searles, 1955). I think that the parallel process that exists within qualitative research is akin to the bricoleur who uses all that he finds to create his unique approach to the research question. Using the same concepts that emerged in the analysis to conduct the analysis is both fitting and furthering, in that it possesses an internal logic.

### **Position Statement**

As a conscientious qualitative researcher, one of my responsibilities is to clearly identify and delineate where I stand with regard to my subject. Accordingly, what I intend to do in this position statement is articulate my context regarding marriage, my existing suppositions and assumptions and how I feel that they may have impacted on my analysis. I have intentionally placed this position statement at the interface between my disclosed methodology and my method as I felt that positioning mirrored the mediating role my context played in my study.

I am a divorced 48 year old Caucasian, Jewish female born to parents who were high school sweethearts and just celebrated their 50 anniversary. I have one brother, who has been married for ten years and has two children, aged 6 and 8. I have been married and divorced three times and I never had children, by choice. My first marriage was at 20 years old and lasted six years. My second marriage took place at the age of 28 and lasted for two and half years. My last marriage was in 2004 and ended in 2007. Since then, I

have been in several relationships but I have lived alone and I rather doubt that I will marry again. I know that these facts about my experience are relevant to my research, although it is ultimately up to the reader to make their own determination of how my history and context impact my interpretation. I am aware that I have not remained in a long term relationship, although I have made numerous attempts to do so. However, my multiple attempts attest to the value I place on marriage, while my divorces attest to the fact I did not value marriage above all else.

I am curious about how other people manage to remain married. I have often wondered about how the marriages that endure are different from mine and I have wondered if it isn't perhaps because of some part of me that values freedom over security. I don't think I felt totally safe to be myself in my marriage and I believe that this is different, for at least some, if not all, of my interviewees. I believe that marriage partners consider if they are in a marriage that accepts them for who they are, at their core. When they feel that they are, they are able to function and communicate in ways that enable the marriage to endure. The marriage itself becomes a container for both partners' true self and thus becomes valuable in its own right.

When looking at people in enduring marriages, I have asked myself what they did that I didn't do and one of the concepts that stood out for me in listening to my participants talk about their marriages was the fact that they experienced their marriages as non-restrictive and expressed that they felt free to be themselves in their marriages. That was not my experience of being married at all and thus it "announced" itself to me by its absence in my own marriage narratives. My interviewees also seemed to be able to let their marriages recede into the background as a backdrop for them to pursue their goals

and interests; this stood out for me as well, again, because of the contrast to my own narrative. Most of my participants were married with children but I was fortunate enough to find a participant who did not chose to have children and his story was not much different than the narratives of those with children. Still, I have wondered if my decision not to have children impacted on my ability to stay married...Would I have stayed married had I opted to procreate? Is having a child one of the things married people do together that keeps them together?

I have also wondered whether it is better to be more similar or more different – which kind of marriage works better? How much does passion and love figure into the equation? Are there different ways of staying married? Does every marriage that works share a fundamental characteristic that I either didn't have in mine or didn't value enough? Indeed, my own experience with divorce has heavily influenced the questions I had of married people and my interpretation of their stories. I filtered it through my own lens and my own impressions of why I have gotten divorced. I don't think that my subjectivity forms a barrier to my understanding the stories of the long married – in fact, I think it gives me a unique perspective and one that I feel is shared by many others who have not remained in a lasting marriage. I experienced my marriages as restrictive and I lacked that sense of “rightness” that I imagined the long married felt about their choice of spouse. One of the other sensitizing concepts I had was whether marriages prosper and fail because of the initial choice or because of what the spouses do after having joined in wedlock. Is it “who” or “how” you go about being married that is the truest determinant of whether a marriage will last or flounder? All of my thinking led me to wonder what

the critical, key ingredients are and what the people in long marriages believe keeps them together.

The fact that I have been both married and unmarried seemed to be an ideal stance for me to conduct this research; I was both an insider and outsider and my familiarity with the world of singledom and the experience of being married enabled me to see the contrasts between both ways of being that I don't think are as readily available to anyone who has only known one of the two lifestyles. My familiarity with the state of matrimony enabled me to enter into the world of my married participants but at a remove, which allowed me to reflexively co-construct a world I had known once, but perhaps in ways that differed importantly from the narrative accounts of the long married.

## **Method**

### **Grounded Theory Method**

This qualitative investigation principally employs the methods of grounded theory research in its procedures (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994). This method was chosen because GTM is considered a viable approach to the study of experience and changes over time (Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark, & Morales, 2007). GTM is regarded as one of the best-established qualitative research methods in the human sciences, and particularly within counseling psychology (Ponterotto, 2005). Glaser and Strauss (1967) articulated the principles of GTM, which sought to reduce bias in the interpretation of data by employing strategies to control for the shaping effects of the researcher's preconceived ideas about the subject under investigation, such as "bracketing" all "prejudgments" and using memoing to park evolving hunches and conceptual relationships (Creswell, 1998).

Grounded theory is intended to generate an understanding of phenomena inductively and is concerned with theory building versus theory verification (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978, 1992; Rennie, 2006; Rennie, Phillips, & Quartaro, 1988). Adhering to the principles of grounded theory was a particularly suitable approach for the investigation of the experience of being in an enduring marriage because it privileges subjective experience as a valid way of engendering understanding of complex phenomena.

In accordance with the tenets of grounded theory, an extensive literature review of relevant research on marriage was not carried out prior to commencing the present study (Rennie & Fergus, 2006). Of course, I can not and do not claim to have come to this research without some preconceived notions about marriage and lasting marriage that derived both from immersion in the culture and from personal experience. Strauss and Corbin (1990) extol the importance of “theoretical sensitivity” in grounded research, which translates into an ability to make sense of the data based on the researcher’s own awareness to the nuances of meaning contained within it and their previous exposure to the phenomenon of interest. As a doctoral student, who has been married and divorced, and trained in doing couples therapy, I reframed my prior knowledge as an asset in the acquisition of “theoretical sensitivity.”

The GTM advocates the use of “theoretical sampling” which is a technique in which the research gathers data, analyses it and then collects new data in accordance with the questions that arose from the analysis of the first data set. In this way, the researcher is grounded in the data both in regards to the content of the analysis and the process of the analysis, which responds to the researcher’s evolving interpretations of the data. In the present study, I utilized theoretical sampling by including a marriage without children, a

marriage from the Mid-western United States, marriages that were examples of childhood sweethearts and marriages that were embarked on later in life (i.e. early 30's). I would have liked extend the theoretical sampling I did to include a couple of mixed ethnicity (to investigate the role of common heritage) and a couple where the wife made more money than the husband, (to investigate how non-traditional gender roles impact on longevity) but I was unable to find suitable interview participants so the decision was made to leave the theoretical sampling as it was and move on to the analysis of the data.

The next step, after data collection, is for the researcher to engage in comparative analysis of the interview material and interpret repeating themes, which are used to develop a theory (Rennie, 1998, 2006). Initially, prior to the identification of themes, the interview material is parsed into segments called "meaning units" (MU's) which are parts of the text that appear to cluster around a common theme. These MU's vary in length from one sentence to a page or more. The next step of the analysis utilizes a procedure called "open coding" which involves noting the theme (or themes) within a given MU and devising a category to represent the meaning (or meanings) contained within it. The meaning unit is then assigned to that category (or categories). Each time a new category is conceptualized, the researcher will go back over previously analysed MU's and determine if the newly conceptualized category fits with pre-existing MU's and if the MU is deemed to fit, it will also be assigned to the new category. In order to simplify the analysis, MU's are gisted into a brief sentence that captured the meaning of the participant's utterance. The conduct of inquiry and of analysis was carried out until saturation of categories was evident (at interview #7) after which no new categories emerged and it was deemed that saturation had been reached. Following reaching

saturation, categories are organized according to meaning and grouped together in a hierarchal manner, with lower level categories subsumed by higher order categories. These lower level categories become *properties* of the higher order categories and serve to define them. As the categorical system builds, the categories become more abstract, in order to represent the meanings of the categories nested within them; however, even these abstracted categories are still “grounded” in the data. The goal of GTM is to arrive at a core category that consolidates the meaning of the other categories conceptualized and organizes the understanding of the phenomenon. While the name of this core category might be abstracted in order to represent all of the lower level categories and the relationships between them, it is derived from it is derived from the lower level categories which are derived from the text itself and thus is considered *grounded*.

### **Participants**

A sample made up of five men and six women representing 11 different heterosexual couples, married between 20 – 35 years, in their first marriage, was interviewed in their homes by the primary investigator. Demographic information regarding age, gender, ethnicity, education level and number and ages of children was collected and recorded for each participant. The sample was relatively homogenous; respondents were all Caucasian, Judeo-Christians over the age of forty. They were all in a first marriage. Clients ranged in age from 44 to 58 (M =52 yrs). All but one participant had children. Educational levels ranged from completing high school through to post-graduate school: One participant had completed high school, three participants had some college training, four had graduated from College, and three had a post-graduate degree. Length of marriage ranged from 22 years to 35 years (M=26.5 yrs). Four participants had a

combined household income of between \$100 -\$150K and seven participants had a combined household income of over \$200K

All participants were completely briefed on the study and made aware of the fact that they were participating in a doctoral dissertation research project in clinical psychology. Participants were asked to sign an informed consent form to assure their full comprehension of the research procedures and their willingness to participate in the program. By signing this form, they also gave their consent to the transcribing and quoting of their interview material in the finished work.

The decision to interview only one representative from each dyad was made in consultation with David Rennie and the qualitative research group within the Department of Psychology at York that I was a part of during the conceptualization of this project. After considered discussion, it was decided that while some people may not feel limited by the presence of their partner, since the marriages I would be exploring would be representative of both happy and unhappy unions, it is very likely that partners may not be comfortable candidly discussing the reasons for their long-standing marriages if those reasons are unflattering or unknown to their spouse. In order to increase the likelihood of candor, the decision was made to interview only one representative from each marriage in the interests of creating the safest forum possible for the disclosure of potentially pertinent information.

### **Recruitment**

Study participants were recruited through social media including Face Book invitations, and through mass emailing to listserves at York University, local woman's



groups, and to all acquaintances of the primary researcher. The email to potential participants read as follows:

If you are in a lasting marriage (20 – 35 years) and willing to talk about what has made your marriage endure, I would love to talk to you. I am currently conducting interviews with people in a first marriage, who have been married between 20-35 years, for my doctoral dissertation on the enduring marriage. If you fit this description and would be willing to participate in an hour to hour an half in person interview about how you account for remaining married, please contact the principal researcher at [fern1@yorku.ca](mailto:fern1@yorku.ca).

Your insights will help to inform and educate people on what lies at the heart of lasting marriages. I am looking for 5 or 6 men and women, who are married, but not to each other. In order to ensure confidentiality and privacy, I will only be interviewing one half of each couple. I am happy to arrange an interview at your convenience, in a mutually agreeable location. If you know anyone who fits this profile, please forward this email on to them. Many thanks for your help with my project,  
Sincerely, Fern Kagan.

After an initial mass emailing, three participants contacted the principal investigator and were interviewed. Three more participants were recruited via snowball sampling from these three initial interviews, and then another email was sent out. Another three interviews were conducted after the second mass emailing, and then the final two interviews were completed the following year. Theoretical sampling was accomplished through the inclusion of participants within a marriage with no children, and one participant who reported being unhappy. Three additional participants reported having

considered divorce at one point in their marriage. There was one participant who separated after having participated in the interview but was kept in the project as the fact that the marriage ended after 25 years did not exclude his interview data from the phenomenon under consideration.

### **Measures**

Immediately prior to the interview, each interviewee was given the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS) (Schumm et al., 1985) to ascertain a standardized evaluation of each interviewees self reported level of marital satisfaction. The KMSS is an abbreviated self report inventory that consists of three questions inquiring about marital satisfaction (How satisfied are you with your marriage, how satisfied are you with your relationship with your spouse and how satisfied are you with your spouse as a partner) that are rated 7-point Likert scale that ranges from “extremely satisfied” to “extremely dissatisfied”. Each interview participant filled out the KMS and it was placed into a sealed envelope with the participants’ initials and the date of the interview. The KMS was not viewed prior to the qualitative analysis of the interviews to avoid any bias in interpreting the interviews.

### **Interview**

Each interview lasted approximately an hour to an hour and a half. The interviews were unstructured, in that there was not a specific protocol that had to be followed with each interview. The decision to follow a (primarily) unstructured interview format was made because I felt it was important that the participants have freedom to follow their own trajectory in deciding what aspects of their marriage were most important for them to share. Structured questions and self-report inventories tend to pull for the presentation

of the ‘social self’ rather than the authentic or narrative self (Veroff, Sutherland, Chadiha, & Ortega, 1993). One interview strategy I employed was based upon the IPR method (Kagan, 1975) which encourages clients in therapy to reflect on their therapy sessions and comment on what was actually occurring for them. Applied to interviewing, this involved stopping the interview and pausing the tape. When I turned the tape back on, I invited my participants to take a meta-perspective upon the just completed interview by sharing some of my own observations (and those derived from conducting previous interviews). In this manner, I hoped to further explicate the idiosyncratic meanings my participants ascribed to their stories of marital longevity and encourage them to comment and reflect on their own process of participating in the interview with me. This reflection time was included in the 1.5 hours spent for each interview and it was also fully transcribed as part of the same interview.

The choice to invite participant meta-reflection on their interviews was made in recognition of the limitations of interviewing people and soliciting their opinions on why they have remained married. As Bruner (2004) points out there are many obstacles to honest self reporting: “Telling others about oneself is...no simple matter. It depends on what we think they think we ought to be like—or what selves in general ought to be like. Nor do our calculations end when we come to telling ourselves about ourselves. Our self-directed self-making narratives early come to express what we think others expect us to be like. Without much awareness of it, we develop a decorum for telling ourselves about ourselves: how to be frank with ourselves, how not to offend others....” ( p.5). Given that we are culturally conditioned to consider social desirability and to be deferent to

interviewers, interpretation, patience, meta-communication and bids for reflection upon what has been said are critical in getting at any kind of real ‘truth’.

When interviewing is the method, the person of the interviewer becomes the “main research instrument” (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). In order to refine my questions and interviewing skills, I piloted this basic interview format on graduate students in psychology and invited them to comment on it before I tested it on actual participants. This allowed me to work out some of the potential trouble spots before beginning my formal research protocol. I also volunteered to be an interview subject for another study to experience what it was like to be on the other end of the interviewing process. I took special note of how the interviewer facilitated deeper exploration in me and I noted that it was very important to be able to summarize and recount to the interviewee what had been heard and also that the identification of themes helped the interviewee see their own perspective with fresh eyes.

Before I began asking the participants targeted questions, I invited them simply to tell me about or describe their marriage. Although my overarching goal was to be attuned to the nuances of each interview and follow the important leads as they emerged in each interview, I did have some general areas of inquiry I asked about : a) how the participants account for the fact that they have remained married, b) what they value most about their marriage, c) what has been the biggest challenge they ever faced in their marriage, d) why they got married, e) what first attracted them to their partner, f) what would make them seriously consider divorce –i.e. “deal breakers”, g) what they consider to be best and worst part of being married, h) their idea of the secret to a good marriage, i) what they would do differently if they had to do it over again j) how they would describe the

evolution of their marriage from it's inception until present day, k) what aspects of the relationship have been helpful and unhelpful, l) how has their relationship contributed to their remaining married.<sup>1</sup>

### **Ethical Considerations**

The qualitative researcher must be cognizant and sensitized to the numerous ethical issues implicit in interviewing people about their private lives. Kvale (2009) writes that the interview is a 'moral inquiry' and that ethical concerns influence all stages of the interview from the initial face-to-face encounter to the writing of any resulting publications: "...the human interaction in the interview affects the interviewees, and the knowledge produced by an interview affects our understanding of the human condition" (Kvale, 2009, p. 62).

In the interests of protecting confidentiality, I disguised the identities of all spouses who participated in my study by changing identifying facts that might increase the possibility that their spouse (who did not participate in the study) would recognize them in any future publication of the results of this study. Ethical considerations also dictated that I obtain informed consent from each study participant prior to the interview, at which time I explained that I was interested in hearing how they accounted for having remained married for 20+ years. I also explained that despite the need for gathering demographic information to contextualize my study, every effort would be made to protect and disguise the real life identities of participants by changing names, occupations and ages/sexes of children.

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<sup>1</sup> A complete list of all interview prompts and questions has been placed in Appendix B.

I allowed each interviewee to decide whether they wanted their spouse to know that they were participating in this study and if they elected to share any of the contents of their interview with me with their spouse or anyone else, it was at their sole discretion. Additionally, I explained to my participants that the interviews are audio-taped and transcribed but that they would not be identified by name on any transcripts or documents. I assured participants that all discussions would be kept strictly confidential and every attempt to disguise their identity would be made; however, they were advised that exact quotes from their interview could be used in reports and presentations and despite my attempts to disguise their identities by omitting revealing/distinguishing information it is conceivable that someone who knows them very well could recognize them by their words. I also informed my participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time and if they opted to do so, all of their information will be destroyed and none of it would be used in the analysis. Each participant was given an alias and their demographic information was entered into a master chart under their alias.

### **Procedures**

The 1 -1.5 hour interviews were fully transcribed by the primary researcher, or a research/administrative assistant and filed under the alias of the participant. Immediately after conducting the interview, I recorded all of my impressions, hunches, interpretations and assumptions about the interview in a *theoretical memo* with the date of the interview and the alias of the participant in a file on my computer. The purpose of the theoretical memo is to allow the researcher to “bracket” ideas that might not be fully grounded in the data for use after the analysis of the text is completed in order to inform the generation of a core category and the final model of the study (Rennie, 2006). Once the interviews

were transcribed, before any formal processing of the interview, the interview was first read over in its entirety, several times, and this activity was followed by more theoretical memoing.

### **Analysis**

The analysis of the first few interviews informed the subsequent interviews in terms of the emergent themes I inquired about, which is in keeping with the GTM technique of constant comparison. In order to avoid the perils of a gendered perspective, I opted to alternate my interviews by interviewing a man and then a woman, until I had interviewed all 11 participants. The themes and concepts garnered from my analysis of the first male I interviewed were contrasted to the themes and concepts from the first female I interviewed in order to highlight potential differences between how the different sexes accounted for remaining married. As previous research (Lauer & Lauer, 1986, Mckey & O'Brien, 1995) has not found significant gender differences in how spouses view their marriage, I was not certain my analysis would divide along the lines of gender, but I wanted to allow for the possibility of such a finding. By conducting my analysis in this manner, which is also fully consistent with the constant comparison method of GTM, I fostered a tacit dialogue that included the voices of each gender without running into the issues of confidentiality that I would have encountered if I had interviewed both members of a couple who were married to each other. As my sense of the phenomenon evolved with increased exposure to participant accounts, new areas of inquiry were incorporated into the interview process. For example, after my second interviewee did not mention sexuality at all, I began to ask my interviewees what their marriages would be like if they never had sex with their spouse again. This question was suggested by David Rennie and

the qualitative research group in order to probe for what sexuality meant in a given marriage.

There were a total of 1254 meaning units identified for the 11 interviews. The interviews ranged from containing 68 MU's to 140 MU's. After seven interviews had been parsed into meaning units and the meaning units had been coded using open coding and one-liners (or property statements) had been created to represent each meaning unit, no new categories emerged and the remaining interviews were parsed into meaning units and then categorized and coded, using the constant comparison method. A total of 211 properties emerged from the first coding. Each transcribed interview was divided into its MU's, by highlighting and segmenting the chosen text on my computer and entering it into an excel file. (i.e. participant *Susan* had a total of 68 meaning units for her interview. The first meaning unit in her interview would be identified as *Susan1*, indicating it was the first meaning unit in the interview of participant *Susan*).

The single sentence property statements were printed and cut up and pasted on cue cards to facilitate the categorization process. The cue cards were placed into envelopes that represented the categories each meaning unit was coded under (Rennie, Quatro & Phillips, 1988). For clarity, an attempt was made to code meaning units under one category, but in many cases where this was not possible, they were assigned a primary category and then cross referenced with other cue card in whatever corresponding category(ies) they fell into. For example, the property statement “shrug it off” was cross-coded under the categories “big picture perspective,” “operating from basic trust” and “focusing on the good.” I chose to use cue cards and open files in my computer to store MU's, and keep track of my categories, despite the availability of computer software



programs for qualitative research. Since I was unfamiliar with such programs and had already done a number of qualitative studies, including my Masters thesis, using cue cards and cut up MU's, I felt it would be a better use of my time to continue with this older method. I also felt that computer software programs might change the nature of my analysis, because there are concerns about the way in which such programs overstress coding and promote a superficial rendition of grounded theory that does not do justice to the more constructivist forms of it (Coffey, Holbrook & Atkinson, 1996; Lonkila, 1995).

Once the meaning units, condensed into one-liners from seven interviews were cut up, put on cue cards and placed into provisional category envelopes, the principal investigator read through the categories, weighing whether they were capturing the phenomenon of interest and whether they were distinct and should be retained, or whether they were redundant and could be better contained within another category. The goal, in this second sorting, was to stay rather close to the specifics of what each meaning unit was about without becoming too abstract yet. Thus, categories such as “yin to [his] yang” and “division of labour” were initially categorized as being distinct. Later in the analysis, both these categories were subsumed under the broader concept of “respecting differences.” By the final sorting, the category of “respecting differences” was conceptualized as a strategy participants used to manage conflict in their marriage and subsequently, it was placed under the main category “Managing Conflict”, which was placed under the 2<sup>nd</sup> order category of Self-defining.

### **Criteria to Assess Credibility**

Qualitative research utilizes different criteria to establish credibility than quantitative research and has often been judged according to whether the research resonates with

those who share a similar experience (Vidich , Lyman, Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Qualitative researchers have advocated that researchers compile large quantities of rich data with “thick descriptions” (Charmaz, 1995c; Geertz, 1973). Rennie (1999) argues that a conscientious qualitative researcher, employing reflexivity, does not require outside corroboration to validate the results of their study as long as they have grounded their interpretation in the data and remained self aware of the biases and assumptions that might have affected their interpretation. Although the present study can be assessed on the former criteria for credibility, I also employed a validation technique called “member checking” which involved running the model by a sample of four of the original interviewees to see if they felt the model adequately captured their experience of remaining married; all four interviewees enthusiastically endorsed the model. As well, four subjects known to the primary researcher who fit the participant demographics (married for at least 20 years, in a first marriage, North American, mid to upper socio economic status, Judeo-Christian ethnicity) were also invited to comment on the model and discuss how well it mapped on to their experience of remaining married. Each of these four subjects also willingly endorsed the emergent model and opined that it fit their own experience, thus the model was deemed to resonate with those who had had analogous experiences and were not included in the study as well.

In order to achieve the type of rigorous self reflection that allows for a thorough elucidation of my biases, I enlisted the aid of an informal qualitative research group headed by David Rennie and a few colleagues in my doctoral program as I analyzed my data. The contributions of other people are invaluable in this regard not because they serve as confirmation of my own thoughts, but because they allow me to locate and

explicate my subjectivity in ways I would not be able to do without the contrasting perspectives of others. Since the goal of all qualitative inquiry is not to eliminate biases but to articulate them in order to be able to offer readers a context for understanding the conclusions and results of a given inquiry, this window into my own subjectivity was invaluable in aiding me in my own self understandings and reflexivity. What is most fundamental to our perspective is often what is most shrouded in mystery because it operates beneath the level of our awareness, in the form of basic assumptions.

### **Process of the Analysis**

The choice to retain the participants' own terminology followed a first attempt to categorize using basic, descriptive wording. My intention was to "park my assumptions" but I discovered there is value to incorporating some assumptions and further, that it is inevitable, due to the number of choices that must be made. The first higher level categories culled from the data did not do justice to the vibrant, living accounts of my participants and seemed to miss all of the richness and poetry the interviews contained. In my second attempt to sort the MU's into larger categories, I endeavoured to stay very close to the words and phrases participants had used to describe their experiences as I felt that they offered a better "fit" than abstracting categories, although both approaches are valid, according to the recommendations of Rennie & Fergus (2006). I felt that there is clearly something that resists knowing and telling that lies at the heart of these stories of lasting marriage that my participants knew, but could only allude to. The language of imagery, metaphor and poetry gets closer to the heart of the experience of remaining married than any other form of discourse and I found that participants employed such

linguistic devices in their attempts to speak about their marriages and how they accounted for them lasting.

After my second analysis, which involved a re-categorizing of the interview data into categories informed heavily by the participants own words, I ended up with 140 categories, some of which were clearly related, yet subtly distinct from each other. The 140 mid-level categories comfortably housed all the MU's that I had generated from the first analysis, while providing a meaningful conceptual framework. A few MU's, specifically those that referred to very specific information (ie. length of time married, age when they met and other general, historical details that were either highly idiosyncratic or highly general) were deemed incidental and omitted from the emerging model of lasting marriage.

The 140 categories were further refined into 110 categories. Higher order categories were abstracted from these 110 categories by tracing the connections between the categories and the data was winnowed into 41 higher and lower level categories that represented the significant common elements in the data and illustrated the relationships between them. The final model of enduring marriage that emerged from the analysis represented a conceptual framework that placed the categories derived from the GTM analysis into seven related processes that were defined by their subcategories which comprised the shared central activity (emotional anchoring) that each participant undertook to construct a lasting marriage.

In order to arrive at the final model and capture the common process/experience of remaining married that my participants alluded to, I sat with the 110 categories that had emerged and pondered how they might be connected to each other. As I did this, I

continually asked myself the following questions: What were my participants really talking about, what questions were they answering and how were they making meaning of their experience?

The final model of enduring marriage that emerged from the analysis represented a conceptual framework that placed the categories derived from the GTM analysis into seven related processes that were defined by their subcategories which comprised the shared central activity (emotional anchoring) that each participant undertook to construct a lasting marriage.

## CHAPTER 3

### Results

In this chapter, the 11 study participants will be introduced, results of the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Survey (KMSS; Schumm et al., 1986) will be reported and the model of the enduring marriage derived from the grounded theory analysis will be presented, beginning with the core category, the second order categories and the main categories and subcategories<sup>2</sup>, which will be illustrated with quotes from the participant's interview. The report of the results will conclude with the identification of three different marriage prototypes and three paradigmatic narratives culled from the participant interviews to illustrate each type of marriage identified in this study.

#### Introducing Study Participants

In order to orient the reader to the results presented in this section, it is first necessary for me to introduce and identify the study participants. In order to do this, I have created a "marriage motto" which is a one-liner extrapolated from the participant interview material that best expresses the *gestalt* of each marriage for the purposes of easy identification of the couple. Additionally, participants will be introduced, via a table (See Table 2) through their alias, marriage motto and the defining "facts" of their marriage, (i.e. length of time married, age and sex of participant). To protect participant anonymity, identifying details such as career and birthplace and any specific locales have been omitted or disguised from all charts and participant quotes.

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<sup>2</sup> In the write up of the results, the categories have been formatted in keeping with their level. The core category is bolded and fully capitalized (i.e., **EMOTIONAL ANCHORING**); the second level categories are bolded, italicized, and capitalized, (e.g. ***Connection Seeking***); main categories are italicized and capitalized (e.g. *Building a Safe Haven*); sub-categories are italicized and in lower case (e.g. *got my back*).

Eleven married couples are represented in this study; six women and five men. I will introduce them to the reader now and henceforth refer to them by their alias. *Richard* is a 47 year old man, married for 24 years with two children. The gestalt of his marriage is best captured by a quote from his interview: “Partnership of equals.” *Sandra* is a 51 year old woman married for 23 years, with two children. Her marriage is best summed up by her phrase “yin to my yang.” *Kevin* is a 52 year old man married for 23 years, with 2 children. His marriage motto is: “Never had a doubt.” *Susan* is a 55 year old woman married for 35 years, with 4 children. Her marriage is captured by her phrase “Trusting each other and not being joined at the hip.” *Howard* is a 56 year old man married for 24 years with 2 children. His marriage is best captured by the phrase “raising a family together.” *Darryl* is a 47 year old woman married for 22 years with 2 children. Her marriage is epitomized by the phrase “Still the one.” *Jack* is a 53 year old man married for 23 years with 3 children. His marriage is summarized by the phrase “No one knows what goes on behind closed doors.” *Lisa* is a 56 year old woman married for 30 years with 2 children. Her marriage motto is “taking one for the team.” *Marilyn* is a 56 year old woman married for 33 years with 2 children. Her marriage is epitomized by her phrase “I’m on my second marriage to my first husband.” *Charlie* is a 49 year old man married for 23 years, with no children. His marriage is summed up by the phrase “Marry your best friend.” *Helen* is a 51 year old woman married for 27 years with 3 children. Her marriage is represented by the phrase, “grudging support.”

**Table 1*****Participant Demographic Information***

<b>Participant Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Married</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Household Income</b>	<b>Marriage Motto</b>
<i>Richard</i>	47	24	M	Caucasian	BA	Over 200K	“Partnership of equals”
<i>Sandra</i>	51	23	F	Caucasian	BA	Over 200K	“Yin to my yang”
<i>Kevin</i>	52	23	M	Caucasian	Grad Degree	Over 200K	“Never had a doubt”
<i>Susan</i>	55	35	F	Caucasian	Some College	Over 200K	“Trusting each other and not being joined at the hip”
<i>Howard</i>	56	24	M	Caucasian	Some College	\$100-150K	“Raising a family”
<i>Darryl</i>	47	22	F	Caucasian	BA	\$100-150K	“Still the one”
<i>Jack</i>	53	27	M	Caucasian	Grad Degree	Over\$200K	“No one knows what goes on behind closed doors.”
<i>Lisa</i>	56	30	F	Caucasian	BA	Over 200K	“Taking one for the team”
<i>Marilyn</i>	56	33	F	Caucasian	High School	\$100-150K	“On my second marriage to my first husband.”
<i>Charlie</i>	49	23	M	Caucasian	Grad Degree	\$100-150K	“Marry your best friend.”
<i>Helen</i>	51	27	F	Caucasian	Some College	Over\$200K	“Grudging Support”

**Kansas Marital Satisfaction Survey (KMSS)**

To ground the qualitative results of this study, a brief three question questionnaire called the KMSS (Schumm et al., 1985) was administered to participants directly before their interview. The KMSS is a well validated measure (Anderson, Russell & Schumm,



1983) with three questions geared toward assessing marital satisfaction. The three questions are **1) How satisfied are you with your marriage? 2) How satisfied are you with your relationship with your spouse? 3) How satisfied are you with your spouse as a partner?** The answers are indicated on 7 point Likert scale with a range from *Extremely Dissatisfied* to *Extremely Satisfied*. The complete KMSS is included in the appendix (*See appendix D*). After participants completed the questionnaire, it was placed in a sealed envelope and I did not look at the participant's answers on the KMSS until after the parsing of the interviews into meaning units. A table (See Table 2) is provided with the results of the KMSS. After the qualitative results have been presented they will be compared to the quantitative results from the KMSS and the fit (or lack of fit) will be reported.

**Table 2**  
*Kansas Marital Satisfaction Survey (KMSS) Scores by Participant*

<b>Participant alias</b>	<b>How satisfied are you with your marriage?</b>	<b>How satisfied are you with your relationship with your spouse?</b>	<b>How satisfied are you with your spouse as a partner?</b>	<b>Marriage type (easy, shifting, challenging)</b>
<i>Richard</i>	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Extremely Satisfied	Easy
<i>Sandra</i>	Extremely Satisfied	Extremely Satisfied	Extremely Satisfied	Easy
<i>Kevin</i>	Extremely Satisfied	Extremely Satisfied	Extremely Satisfied	Easy
<i>Susan</i>	Extremely Satisfied	Very satisfied	Extremely Satisfied	Easy
<i>Howard</i>	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Challenging*
<i>Darryl</i>	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Shifting

Participant alias	How satisfied are you with your marriage?	How satisfied are you with your relationship with your spouse?	How satisfied are you with your spouse as a partner?	Marriage type (easy, shifting, challenging)
<i>Jack</i>	Very dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Challenging
<i>Lisa</i>	Extremely Satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Shifting
<i>Marilyn</i>	Extremely Satisfied	Extremely Satisfied	Extremely Satisfied	Shifting
<i>Charlie</i>	Very Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Extremely Satisfied	Easy
<i>Helen</i>	Extremely Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Challenging

*\*Note.* Howard subsequently divorced after being interviewed, thus his marriage has been classified as “challenging” despite his answers on the KMSS.

### **Model of the Enduring Marriage and Core Category**

**EMOTIONAL ANCHORING.** The lasting marriage functioned as an emotional anchor for partners, serving to keep them grounded and situated despite external pressures, and internal challenges. Every marriage narrative in this study accounted for conflict, regardless of whether conflict was described as minimal and manageable or threatening and constant. Every narrative in this study was built around an attempt to make meaning of choosing to place a limitation on personal freedom while valuing individual freedom; this was identified as the common question participants were attempting to answer in their accounts of having remained in a lasting marriage. Every marriage narrative in this study described common processes (*See Figure 1*) they engaged in within their marriages which were represented by categories such as "*taking one for the team*" or "*I have to listen.*" Extrapolating from these linked categories culminated in a

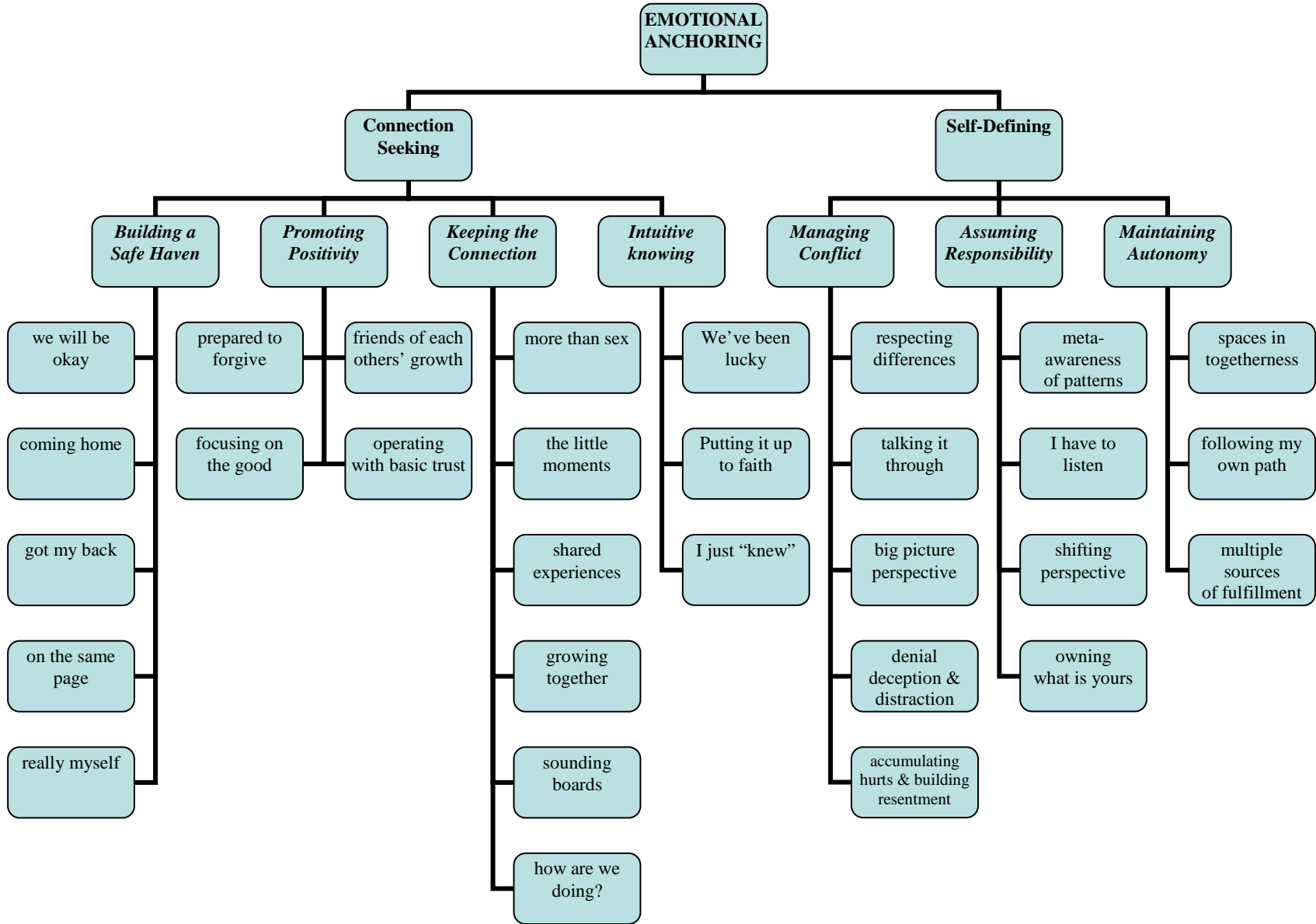
model of the enduring marriage that represents my interpretation of how people in lasting marriages account for remaining married.

The primary purpose “anchoring” serves for the marriages in this study is to ground the partners emotionally, which is distinct from earlier conceptions of marriage as a way of securing social, economic or political position<sup>3</sup>. A dictionary was consulted to corroborate my colloquial understanding of the term “anchor” and the definitions served as further substantiation for the use of this term as a core category. Webster’s New World Dictionary defines “anchor” as: *n.* Any device that holds something else secure. Anything that gives or seems to give stability or security. To keep from drifting, giving way, by or as by an anchor. The root of the word “anchor” derives from the Greek *ankos*, which means to bend. This is an interesting root derivation, as the juxtaposition of bending in order to remain secured maps well onto the central idea the core category intends to convey and captures the dynamic process the use of the term “anchor” is intending to convey in this study. The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines anchor as: *n.* to be the strongest and most important part of something. This meaning also offers a helpful perspective on the intended meaning of “**EMOTIONAL ANCHORING**” within this study, as participant accounts of their marriages conveyed that their marriages occupied a central place in their lives.

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<sup>3</sup> The term “emotional” was chosen to depict the nature of the anchoring in this study. It is reflective of the changed reality of the purpose marriage serves in industrialized, Western society; marriage is no longer entered into to secure social or political status, ensure economic power or provide protection. Today’s marriages serve an emotional function for partners, which is distinct from earlier functions of marriage. Emotion, in this context, refers to the complex constellation of cognition and feeling.

Figure 1. Model of Enduring Marriage



## Connection Seeking and Self-Defining Categories

The seven main categories were grouped under two separate main headings, “*Connection seeking*” and “*Self-defining*” to express the conceptual relationship between the categories identified in this study. Both connection seeking and self-defining processes were acknowledged in all the marriage narratives by study participants and both were identified as necessary to the endurance of each marital narrative. The best examples of participant utterances from their interviews will be used throughout this report of the results to illustrate and animate the categories and clarify their meaning. The examples will demonstrate the different facets of each category in order to provide the reader with a full understanding of every nuance of the underlying concept.<sup>4</sup>

The report of the results will begin with the categories grouped under the main heading of *Connection seeking* which refer to those affiliative, relational activities or attitudes that partners hold or engage in order to stay attached to each other. In this analysis, the following four categories (*Building a Safe Haven*, *Promoting Positivity*, *Keeping the Connection* and *Intuitive knowing*) define *Connection seeking* categories, along with their 18 subcategories. These are presented in the following paragraphs and depicted in *Figure 1* by a tree diagram of **EMOTIONAL ANCHORING** including all seven main categories, 30 subcategories and the relationship of all the *Connection seeking* categories and “*Self-defining*” categories. A chart depicting each of the categories and indicating the number of participants contributing to each category has also been provided for easy reference (*See Table 3*).

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<sup>4</sup> To promote clarity and succinctness, many of the quotes from participants have been gisted, although the interviews were transcribed verbatim. Extraneous words (i.e. umm, hmm, like), confusing passages, pauses and repeated words have been omitted from many of the included quotes.

**Table 3***All Categories and Subcategories*

Category	Properties of Category	Number of Participants (x/11)
<b>Connection Seeking</b>		11/11
<i>Building a Safe Haven</i>		
	We will be okay	5/11
	Coming home	7/11
	Got my back	9/11
	On the same page	11/11
	Really myself	6/11
<i>Promoting Positivity</i>		
	Prepared to forgive	6/11
	Focusing on the good	7/11
	Friends of each others' growth	7/11
	Operating from basic trust	6/11
<i>Keeping the Connection</i>		
	More than sex	9/11
	The little moments	7/11
	Shared experiences	11/11
	Growing together	7/11
	Sounding boards	6/11
	How are we doing?	5/11
<i>Intuitive Knowing</i>		
	We've been lucky	9/11
	Putting it up to faith	3/11
	I just "knew"	6/11
<b>Self-Defining</b>		11/11
<i>Assuming Responsibility</i>		
	Meta-awareness of patterns	9/11
	I have to listen	7/11

Category	Properties of Category	Number of Participants (x/11)
	Shifting perspective	5/11
	Owning what is yours	9/11
<i>Maintaining Autonomy</i>		
	Spaces in togetherness	8/11
	Following my own path	11/11
	Multiple sources of fulfillment	11/11
<i>Managing Conflict</i>		
	Respecting differences	8/11
	Talking it through	7/11
	Big picture perspective	11/11
	Denial ,deception and distraction	5/11
	Accumulating hurts and building resentment	6/11

## Connection Seeking Categories

### Building a Safe Haven

*Building a Safe Haven* is a main category that emerged from the manner in which marriage partners talked about how they created a shared relational refuge to seek comfort and a strong support to build from drawn from participant interview accounts of their marriage. It appeared that a safe haven is built by shared values (*on the same page*); being “there” for each other and supporting each other, no matter what (*got my back*); accepting each other, faults and all, fully and unconditionally (*really myself*); trusting that the marriage is flexible and strong enough to hold whatever needs to be held and to support both partners despite whatever happens to either of them (*we’ll be okay*); and internalizing the knowledge of inhabiting a shared space no matter how far partners may

roam (*coming home*). Taken together, these five sub-categories form the properties of ***Building a Safe Haven*** and will be illustrated by examples from the 11 interviews. All of the study participants (11/11) are represented in this main category, although not to the same proportion.

### ***We will be okay***

This subcategory is endorsed by 5/11 of the study participants. It is really the idea that united we conquer, divided we fall; by combining forces, but aligning with each other, spouses felt more able to handle whatever life throws at them. There is a confidence in their partnership that allows them to feel more equal to handling and overcoming difficulties. This includes the idea of standing by each other in tough times, or of forming a united front to cope effectively with external or internal challenges.

Charlie, a strong contributor to this category, expressed this idea when he talked about how he and his wife had supported each other through hard times in the past and how he was supporting her now, as she faced a health scare:

“[It’s] really that idea of “for better or worse”... I’ve had some bad moments and she hasn’t wavered and currently she has had some health scares and so she gets worried and I’m not worried –... the idea is “it will be okay” – whatever is going to happen it will be okay...”

Richard echoed a similar sentiment when he shared how he and his wife have joined together to handle financial difficulties. Implicit in the notion of “we’ll be okay” is the “we” aspect of a marriage:

“Conflicts, but we’ve been in it together. It’s always been “What are **we** going to do? Not what did **you** do to us?” There’s never been anything to blame about. We had all kinds of screw ups but they were together screw ups.”

Another facet to the sub-category of “*we’ll be okay*” is the idea of sharing in the pain of the other and assuring the partner that they are not in this alone. This was expressed



well in Sandra's interview when she talked about how her husband offered to support her when she was having dental issues and money trouble:

“Don't worry about it. We will figure it out. If I have to, I will borrow the money from my parents. This is your teeth and your teeth need to be cared for and you cannot stress over asking for money for this. We will make it work.”

### ***On the same page***

This subcategory is echoed in the narratives of every participant in this study (11/11), although the degree to which it appeared in each participant account varied. It seemed that an underlying feeling that your spouse is aligned with you, on basic values, is necessary scaffolding for a sense of safety in the marriage. It is hard to build a safe haven without some basic agreement on what constitutes safety and is worth protecting.

The importance of having shared values and seeing the main aspects of life in a similar way is well established in the literature on marriage and it was therefore not surprising that interviewees referred to operating from a common worldview frequently in their interview protocols. Even in marriages that partners described as difficult, there was an acknowledgment of sharing at least *some* basic values.

Richard was an important contributor to this subcategory and he made frequent mention of the way he and his spouse were in fundamental agreement in all the major areas. It was clear from Richard's account that he believed that being *on the same page* has been central to the longevity of his marriage. The following excerpt defined being *on the same page* in his marriage:

“There's a high level of synchronicity in terms of attitudes towards the important things shared values, interests and goals, kids and what they mean to the relationship, notions about what happiness means, what's a good outcome for a relationship and all that... But to me, it seems a lot easier to have people who are fundamentally aligned and compatible. Yes, there are little differences and there's stuff you don't care about. But you have the big building blocks covered. But holy

moly, if all that works is this and everything else didn't work...let me put it this way, I characterized our relationship as 80/20, if it was 20/80 I can't imagine it."

The idea of being on "the same page" often emerged when discussing whether partners felt they were more or less like their spouses. Some participants felt they were different in style but similar in substance to their spouse. Susan expressed it well in her remark, "*I wouldn't say we're alike. I'd say our values are the same, but our personalities are different.*" Kevin echoed Susan's sentiments in his remark:

"And about values, we have very similar values. You know, material values, spiritual values. But we've kind of grown that way. I think we're really aligned on most things. We're different people, but I think we're aligned on all the things that are important for each of us."

### ***Coming home***

7/11 participants are represented in this subcategory. "*Coming home*" is drawn from interviewee responses that referred to an internalized sense of the other, and the marriage that extends beyond themselves. Participants made mention of this image of "home" that they carry in their minds and hearts and the role it plays in keeping them emotionally centered when the world gets tough. A good analogy might be to a mirage in a desert that enables the weary traveler to keep on walking, because s/he can almost see and taste the water. Kevin spoke to this internalized sense of the marriage in the following excerpt from his interview:

"It's critical to your emotional happiness. And your ability to be productive. You know, I'm a lawyer, and you have tough days and I can't imagine, having the stress you do at work and then coming home and having round two. To me, there are guys that stay in the office because they prefer to be there than at home. For me, I always wanted to get the hell out and get home. So, that's an enormous comfort. Like I said before, it's like an anchor. It's just stability; you're not wasting emotional energy on this whole part of your life."

Richard also made reference to the comforting factor of having someone and something to come home to:

“I have my life at work, I have my life at sports, I have my life in my music. Completely independent. We could be in different countries, executing those parts of our separate lives and they per se have nothing to do with the relationship. Other than we know that when we come upstairs or come downstairs, or come home from wherever we were, there is something there for us. And it gives you a certain sense of comfort, and strength and stability that you've got something to come home to.”

### ***Got my back***

9/11 participants are represented in the subcategory “*got my back*,” which captures the idea that partners feel they can rely on their spouse, that if the chips are down, their partner is there for them, will catch them if they fall. Notions of support and encouragement are included in this subcategory; participants stressed the ways that spouses are “there” for each other, especially in difficult times, and the ways that spouses do not put up roadblocks or obstacles against each other. Spouses make it easier for each other to function at optimal levels. Sandra expressed this idea very eloquently:

“And it was like I realized for the first time in my life, I had a support system. I had somebody behind me who was my safety net. And I had never felt -- I was about twenty-five or twenty-six at the time-- and I felt that for the first time in my life. And that’s what it’s been for twenty-five years. The best thing about marriage? There is 100% support. If he falls, I will pick him up and if I fall, he will pick me up. And there’s no question about it.”

Kevin spoke very glowingly of his wife in his interview and it was clear that one of the aspects about her that he cherished most was her complete support of him, even when it was a hardship for her.

” I mean she’s the type – I broke my leg playing hockey really badly about four years ago, just as an example. So, it was really bad. And we had a trip planned for ten days later and we had to cancel it at the last minute. So most women, I think, understandably, would say, don’t play hockey, or whatever. She was the first, even though I was on crutches for like four months, as soon as I was feeling better she said, “You should go back and play hockey.” Even if it may not be in her, necessarily, in her best interest. I mean, it was hard for her when I had my broken leg. I needed help to do everything. And she did, and yet she didn’t begrudge me.”

Charlie voiced the idea of being fully accepted for whom you are, faults and all, and how meaningful it had been to him in his marriage:

“I mean to me, when my drinking progressed, if she was going to leave me that is when she should have. Yeah. And she didn’t. And she never threatened it or said anything like that. And that kind of amazes me.”

### ***Really myself***

This subcategory of ***Building a Safe Haven*** speaks to the importance marriage partners placed on being able to be themselves and be accepted and embraced for all that they are. When partners do not feel safe to be who they are, they tend to suffer in their marriages. 6/11 participants are contributors to this sub-category. Charlie stressed the importance he placed on being accepted for who he is:

“I think it goes back to that idea if you are really yourself and that person knows you and decides to stay with you anyway, my goodness! Wow! I mean that really is unconditional love. That is what that is. ‘Cus you are saying I can take this crap and everyone has got their crap but I’m going to stay with you, by the way”.

Darryl acknowledged the importance of her husband’s acceptance of her in her interview, “*I mean...you know, he was really good in the sense that I don’t think he really wanted to change me ever.*” She was also honest enough to admit that the acceptance did not go both ways in their marriage. She identified wanting to “*change him a lot*”, but ultimately she was able to let go of her wish to change him and this was an important step toward the positive shift that her marriage ultimately took.

Sandra provided an excellent example of what being fully accepted for who you are means to marriage partners.

“Because I haven’t had to – you have to make accommodations for the partner because you’re not living in a vacuum, you’re not living by yourself, so there’s all kind of things we do to accommodate the other person – however, when it comes to my passions and the things that he knows are me...he knew who he was marrying. He just honours me. He honours my space, he honours my passions,

and he honours my interests. He doesn't stop me in any possible way from being the person that I was meant to be on this planet.”

### **Promoting Positivity**

*Promoting Positivity* is a main connection-seeking category that represents the ways that couples behave and think and feel about each other that promote positive feelings and build trust and good will between them. This appeared to be an important aspect of long-term marriage in this sample wherein couples engage in practices such as *prepared to forgive, focusing on the good, being friends' of each others' growth and operating from basic trust* in order to promote positive interactions and cultivate a positive view of the spouse. Some participants reported very few experiences of positivity and identified promoting less positivity than other participants and thus, the opposite of a certain category (i.e. prepared to forgive) was also reported through the occasional inclusion of meaning units that reflected the absence or opposite of some of the positivity promoting subcategories.

### **Prepared to forgive**

Marriage partners in this study frequently (6/11) referred to the importance of being willing to forgive each other, sometimes for large transgressions, such as infidelity, as in the case of Susan, who stated “*And I forgave him. And I know a lot of people wouldn't have, they would have said, “forget it, you're outta here.” But I knew, I really really believe that it was just a one-time thing*”. Partners also spoke of the importance of daily doses of forgiveness, such as in this example provided by Charlie:

“I'm sorry if I acted like an ass – I don't need to be an ass, so let's start there, I apologize for being an ass. I take responsibility for escalating this in a way. So I've learned better and I think that's kind of a secret for me, but I think it's an extension for me of always been ready to forgive yourself and the other person – like that's your baseline, that is just what you are going to do. ”

### *Focusing on the good*

Not surprisingly, 9/11 participants talked about how highlighting positive aspects of their marriages contributed to longevity. Focusing on the positive was something that some couples reported doing from the beginning (i.e. Kevin, Sandra, Susan, Charlie and Richard), but other couples had to learn this skill along the way (i.e. Marilyn, and Darryl). In one case, (Helen) the opposite tendency is more active - that of focusing on the negative. In Helen's narrative, even stories that begin positively turn negative, which is reflective of the trajectory of Helen's feelings toward her marriage.

In Marilyn's case, she had to learn how to see the best in her husband and when she did, her marriage changed for the better: *"And so, what happened was I started really focusing on the best in him and there started to be a shift in our relationship. "*

Darryl experienced a similar dynamic in her marriage and she talked about the power of changing her focus in her interview: *"It feels so good. Like, it feels so good to change my glasses and look at the really amazing things about him. Because he is an **amazing** man. And to appreciate and see those things."* Although Marilyn's marital narrative shifted in a positive way over time, it is important to note that even before things shifted Marilyn spoke of the importance of having good times to the survival of their marriage. As she put it, *"we did ride the rollercoaster"*

Richard and Lisa echoed the value of seeing the positive in their marriages:

*"So if I think, wow this relationship is like eighty percent good, ten percent OK and ten percent off-putting, or ten percent 'I wish it could be better'. Eighty percent, or pick a number, seventy percent -- it's pretty good because I knocked off a bunch of categories."*

Lisa remarked, *"Yeah, it's just being thoughtful and aware and grateful for what is great. And not focus on what's not working, but focus on what is working."*

### ***Friends of each other's growth***

The idea of being friends of each other's growth was an aspect identified in 7 /11 of participant interviews in this study. The concept behind being friends of each other's growth is really the idea of supporting the other in what they choose to do for themselves. It is not so much about being helpful, but more about having an attitude that expresses faith and approval of the other's choices, values and needs. It is distinct from the category of "*got my back*" in that is more about being a cheerleader for your partners own agenda than catching your partner if they fall.

Lisa and Richard both made mention of how important this aspect of their marriage had been for them. Lisa stated: "*That's another thing he has always supported every idea, business idea, reinvention of myself. He's always supported it.*"

Richard's interview had 50% of the total number of meaning units (70/140) fitting under this category.

"I haven't even mentioned an obvious thing which has been very important to our relationship, which is while I've been incredibly supportive of her things, she's been incredibly supportive of me and mine. And I've acknowledged that many times, not just to her but to others. I've said "You can't have a better, more supportive spouse for what I've done, than her." And she has been unbelievably supportive, in terms of the weeks and months and years that I wasn't home... I've given her credit, but I probably haven't given her enough. She's really, honestly, consistently, fantastically, supportive. And not just supportive like ignoring it, but actively supportive: "Do what you need to do"."

Although Helen is represented in this subcategory, she pointed out that the support and encouragement she received from her spouse was erratic and grudging, which was consistent with her tendency to focus on the negative in her marriage.

### *Operating from basic trust*

Participants suggested that their marriages endured and flourished because they were firmly based on a foundation of basic goodwill. In this study, 6/11 participants provided responses that were coded under the subcategory “*operating from basic trust.*”

Kevin’s marriage interview frequently made reference (65% of the meaning units in his interview fit under this category) to the implicit trust and goodwill that underscored his marriage. Operating from basic trust includes the idea of respect, because it is hard to trust someone you do not have respect for. Three quotes from Kevin’s interview are reproduced here to give a sense of what operating from basic trust sounds like. The first quote illustrates how the assumption of basic trust colors interactions and promotes closeness: “*I respect her as a person and I trust her instincts and everything. So even when she’s nagging me, I think “oh, I may have forgotten that.”*”

The second quote shows how trust is connected with respect for the person of one’s spouse:

“And I respect her. I mean, there’s no one that I’d want to be raising my kids with more than her. I don’t feel like I have to watch what she says or does. I respect her as a person and I trust her instincts and everything. So it’s a teamwork raising our kids, but I trust her as my partner one hundred percent.”

When basic trust is firmly entrenched in a marriage, interviewees cannot even fathom a deal breaker. This sentiment was beautifully captured by the third excerpt from Kevin’s interview, in response to being asked if he could imagine a “deal-breaker”:

“Not at this point. I just can’t. I don’t even think about that to tell you the truth. It’s not even a part of my consciousness. It’s not like I take anything for granted, it’s just that I - for what we’ve been through and what we’ve done together and what we have – like all the water under the bridge – and just our plans for our future, I just can’t think of anything that doesn’t involve her.”



The following example from Helen's interview was a notable exception to operating from basic trust and gives a good sense of what it sounded like when basic trust and respect was missing in a marriage. In Helen's marriage, she reported little sense of basic trust and that clearly coloured her satisfaction with her marriage and her projections for the future:

"I don't have any hope anymore. I used to. It used to happen every few years I would tell him to get help or I'm leaving, so he would quit drinking and go in to therapy and usually there would be some shifts and sometimes it would feel good for me in those periods but he always regresses back. "

### **Keeping the Connection**

The next category grouped under *Connection seeking* process is called *Keeping the Connection* and it is comprised of the ways in which couples attend to, nurture and promote their emotional, physical, mental and spiritual connection to each other. The nuances that define this concept are *more than sex, the little moments, shared experiences, growing together, sounding boards* and *how are we doing?* Taken together, these six subcategories appeared to help couples maintain and strengthen their ties to each other. All 11 participants contributed to at least one subcategory of *Keeping the Connection*.

#### ***More than sex***

All the participants (11/11) mentioned sexuality in their interviews, either spontaneously or it was introduced by the interviewer because other participants had mentioned it. Clearly, sexuality and intimacy is an important aspect of marriage. However, when study participants talked about sexuality in their long-term marriages it was obvious that they were speaking about more than merely sexual satisfaction and sexual activity. The main concepts contained within this category are the ideas that sex is

not merely sex, but a way of staying connected. This idea is contained in the narratives of 9/11 participants.

Predictably, there were some divides along gender lines in the ways in which participants spoke about sexuality. Men tended to express the feeling that no sex would be “*a really bad thing*” as Jack put it. Women (Marilyn, Sandra and Lisa) spoke about learning to become more sexually receptive once they realized that sex was much more than just sex to their husbands. This was captured nicely in the following quote by Marilyn:

“When I really learned that sex is his way of connecting with me – things shifted. ...for many years I looked on it as just sex. And it’s his way of connecting and that’s his love language. It started to shift and we started to just develop this great playful, passionate connection more, and more and more. And that’s very important to him.”

Lisa also mentioned shifting her attitudes around sex to connect more with her husband, but she also commented that she felt her marriage would not change that much if sex was off the table, even for her husband, although she was willing to grant he would not be happy about it:

“I think I can say that even though that [no more sex] wouldn’t be something that he would like necessarily; that would not affect his love. Because I think when you do really care, love and care about someone that’s an aspect. But it’s not the whole thing, right? So, if that’s all there is, that ain’t gonna last forever either. Even if that [sex] wasn’t there at all, I don’t think that would change things for us.”

Richard expressed that his desire for more sex was not just about sex, but really about attention, at its core:

“Its sex and attention. It’s not just sex, because sex is like an hour. It’s attention. Great sex life, really good – fabulous. But it’s an hour or two hours, not eight hours. Would I want to have more sex? Sure, but everybody does.”

Participants also talked about the role that passion has played in their marriage. Darryl was unique among the women for citing the important role played by chemistry in her marriage: *“So, you know, to this day, we have tremendous chemistry and I am always trying to get his attention... still to this day there is that flirty game.”* Sandra describes her marriage as being a "quiet love" and shares that it was never characterized by heart fluttering and waiting for the phone to ring. As she reflects upon the place passion has in her marriage, she remarked, *"would I want that kind of passion? Sure, I would. And I had it, in other relationships. But it's not sustainable. And what I have is sustainable."*

### ***The little moments***

The majority of study participants (7/11) talked about the significance of the little things and small moments in their marriages. These small rituals seemed to carry a profound meaning to the participants – for example, Darryl talked about when her partner draws her a bath, lights candles and puts a magazine out it says “I love you” to her. Lisa shared a story about how her husband slept outside in the garage with their beloved family dog when he was sprayed by skunk (*“I couldn’t have loved him more in that moment.”*) to illustrate the power of a small gesture. Helen shared how the fact her husband makes a “big deal” out of birthdays and anniversaries meant so much to her. Marilyn spoke about how she appreciated her husband’s willingness to walk through a small town with her despite his initial reluctance. Charlie also offered a very touching example of the power of small rituals in his marriage:

*“Boy, the small best part of the marriage is that point - I tend to stay up later than she does, so we don’t always go to bed at the same time - but whether we do or not, I always put her to bed. So it’s quiet, there is nothing more expected of you in the day and there are those few minutes where we say what’s at the end of the day or what’s the expectation for tomorrow, a kiss goodnight and we’ll say a few things and that – that’s the best part of being married.”*

### *Shared experiences*

This subcategory encompassed how couples described their past history and its significance, and how spending time together in the present contributed to their marriage enduring. It also expressed the idea of how their shared history functioned as a real cornerstone to the marriage and how feeling connected in the present was predicated on a shared history. There was also a focus on the daily practice of shared experience which showed up as “doing things together,” such as activities they both enjoyed, TV shows they watched, restaurants and travel destinations they liked to frequent. Every participant (11/11) in this study spoke about doing things together, spending time together and how that was part of the “glue” that kept the marriage intact.

Richard talked about the importance of wanting to do things together: “*we aspire to do together.*” Jack stated a big component of his marriage was “*spending a lot of time together.*” Charlie also referred to the “*experience of doing things together*” as being foundational to his marriage. Lisa stated “*my husband brags all the time, “I don’t know many couples who spend as much time as we do together.*” Even Helen, who is unhappy in her marriage, acknowledged the importance of spending time together and doing things together in her marriage. She invoked their shared history as part of her rationale for staying, noting “[*there’s*] a lot of history. Most of my life he’s been in it.”

Darryl also shared how their shared past enabled them to get past a difficult period in their marriage:

“There was finally one night where we were just sitting in the hall. Like its so bare bones, because you have just gone through every fight, every problem...it’s just like to the bare bones. And we were just sitting there, there was nothing left to fight about and we were just talking. And it was really nice, and then we went out for dinner, and he just took my hand, kissed my hand and it all just gets washed away and the love just[comes in], you realize you’ve got a lot of history with this person and let’s just get it right.”

The high prevalence of meaning units that were categorized under the subcategory of spending time together in every marriage narrative in this study was testament to the importance of the role it played in the marriages included in this study.

### ***Growing together***

This subcategory referred to the ways that the participants felt they had evolved over the years in a similar direction to their spouses. 9 /11 participants mentioned the ways in which they have grown together. In this study, only one participant (Helen) stated that she felt she and her partner had grown in different ways and she cited this as one of the ways that she felt frustrated in her marriage (“*I think a lot of it is just we are growing in different directions*”).

An example of “growing together” is the following quote from Lisa:

INT: And what about him, would you say he is the same person that you married?

LISA: No. He’s grown; we’ve grown together.

INT: You’ve grown together.

LISA: Yeah.

INT: Yeah, so that would be the story, “we’ve grown together?”

LISA: You know, sometimes you’ll hear “well, you know I moved in this direction and my partner didn’t.”

INT: Yes, that’s right, very often people grow apart.

LISA: Yeah well, we’re on the same wave length.

Kevin also noted the importance of a shared sense of evolution in his marriage:

“You know, slowly, it evolves. But really, the first thing that attracted me was how pretty she was. And then, as I say, you grow together, and as you evolve and you see what she’s like as a daughter-in-law, as a mother, as a sister-in-law, as a wife through all these years. You grow the same way.”

Richard also identified the ways in which he felt he and his partner have evolved together and he highlighted the contribution of their marriage to their mutual growth:

“I think we’ve basically turned out to be the people we were destined to be, as shaped by our experiences and our marriage. I think the marriage -that is the relationship we’ve had for the length of time we’ve had it - is a major, massive contributor to the people that we are, along with obviously other factors. But there’s no question that two people who have had this close of a relationship – interdependent relationship – for this long, there’s no question in my mind that it’s shaped the people that we are.”

### ***Sounding boards***

This subcategory was drawn from participant comments regarding the role of communication in their marriages. 7/11 participants in this study were represented in this subcategory. In particular, participants talked about the value of having someone to bounce ideas off of, someone who is aware of whom they are and what they are doing and can be a good listener. Sandra talked about how she learned at a conference she attended recently that we all need different people in our lives to fulfill various roles,

“One is that we need to have a sounding board. We need to somebody who we can talk to, just somebody who knows us really well and will love us for who we are and allow us to speak. My husband absolutely fulfills that role.”

Richard stated that the best part about being married was:

” having somebody who’s a real confidant, not in the telling secrets sense, but someone who really understands exactly. She doesn’t exactly walk in my shoes but she’s got a big brain, so I can tell her, she understands it, she’s interested in it, she enjoys the funny parts of it, she’s sympathetic with the terrible parts of it, the hard parts of it. ”

### ***How are we doing?***

In this study, 5/11 participants identified the importance of status checking in their marriages as a technique to maintain their ties to each other. This subcategory referred to the ways in which partners actively monitor their relationship and use reliable signs and symptoms to diagnose potential problems before they get too big. In this study, Richard

pointed to the role of communication in his marriage as a way of knowing how things are going between he and his wife in the following quote:

“Like that’s the normal and you kind of know when it’s not working. So if something is not going right for her,, and I don’t mean for a day, I mean for a month. Then that’s bad. It shows up in all facets, but it shows up immediately in communication. And it’ll show up immediately for me as well. I mean, if I was going through a down period, either I’m bored or I’m distracted or something crappy is happening big picture, and I’m not that happy, she knows immediately, because for me it manifests in terms of not talking. That’s what I do. Maybe I’m typical for a man, but I just don’t talk.”

Lisa remarked “*I think it’s important in any relationship to be aware of how things are going. Status checking.*” Charlie echoed her sentiment in his interview and elaborated on the need to be aware of where the marriage is at, at any given time:

“And I think that it’s really important to have – it waxes and wanes right? Months are better than others and weeks are better than other weeks, right? But I think that if there has been a time in our lives when we’ve drifted from our – or the connection has decreased, the marriage didn’t mean as much – it’s like - well I am looking at that, since I’ve been talking to you about this, I’m aware of it and I don’t like it, so it’s to address that when that happens, and that is when I think people start to do other things, they find – it could be bowling, it could be another person, it could be just distance, but they start to chose away from that [the marriage]. So I think you kind of have to talk about that, you have to monitor that, like “how are we doing?” [INT: Right so you are always checking in?] Yeah, like are we spending enough time together, or do we miss spending time together, or [have]we had too much time together. But mostly are we talking about that, are we are saying “where are we at with that?”

### **Intuitive Knowing**

This final category under connection-seeking was created to house participant utterances that referred to the lucky guess, and the fortunate circumstances, either outside of their relationship or inside of it, that participants identified as having been important in helping them remain connected. *Intuitive knowing* captures the gut instincts, the hunches or what one participant labelled “a good call” that study participants verbalized as having been important to both the instigation and maintenance of their marriages. As well,

***Intuitive Knowing*** captures the unintended, unanticipated fortuitous coincidences that enhance connection seeking – you might say that respecting their intuition predisposes participants to view their connection in positive ways and those positive views enhance their connection to each other.

***Intuitive knowing*** is comprised of three subcategories (*we've been lucky, putting it up to faith* and *I “just knew”*) that express the three identified facets of ***Intuitive Knowing***.

### ***We've been lucky***

A surprising number of participants (9/11) cited the significance of luck in the creation and maintenance of their marital bonds. Participants contributing to this subcategory were highly cognizant of the fact that they didn't necessarily go through a rational process to decide to get married and yet it ended up working out really well. A connected, but slightly different idea contained within 'we've been lucky' is an awareness of the absence of potential external stressors on their marriage. A propensity to view one's marriage as being fortunate promotes connection between partners. Kevin is a strong contributor to this subcategory and in the following quote from his interview, he identifies the fortunate circumstances that helped his marriage:

“I'd have to say, and this is what I said before, is that we're lucky, I think. Because we were dating for a long period of time, but a lot of people do. And you kind of drift into that married age, so you get married. And I think this is where a lot of people have problems. They get married without really thinking as you should. We were pretty naive about all the things that would go into a successful marriage and that you'd have to have to have any chance really. And maybe I subconsciously felt that...I mean, we got along, and she came from a nice family. But I can't say that I ticked off all these boxes, thinking, “oh, she's got this quality or I think she'll be a good daughter-in-law.” I really didn't think about it a lot. I give myself a little bit of credit. But I think it's really lucky. Obviously I liked her enough, loved her enough, to marry her. But you know, looking back, I can't say that I did all the mental homework that I should have.”



Susan also highlighted the role of luck in her marriage when she considered why her marriage has endured when so many marriages around her did not: "*I think a lot of it is luck, and I think I'm really lucky being that I was married when I was because I know a lot of people don't have this.*"

Charlie was acutely aware of the good fortune he and his wife experienced in their marriage and he pointed it out in the following excerpt:

"And we were really lucky. We were so lucky in ways that I think that- I mean I remember the research on couples, when I was doing couples therapy and people fight about families, money, kids and sex. And we've had – we never fought about sex, we have always had enough money, our families are not too crazy and we don't have any kids. I don't whether we just got lucky or that we are fairly level people – I don't know – did that make it easier? I don't know. We just never considered that there would ever be anything so serious that we wouldn't get through it."

### ***Putting it up to faith***

This subcategory was only evidenced in only three participant narratives but it seemed to capture a significant aspect of the notion of *Intuitive knowing* and so it was retained.

"*Putting it up to faith*" captures the way participants choose to believe in their marriage, their spouse and the "rightness" of their union, in the absence of incontestable proof. The best example came from Richard's comment:

"I've honestly put the whole thing up to faith, really. I had faith that I called it right, faith that my long-view perspective is the right perspective, because I actually don't know if it's better on the other side."

Given that Richard self-identifies as an atheist, his invoking of faith as a part of his rationale for remaining married was particularly striking.

Sandra echoed a similar sentiment in her comment: "*Well I definitely think I met my soul mate. I do believe that my husband is my soul mate.*" While realizing there is no way to be 100% sure, participants contributing to this subcategory chose to see a greater

purpose behind the randomness of meeting, marrying and remaining together and this belief is protective to their marriage.

### ***I just “knew”***

This aspect of the main category ***Intuitive Knowing*** captures the unconscious knowing that 6/11 participants identified as having been important, particularly with regard to the initial selection process. There is a strong element of luck and intuition involved in the mate selection process and the participants in this study expressed this idea in comments such as this one from Susan:

“I remember when I met him it was at a New Year’s Eve party and we were at my friend’s house. And he came in and I said to my friend “I think I’m in love with this guy.” Just like that... ”

Lisa concurred and offered a similar comment: "*We were fixed up on a blind date and I liked him right away.*"

Sandra identified an immediate connection to her husband to be as well:

"So we met and became friends right away. And we didn’t start going out right away. I wasn’t interested in being in a relationship and he was already in a relationship and so we sort of just became friends, but we connected almost immediately."

### **Self-Defining Categories**

The overarching category of ***Self-defining*** in this study depicts the specific ways in which partners defined themselves as being distinct and separate. The close connection they shared with their spouses seemed to help them notice and respect the ways in which they were not alike. Participants noted that there needs to be a balance of individual time and space in a marriage and togetherness in order for it to flourish and endure. All 11 participants were represented in the three main categories, ***Managing Conflict***, ***Assuming***

**Responsibility** and **Maintaining Autonomy** that comprised this second level, overarching category.

### **Assuming Responsibility**

This category reflected the ways in which participants stated that they had stepped up and owned their own part in marital dynamics (*meta-awareness of patterns*), and forced themselves to consider their spouses views, even if they disagreed (*I have to listen*), shifted their view of their marriage or their spouse when things were clearly not working, without waiting for the other to do so first, (*shifting perspective*). Also participants noted how they took care of their own emotional needs in the marriage (*owning what is yours*) by attending to their own happiness, either through doing positive things for themselves, without relying on their partner to make them happy, or by owning their shortcomings and making efforts to improve themselves when warranted.

### ***Meta-awareness of patterns***

Over time, participants stated they became aware of the “dance” they did with their spouses and were able to identify the steps in it. This represented a kind of meta-awareness of the dynamics of the marriage and was often associated with the ability to transcend maladaptive patterns of this dance. In particular, the participants (9/11) spoke of their awareness of old patterns in their marriage. For instance, Marilyn noted that her awareness of the entrenched patterns in her marriage helped her transform her marriage from one she was frustrated and unhappy to something that she was far more satisfied with. The following quote shows Marilyn’s awareness of the patterns in her marriage:

“He didn’t know what to do with that [her neediness], so he pulled away. So we did this dance where I would lean forward so far, he would back off, then I would back off and then he would come forward. And we went back and forth like that. We had some wonderful glimpses of happiness and good periods in between, but

basically as soon as he would start to come forward I was just so overwhelmingly needy and smothering that he would back off very fast and then I would be all sad and depressed and feeling unloved and wondering why isn't he making me happy? And then I would back off for a while, and then he would come forward, and then we would have a good little period; and then we would do that dance; over and over and over again”.

Participants appeared to use their meta-awareness of the patterns in their marriages as an impetus to change the things that were not working, as demonstrated in the following quote from Charlie:

“Yeah, so I'm a bit of a whiner about stuff that I want to happen, I don't know – so one of the things I've been working on, I don't think she has to work on this as much, but if I could be open to her way or her idea then I could probably learn something or find something of value.”

Helen felt her meta-awareness of patterns led her to become more agentic and differentiated in her marriage. She explained that marrying someone who “defied me” pushed her to have to assert herself:

“Like now I go out whenever I want, I do whatever I want, if I want to take a course, he can't stop me. I just tell him, ‘ this is what I'm doing,’ I don't ask him. Int: So in a weird way his saying “No” forced you to become more assertive. Helen. Yeah. Yeah. He once said to me – he was in therapy – ‘ you can't blame me for everything’ and I said “I don't blame you – I'm actually grateful to you because I wouldn't become who I am if it weren't for you.”

### ***I have to listen***

Seven participants in this study contributed to this category. The key ideas the meaning units classified under this category expressed were respecting your partner's point of view, understanding that there are multiple realities, and that your own perspective is only one of those realities; thus you have to listen to what your spouse says, out of respect and in recognition of your own humility. When partners are able to operate from this perspective they allow their partner to be themselves and speak their

truth while honoring their own position. Sandra expresses this stance in her interview in the following quote:

“Much of how we run our lives as a couple is based on my needs because I’m much more opinionated than he is, but I would never do something if it didn’t suit him. There are definitely things, I can’t think of an example at the moment, but there are always things that he doesn’t want to do that kind of thing and the idea is (snaps fingers) over if he doesn’t want to do it.”

Richard also demonstrates this willingness to listen, even if at first he doesn’t agree, in the following excerpt from his interview:

“Yeah, it builds a lot of respect. She does or says something that sounds kind of goofy, but you’re talking to someone who’s been through a lot with you, so while one particular thing [might elicit] ‘what the hell are you talking about?’ then I [have to] say, ok. I have to listen. I have to listen, she’s made sense before, and she’s called them right. She’s got our best interests in mind, let me listen now.”

### *Shifting perspective*

5/11 participants contributed to this subcategory, which was composed of the ways in which participants talked about shifting their perspective, either of their marriage or of their spouse, although the two often seemed to entail each other, to some degree. This was the only category that had a strong gendered perspective, as only one man (Charlie) was a minor contributor. There were two participants (Darryl and Marilyn) who described marriages with dramatic turning points and a real shift in perspective and both are strong contributors to this category. Marilyn eloquently illustrated a shift in perspective in the following quote:

“I got it, that most of the time I was looking at what was wrong with him. Looking at what he was doing wrong, or wasn’t doing right, and talking about it with my girlfriends, and always wanting him to change. Me, always having the fantasy of a therapist tying him up so I could tell him everything that was wrong with him. And when I realized that it was -- when I really completely got it that it was my thoughts that were making me unhappy. And when I started looking at him and what he was doing right and at all of his great points; all of a sudden the energy between us started to shift.”

Darryl also told a story of a marriage that had a big shift in perspective when she talked about seeing her husband in a new light:

“Yeah, it was probably at the very, very end when we were at rock, rock bottom that I thought you know what? I actually really love this person. I really love him, so deep in my heart and ...I just looked at him very differently all of a sudden and it was that appreciation, you know? I mean...here was this guy who has probably the softest heart in the world, but has such a hard exterior and what was so hard for me was that hard exterior. ”

### ***Owning what is yours***

The majority of participants (9/11) made at least some reference to the parts of their marriage that they don't do as well as they could, and their own responsibility to take care of themselves emotionally, without laying it all on their spouse. For instance, Susan stated:

“Without really looking, it's usually something in yourself that you're not happy with. Usually I can do something about it to make myself happy. Like ok, why aren't I happy with me? I let myself go take painting classes, or let me go and do something else for myself to make me happier. ”

Charlie advocates taking responsibility for what is yours in his interview, in his answer to the question: Are there any secrets to a marriage that lasts? *“I really think you have to be very prepared to say “I'm sorry, that's my fault” Take responsibility for things in the relationship and not argue about whose responsibility it is to take responsibility.”*

### **Maintaining Autonomy**

In order to stay married, participants frequently talked about the ways in which they remained independent and autonomous in their marriages. This included finding ways to be alone, while still being together (*spaces in togetherness*) and maintaining or creating a life outside of the marriage that is separate from the marriage (*following my own path*). It

also included having *multiple paths to fulfillment*, such as hobbies, friends, interests and ways of getting your needs met that are independent of your partner.

### ***Spaces in togetherness***

This subcategory included the ways in which participants (8/11) talked about how partners share their space and leave each other the room to be themselves. It captures that idea of being alone, together, and being comfortable to do your own thing in the presence of the other, without feeling constrained in any way. Sandra expresses it well in her quote below:

“I’ve always been the one with a lot of interests and a lot of outings and a lot of things and even if he doesn’t have as many outside interests as I do, he’s happy in his time. He’s happy in his own time. Sometimes its work, he’s just preoccupied with work; that’s a big part of his life. But even if he was home, he could sit at the computer for the whole day, just researching music. And he’s happy. I hear couples say all the time, women will say “I gotta get out of the house...I don’t want to be in the house with my husband at the same time. He takes up space.” I’ve never felt that way. I’ve never felt like he’s in my space. We just don’t invade each other’s space. He doesn’t need me around him 24/7. I don’t need him around me. “

Kevin recalled how the poem read at his wedding by poet Kahlil Gibran expressed this idea (and is, in fact, where the name for this category originated) of being together and yet separate. He shared his recollection of the poem in the following quote:

“I’m not going to remember it with as much detail as I should. But it was basically that you can be together but still be independent. Like you could have this closeness but not need the person to the exclusion of everything else. So, lead your life together, but also apart is a good thing. And my wife wanted to read that [at our wedding]... It’s about a tree but the branches are apart but they’re part of the same foundation. And each nurtures each other. It was beautiful. So she had wanted to read that to me before we were married and didn’t get around to it. And when we were under the chuppah, [the rabbi] started to read it. She looked at me with a look of amazement. Then after she told me that that’s what she thought was so important in a marriage and that she thought we had that in our relationship and that it was an important thing to keep in mind as you go through life together.”

### ***Following my own path***

This subcategory was evidenced in the interviews of every participant in this study (11/11). Essentially, this was how participants talked about reconciling the paradox of being married, which is a limit on total freedom to do as you please, and yet feeling free. Unprompted, participants talked about the ways in which their marriage had not felt restrictive or stopped them from doing what they want to do. Kevin provided a good example:

So we've never had to make deals where I felt like I was giving something up that was important to me. Like I've never felt... I can't think of anything that I want to be doing that I'm not... There's been nothing that I wanted to do that she's stopped me".

Susan echoed Kevin's sentiment, when she stated:

"I think it's very important to do things together, but I also think it's very important to do things that are not together, because then you bring back to the marriage something of interest. You know? Like I go out, you know, for my woman's organizations every friggin' night of the week sometimes, but that's ok."

Marilyn was a big contributor to this category as evidenced by her passionate statement, *"All that – it's unimportant. Oh my God, get your own life and come together when you come together. This is a human being, this is not someone who's mission in life is to make you feel good. It's yours."*

### ***Multiple sources of fulfillment***

This subcategory emerged from participant contributions that stressed how they each had their own interests and did not expect to get their entire fulfillment from the relationship. 11/11 participants contributed to this category. Richard's interview was liberally peppered with references to the importance of having his own life and his own



interests in his marriage. The following excerpt was one of many examples in Richard's interview:

"I'm patient and I would say I'm not completely dependent on this either. Again, I have my own interests. I have a life outside – I was going to say I have a life outside the marriage – but what I mean is I have interests outside the marriage. I'm not dependent on her."

Sandra also noted *multiple sources of fulfillment* in her interview and was quite insistent about the importance of having your own interests and getting your needs met through many avenues:

"[I've] never been totally emotionally dependent on this relationship. I think I get my needs fulfilled in a variety of ways. Communication is definitely a very vital part of our relationship and we talk a lot. I probably don't go into those deep, energy-swirling conversations with him all the time, or maybe ever. ..Like we do talk a lot, and it's definitely an important thing, but again, I would say the same thing which I sort of put in the same context as my spiritual needs, is some of that deep conversation, I get elsewhere, if I need it. And I don't feel I need it from him. We have enough conversation; I'm not needing that from him. I get a lot from him, you know? "

Kevin echoes a similar sentiment. "*Like I say, we both do a lot of other things independently too. So it's not like we're stifling each other. We both have other interests and other friendships and do other things.*"

### **Managing Conflict**

*Managing Conflict* is a main category that is involved in both individuating and relational processes, but following some deliberation, it has been classified as self-defining category because conflict asks for self assertion, boundary setting and managing differences, which are a better fit with the properties of *Self-defining* categories in this study. The literature has identified the importance of conflict managing strategies on relationship satisfaction (Gottman, 1991, 1993, 1994, 1995; Gottman & Levenson, 1992, 2000). Some ways of handling conflict are more relationally enhancing, while others are

autonomy building. There are also ways of handling conflict that do not enhance relational bonds or help build autonomy. If conflict is not successfully managed, emotional anchoring is compromised and partners experience less satisfaction and safety in their relationship than they would if they had been able to successfully navigate conflict.

In this study, marriage partners made reference to five main strategies to manage conflict within their relationship (*respecting differences, talking it through, big picture perspective, accumulating hurts and resentments and denial, deception and distraction*). These will now be presented, beginning with the subcategory, *respecting differences*.

### ***Respecting differences***

The fact that spouses are different from each other is a potential source of conflict in all marriages. Dr. Les Greenberg notes that the first thing spouses have to do in couples' therapy was to forgive each other for being different from each other (personal communication). *Respecting differences* was something that participants talked about frequently in their interviews (8/11). This concept was exemplified in Sandra's comments contrasting the differences with how she handles being different to her partner to how her parents handled it in their marriage:

“When I was growing up, my parents, besides having no respect for one another, they were also polar opposites, but they didn't admire each other's differences, they condemned each other's differences. My mother was extremely artistic, out-there, social animal, but very flighty and housekeeping was not her thing at all, but she was a social animal. My father was introverted and somewhat withdrawn, and I think got married, really hoping that he would find a nice housewife that could cook and clean for him, and he met the wrong woman. So they had a terrible marriage. So, there was no respect. He didn't admire her fire. And she didn't admire his quiet, stable personality. He drove her crazy.”

Sandra went on to explain how things worked in her marriage,

“He [her husband] would prefer if I would make the decision. So we’re never butting heads over what we’re going to do. However, if he doesn’t want to do something, I don’t, I cannot walk over him. If he doesn’t want to do it, he will say, “I don’t want to do it.” And I’m very respectful, we don’t do it.”

Howard also spoke about how he and his wife handled their differences, and noted

“I mean we do a lot of stuff together, but we also do stuff separately. I have different interests and my wife has different interests, and we respect each other for that. You know, I’m not going to make her change because I like certain things and she doesn’t, and vice versa. And I think that’s fair.”

To provide a fuller sense of what respecting differences looks like, it is helpful to consider what the opposite end of the spectrum sounds like. When asked to elaborate about the challenges in her marriage Helen stated the following about her husband’s intolerance:

“...intolerance, to so much, to people, to my family, to doing things – he’s intolerant of people. His not wanting to do things.... we are different in – I am so tolerant – I tolerate even if I’m not happy about tolerating because I don’t want to displease anybody, but he doesn’t give a shit. So we are VERY different, we are TOTALLY at opposite ends in that way.”

Helen was critical of the ways in which her spouse was not like her and found it hard to see the value in his way of being. She also felt disrespected by him and made mention of how he shuts her down when he doesn’t agree with her.

### ***Talking it through***

Another aspect of managing conflict is through communication, particularly of sensitive or difficult issues. In this study, 7/11 participants elaborated on the value of talking challenging issues through in order to resolve conflict. The notion of compromise is contained within talking it through, although not in all cases. Illustrations of talking it through include this excerpt taken from Jack’s interview:

“...look, when you’re married this long, you have disagreements, you have fights, you have, issues. Part of it is that things come up and, I think we’ve always been

able to deal with those things ultimately. I think it's just really confronting the issues and hitting it head on, you know. I can think of examples where it's been uncomfortable. But the bottom line is we sit down and we thrash it out on that issue, and even though we end up not agreeing. We at least understand the other perspective, and somehow the discussion is cathartic, and you get through it, as opposed to sitting and festering and building it up into something more than it is. I mean, we've never had an issue like a marriage ending issue."

Lisa echoed Jack's sentiment in her remark, "*If something's pissing you off, you've got to talk about it. And talk about it a way that is not harsh.*"

Richard also referred to the importance of hashing out aspects of his marriage as well, when he noted, "*And of course we talked out some aspects of it as well, but the talking out, if it doesn't kill you, it makes you stronger, in your relationship as well as in life.*"

### ***Big picture perspective***

An important aspect of managing conflict is to be able to retain the ability to see the big picture, or take the long view. All participants in this study (11/11) endorsed this notion of putting disagreements or disappointments into perspective and being able to see past small conflicts to the greater whole. In some respects this is akin to not sweating the small stuff, but also speaks to the value placed on the marriage as a whole.

It seems that at least some ability to retain a broader view is needed to remain in a long marriage. Richard was a big contributor to this subcategory, and he expressed his opinion about having a long view in the following excerpts:

"I have a long-view. I have a long-view about my life, about the marriage, and I think people who don't have a long-view, they're the ones who need to stray, they need to have affairs, I think... I knew that next month, it would be better, and next year we wouldn't even be thinking about it."

"You go through a particularly crappy cycle and you have to say, 'Ok, we're not together because we've been together, we're together because we trust each other, we get a lot out of the sharing we do, and now we have kids.'"

In particular, Richard relied upon his big picture perspective to weather storms and dry spells in his marriage; Charlie voices a similar idea in his interview when he notes how marriages “wax and wane” and that changes are inevitable.

Susan adopted a big picture perspective when she talked about her husband’s one night stand with a co-worker and how she chose to deal with it by placing it in the context of their long marriage and life together:

“I was really upset when I found out. I remember going out for a long long walk and just crying, and crying. And I couldn’t believe it was happening to me... it did, it rocked me. And you sort of think, my God, you know, my kids. For one little mistake you were going to throw away years, and years, and years ... It just wasn’t worth it to me.”

Howard also made use of the big picture in his marriage in the following quote from his interview:

“You know, my life would have to be unbearable for me to walk away from my relationship. I have a very long fuse and I can tolerate a lot of bad things, whereas a lot of people would just probably say “There’s no way I could live that way, you know... And there’s nothing really in my relationship that’s **that** awful... and to go ahead and start all over again with someone else- for not a major reason - doesn’t make any sense -- especially with children involved.”

### ***Denial, deception and distraction***

This subcategory contained participant statements that referenced denying or downplaying difficulties, using distraction to avoid facing difficult aspects of the marriage and evading answering difficult questions in the interview, going outside the marriage to get their needs met and harboring doubts about the suitability of one’s partner or the desirability of remaining married. Meaning units included in this subcategory tended to normalize issues within the marriage as being universal in nature and therefore acceptable. There was also a hedging quality, which showed up as a lack of elaboration

or a tendency to divert conversation toward other people instead of focusing on their own marriage and their feelings about it. 6/11 participants contributed to this subcategory.

The following excerpt from Howard's interview is one example of many meaning units in his interview that demonstrated this hedging quality, the tendency toward normalization and minimization of issues and a propensity toward generalizing to divert focus from the specifics of his own experience:

“Well, it's interesting most of the time, but we've had our issues with kids and stuff like that, which is normal. Because I know a lot of families have those issues similar to us, some don't; some are different... but it's always about, you know, the parents or the children, so it's the whole package, you know things happen in your life, parents get older and kids grow up and there's issues with them or there's issues with the parents and other people come into the picture off and on, some last, some don't, some stay, some leave...”

Other participants, such as Darryl, were more explicit about their doubts:

“I've done 22 years of soul searching about it. The struggle...one huge struggle that I had with him is that my family did not like him. Because he was very, very different. [The] ups and downs and the difficulty of me being a certain personality and him truly being an opposite. I think I should have picked somebody more similar. It probably wouldn't have been as exciting and passionate, but I think later in life, it's [easier]...to have a companion that is similar to you.”

Helen was also a big contributor to this category because she employed deception to go outside of the marriage and have an affair in order to manage her frustrations within her marriage:

“It was after I had been married 18 or 19 years. I am not a player, I was never highly sexual at all, but I was starting to get very curious. I had low self esteem in many ways, I didn't think I was attractive or that men would like me, but I learned the opposite. There was one man I saw for awhile on and off and that is where I really learned that I was sexual. If anything, it made me like him [my husband] less.”

Jack was also a big contributor to this category because many of the meaning units in his interview displayed the hedging quality (i.e. When asked about what he valued most

about his marriage, he replied “*Can I get back to that and answer your other question?*”) and talking in generalities and making reference to other people or marriage in the abstract that are the key components of this category. For example:

“I know people whose marriages break up. You have a child born disabled, or you know some health issue and I’ve seen marriages break up because of that. I don’t know what that means exactly, but I can’t blame anyone for that...if you have a hundred friends, each marriage is different, each of the participants, I guess I’m still a believer that there is a lot that goes on behind closed doors”.

### ***Accumulating hurts and building resentment***

This category was derived from participant utterances that focused on the unresolved issues that plagued the marriage. Included in this category are notions such as blaming, criticizing and condemning the partner. Holding on to negative feelings like being misunderstood, being mistreated and disappointed or betrayed all fit under this category. This category might also be viewed as representing the “same old story” in a marriage (Angus & Greenberg, 2011); the recurring fights, the grudges that partners do not let go of. Most participants were represented in this category - the two notable exceptions were Sandra and Kevin who did not make any mention of resentment in their marriages. There were, however, marked differences in the frequency that interviewees referred to unresolved and lingering issues in their marriage. For example, in Helen’s marriage, her narrative was built around her frustrations and unmet needs. Darryl and Marilyn both focused on the hard issues in their marriages as well, but then both of their narratives shifted and they no longer accumulated hurts and resentments in the same way. Richard and Charlie both acknowledged some areas of conflict, but did not dwell on them, while both Jack and Howard covertly alluded to on-going issues but in a rather abstract, overly generalized fashion.

Helen expressed the build up of resentment and hurt frequently and poignantly in her interview:

“Yeah and I don’t know if that’s from the control, the emotional abuse which has happened for so many years that I’ve put this wall up that -You know I can forgive him, because I’m stronger now, so there is less of it [the emotional abuse] but I don’t know if that wall can ever be broken.”

Jack hinted at the accumulation of hurts and resentments in his marriage in the following statement from his interview:

“I think they probably would say it’s great. But I think they also would describe, you know, turmoil. There would be times where she gets upset or angry and um, so I think that uh, you know, again, it’s not so much in my personality. I don’t, there aren’t times where I get like she does. There’s not times where we are having like, all out brawls, or yelling, screaming, going on, but still...”

Marilyn explicitly identified this pattern in her marriage before it changed for the better:

*“And, I was extremely unhappy always. We always loved each other, but I just pushed him away. He didn’t know how to handle my neediness, my feeling that I couldn’t do anything.”*

### **Summary of Results of GTM Qualitative Analysis**

A grounded theory (GTM) informed analysis of 11 participant interviews (five men and six women) generated a core category called **EMOTIONAL ANCHORING**. The core category was further organized into two overarching second level categories, defined as *Connection-seeking* or *Self-defining*. *Connection-seeking* categories were comprised of *Building a Safe Haven*, *Promoting Positivity*, *Keeping the Connection*, and *Intuitive Knowing*; plus their 18 subcategories, while *Self-defining* categories included *Managing Conflict*, *Maintaining Autonomy* and *Taking Responsibility*, along with their 12 subcategories. Each main category was described in terms of their subcategories and



illustrated through examples of participant utterances taken from their interviews. (See *Figure 1* for a visual depiction of the model of enduring marriage, showing the relationship between the categories identified and explained in this chapter).

### **KMSS Results Summary**

In this study, there were only two instances where the interview data did not match the results from the KMSS. In eight interviews, study participants rated their satisfaction with their marriages, their relationship with their spouse and their spouse as a partner as either "very satisfied" or "extremely satisfied", and these high ratings were reflected in the interview data and the loading of their meaning units onto categories associated with satisfaction in marriage, such as *Promoting Positivity*, *Keeping the Connection* and *Building a Safe Haven*. In one interview, (Helen) there is a minimal contribution to many of the positive, connection-based categories but her KMSS results are consistent with her low levels of satisfaction (extremely dissatisfied across all three KMSS questions).

The two instances where the results of the KMSS were surprising were in the cases of Jack and Howard. Jack does not explicitly or directly indicate being dissatisfied with his marriage in his interview; however, his dissatisfaction does reveal itself subtly in his contribution to the categories of *denial and deception and distraction* (a sub-category of *Managing Conflict*), which shows up in his tendency to deflect answering questions about his marriage by talking about other people and avoiding being specific about his own marriage. His frequent use of the adjective "interesting" to describe his marriage is also coded under the sub-category *denial, distraction and deception* and connotes his evasiveness and reluctance to look at the unsatisfactory aspects of his marriage. However,

Jack's dissatisfaction was very clearly indicated on his KMSS, reflected by his ratings of "very dissatisfied" across all three questions. Unlike Helen, Jack did not voice his dissatisfaction directly in his interview; it is evidenced by his small contribution to the positive, connection-based categories in the model and his strong contribution to the sub-categories of *denial, distraction and deception* and *accumulation of hurts and resentment*.

It is important to share that Howard subsequently separated from his wife after participating in the study. Thus, one would have expected to find some evidence of dissatisfaction in his interview data and his answers on the KMSS. While there was no indication of dissatisfaction on his KMSS responses (all questions were rated as "very satisfied"), in his interview, he was a big contributor to the sub-category of ***Managing Conflict*** and particularly the sub-category of *denial and deception*. Like Jack, Howard also often deflected questions by talking about other people and avoided specificity when talking about his marriage and his wife. He also repeatedly stated that his "marriage would have to be unbearable" for him to justify leaving it and he noted that he has a high tolerance for being able to withstand difficulties. From these statements, I inferred that he was less happy than the other participants, but it was revealed covertly. Notably, neither Jack's nor Howard's interviews painted a clear picture of their wives; there is a lack of detail and concreteness in both narratives that tacitly indicated a less satisfying marriage and showed up as a large proportion of meaning units that were categorized under the subcategory *denial and deception*.

### **Marriage Prototypes and In-Depth Write-Up**

Three distinct types of marriages emerged in this study, based upon interviewee perceptions of the relative ease or difficulty of their marriages (*See Table 2*). Marriages

were typed in two main ways. Initially, they were grouped early on in the analysis, according to whether participants described their marriage as being easy, challenging or as having radically shifted. Once the qualitative analysis was underway, they were grouped according to the way they loaded onto the main categories, which did not change the groupings. While every marriage in this study demonstrated emotional anchoring and referred to the seven main categories in their narratives (*see Table 3*) each marriage differed in the degree to which they utilized the categories and thus, the model satisfies the principal investigator's goal of capturing the common elements of each lasting marriage while at the same time, being able to distinguish the important differences in each marital narrative.

The three different types of marriages were termed: the easy marriage (5/11), the challenging marriage (3/11) and the shifting marriage (3/11). Although writing up each marriage narrative in full felt like the most fitting tribute I could offer my study participants, due to the constraints of time and length, I have limited my in-depth narrative depictions and analyses to three prototypical marriages that illustrate the easy, shifting and challenging marriage, respectively titled *Marry your best friend*, *On my second marriage to my first husband* and *Like being in a dark cave*. A brief analysis, commenting on how each of the three prototypical marital narratives maps onto the model of enduring marriage that emerged in this study is provided at the conclusion of each marriage narrative.

***“Marry your best friend”***

*Prototypical example of an easy marriage*

I interviewed Charlie in his office. It was a warm and inviting office, with two comfy chairs and the much coveted window. He invited me to take one of the comfy chairs and we sat down, facing each other.

“So you have been married for 23 years. What is it like, being in your marriage?” I asked. Charlie paused and then said *“I think...our marriage is really that idea of “marry your best friend.”* He added, *“I don’t know if XX was my **best** friend, but she has always been my friend...she’s like a friend I never get tired of.”*

Charlie explained they met in university and became friends quickly. Friendship turned into dating and then he did *“something stupid”* by dating other girls, and she found out, but remained his friend and eventually he *“came to his senses”* and they began dating exclusively. Charlie was frightened of the idea of commitment *“One woman for the rest of my life? It sounded so restricted, how would I know who was the right person?”* His wife did not suffer from the same decision-making angst and Charlie reported that *“she just knew”* from very early in their relationship that they would be together.

Shortly after Charlie started grad school, they moved in together, despite some family concern on her side about them living together before marriage. After about 4 months, Charlie knew he was going to ask her to marry him. He still sounded a bit surprised that his fear of commitment had evaporated: *“I don’t know – I guess I thought it would be ok.”* The idea of marriage ceased to feel like a trap to him and Charlie had used the living together period as an opportunity to tell her everything he was afraid might cause an issue down the road. Among the things he shared with her was his reluctance to have children in case he ended up having to care for his severely handicapped younger sister one day.

That was fine with her; she did not have a strong maternal urge. After revealing all of his secrets including "*the "big one" that I wasn't perfect, which apparently she already knew*" they took the next step and got married.

Charlie entered into marriage with a strong awareness of the potential for divorce. Fuelling his concern was fact that his fiancée was a child of divorce and her family were very nice people and he wondered how he and his wife-to-be would avoid their fate because he realized "*gosh, we are not better than many other people, so why is this not going to happen to us?*" He shared his fears with his soon-to-be wife, and was reassured when she told him "*I wouldn't say I would marry you if I didn't think I could be married to you forever.*"

Charlie identified that having similar views about the meaning of marriage was important to him and has been important in sustaining his marriage. One of the challenges he recalled facing in the beginning, was that any conflict felt very threatening to him and if they fought, he worried that it meant they shouldn't be together. "*No one ever threatened divorce – it was more like we are going to be stuck in a shitty marriage.*" Over the years, one of the ways that Charlie explained they have grown is that they have become much better at tolerating conflict, although he admitted "*we still struggle with this one sometimes, when we really disagree.*"

Another thing that Charlie and his wife do to keep their marriage intact and fulfilling is to monitor it. "*[Marriage] waxes and wanes right? Months are better than others and weeks are better than other weeks, right? But I think that if there has been a time in our lives when we've drifted or the connection has decreased, or the marriage didn't mean as much –I'm aware of it and I don't like it, so it's important to address that when that*

*happens. Otherwise, I think people start to do other things, they find – it could be bowling, it could be another person, it could be just distance, but they start to chose away from [the marriage]. So I think you have to talk about that, you have to monitor it, like “how are we doing?”*

I observed Charlie checking in with himself during our interview after he told me he always used to say getting married was the best decision he ever made. Charlie admitted, *“I’m probably in a lazy spot marriage-wise. It’s on autopilot, maybe not lazy, but it’s on autopilot, so I’m maybe not as grateful as I should be as often as I should be and I try to be grateful about it everyday, if I can.”*

There was clearly a sense of evolution in his marriage and Charlie spoke frankly about how his motivation has changed over the years: *“I don’t think I had conceptualized beyond the idea of the sexual attraction and sexual activity part– the earlier drive for that was stronger for me, than it is now, and so it’s like “what happens?”* Since the sexual attraction that once took center stage is no longer the reason for the whole enterprise, Charlie has had to make sense of marriage in new ways: *“I just didn’t think about how much those little moments would be valuable and the idea that you could just unconditionally love somebody. Or try to. And receive that back.”* What has emerged for him, after many years of being married, is a sense of being connected, of being there for each other, no matter what life brings, *“Yeah, really the idea of “for better or worse” That’s what’s it like, it truly is – I’ve had some bad moments and she hasn’t wavered. And currently, she has had some health scares and so she gets worried, and I’m not worried – “it will be okay “– whatever is going to happen it will be okay. We’re going to be okay.”* Charlie espoused a strong sense of being in this together. The inner turmoil that

caused Charlie's trepidation around making a permanent commitment has totally abated and what remained was a strong sense of being there, no matter what.

At my urging, he tried to imagine a deal breaker and admitted it was hard to come up with one at this point. He mused that a real shift in religious beliefs that was not shared by the other might put undue stress on their bonds, but he was quick to say he can not imagine that happening after all of this time. He stated that when he was younger there were things he thought would end the marriage, but now he is not sure anything could be as significant as the years they have spent together and the marriage they have built together.

The next evolution Charlie told me about was how they learned that they don't have to spend all of their time together. Earlier in their marriage, choosing to do something other than be together felt like a rejection. *"I think that in the early days of marriage it would be like how could we ever have a time when we wouldn't want to spend time together? Even when we got more independent, it was like why wouldn't we want to spend all of our time together?"* Now, Charlie says he is able to tolerate and even celebrate his wife's separate interests *"if she wants to do something and has to be away for three weeks, I don't care. I'll miss her, and I'll have things to tell her and I'll be excited to see her when she comes back and but I'm thinking 'good, I'm glad you get to do that'."*

The development of their ability to be both separate and together certainly was a big part of Charlie's narrative. Another important aspect of his account of remaining married was unconditional love and how his marriage taught him that it was possible to be accepted exactly as you are flaws and all. This was brought home rather dramatically in Charlie's narrative through a significant drinking problem he had that precluded him

from driving for a year and a half. He explained how he had taken pains to hide it from her and would drink by himself, but “*she knew.*” He sounded almost astonished as he relayed “*to me, when my drinking progressed, if she was going to leave me that is when she should have. And she didn’t. And she never threatened it. And that kind of amazes me.*” The fact that she stood by him and never wavered is huge for Charlie. “*She’s been incredible. I don’t know that I would tolerate me...I think it goes back to that idea if you are really yourself and that person knows you and decides to stay with you anyway, my goodness! Wow that really is unconditional love.*”

I asked Charlie if he thought there were any secrets to remaining married. He shared that he believed taking responsibility was really key: “*I really think you have to be very prepared to say “I’m sorry, that’s my fault” Take responsibility for things in the relationship and not argue about whose responsibility it is to take responsibility.*” Even initially, Charlie said he has always been willing to take responsibility. “*like I’ll not know what the thing is, but I’ll say it doesn’t matter if I don’t know what the thing is, but I’m sorry if I acted like an ass ...I think it’s an extension of always been ready to forgive yourself and the other person – like that’s your baseline, that is just what you are going to do. That’s an extension of being able to take responsibility when things are happening.*”

One of the unique challenges Charlie and his wife have dealt with together was their decision to remain child-free. He explained that at times they have both wondered about it but despite their occasional misgivings, Charlie reported they are both happy with their life together and their decision not to procreate. “*I think it’s probably helped us because we have been really really fortunate and very grateful for how easy our lives have been –*



*not that we haven't gone through a lot of stuff too, but we've got food to eat, we can go to a movie if we want to, we've had a pretty easy life that way."* Charlie also stated they have been fortunate to be very well matched, with some compatible differences.

We talked about the best and worst parts of being in his marriage. The worst part was easy for him to answer *"Not getting your way all the time. I'm a bit of a whiner about that stuff."* He also mentioned it was tough having to deal with someone else's "family crap", because it was bad enough having to deal with your own. To illustrate the best part Charlie offered a touching story of their shared bedtime ritual: *"I tend to stay up later than she does, so we don't always go to bed at the same time, but whether we do or not, I always put her to bed. So it's quiet, there is nothing more expected of you in the day and there's those few minutes where we say what's at the end of the day or what's the expectation for tomorrow, a kiss goodnight and we'll say a few things and that's the best part of being married."* Charlie also spoke of the importance of doing things together and feeling totally free to be himself, *"even simple things, like laughing at the same television show, or reading a book after she reads it, and just doing that in a really comfortable way with somebody where I'm not self-conscious at all... I'm as much myself, good bad, as I'll ever be with somebody else."*

Charlie gave his thoughts on the age-old conundrum of passion versus friendship: *"it's the loving somebody when they are a shitball, when they've hurt you, when they've been drunk, stupid or whatever. That is the kind of love that I believe in. And so when I hear people talk about romantic love throughout their marriage, I'm like "that is bullshit." I have had moments like that, but I don't have that same romantic thing going, so to me, it's really settling into the hard work and dealing with the changes that happen to people as*

*they grow, over time. All of us go through change – what is pretty amazing is to be able to hang in there with somebody.”*

Charlie felt that he and his wife have mostly changed and grown in the same direction, which he acknowledged certainly made it easier to stay married and keep connected. He didn't describe his marriage as being volatile (“*It’s pretty steady,*”). I asked him if any other words came to mind. “*Yeah,*” he said. “*There is a comforting aspect to it. It’s those few minutes at the end of the day – there’s a comfort in that, that’s really pretty profound.*” “Comforting” was much more than merely being comfortable for Charlie; it represented a resting place, a safe haven, and a home base. It was that small bedtime ritual of ending the day together and planning for the next. No matter what Charlie may be doing, they come together in those last moments of the day to recap, regroup and recommit to facing another day together.

### ***Brief commentary***

In Charlie’s narrative, the categories of ***Building a Safe Haven, Keeping the Connection*** and ***Assuming Responsibility*** are most frequently espoused. Charlie's account contributed the subcategories of ‘*we’ll be okay*’, ‘*really myself*’, ‘*more than sex*’, ‘*the little moments*’ and ‘*how are we doing*’. Charlie is also represented in ***Intuitive Knowing*** (‘*we’ve been lucky*’). His narrative begins by stressing connection seeking processes, such as building a safe haven and keeping the connection. While he acknowledges that initially, conflict was experienced as threatening in his marriage; his interview highlighted the development of his ability to follow his own interests while maintaining the connection seeking processes.

***“On my second marriage with my first husband”***

*Prototypical example of a shifting marriage*

“Marilyn” was a statuesque, well groomed woman in her early 50’s; she has been married for 33 years and they have two children, both boys. Marilyn was animated and expressed her delight at being able to talk about one of her *“favourite subjects.”*

Marilyn began by telling a familiar tale - a young, romantic girl looking for her knight in shining armour to rescue her from an unstable home environment and meet her every fantasy of romantic love. As she explained, she was looking for *“someone to make me happy. Someone to love me, and just take care of me. I remember having the thought “I wonder where he is.” To me, he was the prince charming who was going to save my life.”* She describes the moment when she first met her husband *“I was really drawn to him. There was just this chemistry that was so strong between us.”* She actively campaigned to get married, *“I remember being hit by the thunderbolt. I saw him walk by and it was like “He’s the one.” I have written in my diary from 1974 recording all of my steps and my first step was to get a date, that was “A.” Step B was to go steady. Oh, I knew what I wanted. Step 3 was to get engaged. Step 4 was to marry him. And then I put ... That was the living happily ever after.”*

Despite her dream of wedded bliss, Marilyn recounts that it was very hard at the beginning *“I was extremely unhappy always. We always loved each other, but I just pushed him away. He didn’t know how to handle my neediness...So we did this dance where I would lean forward so far, he would back off, then I would back off and then he would come forward... We had some wonderful glimpses of happiness and good periods in between, but basically as soon as he would start to come forward I was just so overwhelmingly needy and smothering that he would back off very fast ...and we would*

*do that dance; over and over and over again.” Marilyn explained how she resented her husband for being different from her and from her father, who was always very verbally demonstrative. She kept waiting for the words of love that never came and accumulating hurts and building resentments. She stated, “With my husband, I was always looking for words, looking for the words, instead of realizing that it’s actions; actions are everything.”*

Despite her frustrations and the dance of distance and closeness that characterized their marriage until about 10 years ago, they managed to stay together. I asked Marilyn about what enabled them to stick it out despite their constant conflict and the destructive ways they had of coping with it, such as turning away from each other at different times in the marriage, going outside the marriage to be with other people and feeling frustrated with each other. Marilyn looked thoughtful and stared off into the garden before she slowly responded, *“Because we did live the rollercoaster. We had highs. We had connecting moments... We never would have made it if we’d not have had connecting times.”*

She went on to talk about the incredible shift that she and her husband experienced. She described it as a “light bulb” moment and told me how everything changed for her *“When I realized that my happiness is 100% my responsibility and this is a human being just like I am, who has no idea how to be a husband or a father... we’re just not taught that stuff. But that by loving and thinking about the best in each other and what you want, you start to draw together more and figure it out together.”*

She elaborated *“I was always looking for the love in him, looking for him to give me love, looking for him to fill me up and that is the big problem within relationships. And it*

*wasn't until I really learned to fill myself up. Because I really know that nobody wants to give you what you are not willing to give yourself. I made him the center of my universe. Nobody should be the center of our universe except us."* When Marilyn understood that she had the power to change her relationship by taking responsibility for her own happiness, everything shifted for her and eventually, for her husband too.

She relayed a pivotal moment in their marriage that occurred over ten years ago: *"I stood in our kitchen and I said to him, "I get why I don't have the relationship that I've always wanted with you." He just stood there and looked at me dumbfounded and I said, "You are really going to feel different because I understood how my thoughts have created this. And you are going to be feeling different because I am cleaning up my thoughts about you, and I'm going to be focusing on the best in you and what I love about you and what I want for our relationship and I'm going to be focusing on developing myself and creating a wonderful, life for myself. And, I'm not going to be dependent on you and looking for you to shift in any way."*

Despite her radical change in thought, and her grand declaration, the shift in her marriage was not immediate. However, Marilyn was able to give her husband time to get used to the new her, because she really understood what was behind some of his withdrawing behaviours. *"I'm amazed that he even ever went for a walk with me, because walks were where I used to **really** vomit on him and tell him everything I was upset about little lectures on what this man did that was right and what this man did that was wrong, and always with the implication that **he** was doing it wrong."*

Because she had taken total responsibility for her own part in their marital dynamics, Marilyn was able to sustain herself by focusing on her own happiness while her husband

slowly shifted in response to her new ways of being with him. She explained *“I started really focusing on the best in him and there started to be a shift in our relationship. It took him a while to not feel that he was going to be told that something was wrong. To trust it, and believe that this was real, this wasn’t fake.”* Once Marilyn saw their cycle clearly, she was able to do things differently. When she reflects back on her earlier self, and other marriages who might be living the same unfortunate cycle, Marilyn advised, *“Get your own life and come together when you come together. This is a human being, this is not someone who’s mission in life is to make you feel good. It’s yours.”*

Marilyn believes the secret to a good marriage is *“Really absolutely loving yourself and developing yourself and having your own rich and full life and looking for the best in whoever you are with.”* By taking responsibility for her own happiness and changing the old story of her marriage into another, more liberating plot line, Marilyn was able to lighten up and focus on what was wonderful about her husband and what she loved about him, instead of reciting her old litany of what didn’t work and why he had to change. She does concede that they both had similar values and both of them believed in marriage, intended on staying married for the long haul and they had these two little boys that they loved, so there was a strong commitment to keep trying. But even so, Marilyn is not so sure that they would have made it if she hadn’t shifted her thinking. She admits *“It was a desire [to stay together], but I will tell you there were sometimes when, but not very many, where I did think “I don’t know that we’re always going to be together...”*

These days, things are very different in her marriage. She told me she was amazed sometimes that she was living *“this vacation style life”* with her husband, who went from *“a moody workaholic to easy-going, generous, fun, more loving husband.”* Although

Marilyn now experiences her marriage very differently, it's not that everything has changed; in some cases, all that changed was what she made things mean. Marilyn remarked " *and it's interesting because I still don't always get the words that I wanted for so many years and I couldn't care less; I couldn't care less, because I've developed and cultivated the energy inside of me. His love language is extremely touching; massaging, rubbing.*" Marilyn said as she became more "selfish" in terms of wanting to feel good, she let go of needing her husband to be the way she thought he should be and he felt freer to be himself and ended up behaving in many ways that she only dreamed he would back when she was so insistent on him meeting her needs.

Her attitude toward sex is another thing that she consciously shifted once she understood that sex was the way her husband connected and withholding sex only served to create distance and unhappiness between them. In their old cycle, Marilyn used to withhold sex because she wasn't getting the words she craved. Once she realized that all she was doing was creating a negative cycle and that sex was actually the way he connected, she changed her attitude toward sex and became much more sexually available to him. She stated that sex was an important part of their marriage, and even more so now.

As she reflected on her journey in her own marriage and what she feels is really the key to a good marriage, a long marriage and a happy life, she remarked "*Unconditional love is the key to a great life. I also believe that unconditional love brings in forgiveness, and I believe in that daily forgiveness in a marriage. Daily forgiveness about life is huge, it's letting go, letting go, letting go all the time. And loving unconditionally is a freedom, because then all of a sudden nobody needs to act a certain way for you to feel good.*"

Marilyn's story was one with a vivid turning point. She began her marriage with the common fairy tale notion about being rescued by a knight in shining armour and quickly entered into the equally common state of disillusionment and disappointment so many marriages fall prey to. What was different and notable about Marilyn's story is how she shifted her thinking and feeling to assume radical responsibility for her feelings inside her marriage and in doing so, created the kind of marriage she had always wanted. Although Marilyn described her marriage as "very happy", she was quick to say that she believed she could be happy no matter what now; her marriage no longer occupied the stage front and center of her emotional life. Paradoxically, caring less and needing it less has made it more fulfilling for her.

*Brief commentary*

Marilyn's account of her marriage privileges *Assuming Responsibility* for her own happiness and her own role within the marriage, maintaining her own life and interests and cultivating positivity by being *prepared to forgive, focusing on the good, and operating from basic trust*. While both *Maintaining Autonomy* and *Promoting Positivity* figure prominently in Marilyn's narrative, the strategy of *Assuming Responsibility* occurs first within her narrative and provides the framework for the two additional main strategies Marilyn employs to remain married: *Maintaining Autonomy* and *Promoting Positivity*. The remaining 25% of the meaning units in Marilyn's narrative were fairly evenly distributed between *Respecting Differences, Keeping the Connection, Managing Conflict, and Building a Safe Haven*.



***“Like being in a dark cave”***

*Prototypical example of a challenging marriage*

Helen,” a petite, pretty brunette, with a shy smile and soft voice, met with me to talk with me about her 27 year marriage. After the paperwork had been completed, I turned to Helen and asked her what it is like to be in her marriage. Helen hesitated for a long moment before answering *“Sort of like being in a dark cave.”* She went on to clarify that it hadn’t always been like that. In the beginning it didn’t feel as dark, but Helen thought that was because she was more naive.

Helen got married when she was 23, nearly 24 and said she felt like marriage was her ticket– she felt unequal to the task of taking care of herself and here was someone who was offering to take care of her. Plus, having a family was important to her and this was her chance to do that. Although she described having an instant connection and attraction to her husband, (*“I looked at him and I thought he was the cutest thing in this world.”*) she also shared that she would often get the urge to break up with him during their courtship and actually did break up with him three times. They always got back together though, and Helen mused that there must have been something very strong that tied her to him. Partly, it was her fear of his reaction *“Every time I broke up with him he went really crazy.”* She also made a point of telling me she never felt physically attracted to him like she had to other boyfriends.

As Helen told me about their wedding, I got the sense that she was barely present; she related a story of being on autopilot as key events in her life took place:

*“I thought ok, people are getting married, it’s just the next thing to do... I remember even getting a wedding dress – I wore a dress I didn’t like for the wedding, everyone was telling me “we’re going to do this for you, we’re going to do that for you” I’d give my*

*little ideas, but I really had no strong sense of who I was. Everything was whatever anybody else wanted for me.”*

Despite her reservations, Helen married her husband and they began married life together. Initially he was still in school and Helen reported that their lives revolved around his schooling for the first year (*“So the first few years of our marriage his studying took over everything”*). However, she also shared some good memories of their first year together, skiing together, living downtown and socializing. As Helen reflected back, she said *“I guess it wasn’t so bad really (sounding surprised) it was probably the best part of our marriage. When the kids were little.”* She noted that they were on the same page regarding how to raise their children, until the past few years when they disagreed about how to parent their youngest, which has been very challenging to them.

Rather quickly Helen’s narrative shifted into negativity and she reported being disappointed and frustrated with her husband. She complained that he would pull her away from social situations before she was ready to go, noting *“We’d always be the first to leave.”* Over the years, this pattern has gotten worse and Helen described feeling as if she and her husband are the antithesis of each other. She described herself as very tolerant and easy going, while he is intolerant, argumentative and controlling.

Helen wished she would have left her husband after her third year of marriage, when she was already very unhappy, but she didn’t and she is not sure she ever will now, even though she is frustrated and unhappy. She didn’t believe her children were what was keeping her in the marriage, although she was willing to consider that perhaps subconsciously they were part of why she stays. Mostly, she cannot imagine how she would tell him: *“How do you say it to someone you have been married to for 27 years,*

*it's over? So it's saying the words... and his reaction. I don't feel strong enough to handle his reaction."* Helen sounded resigned as she confided she would have happily divorced him if he would have wanted to, but divorce wasn't really accepted in his family, whereas she was the child of divorced parents.

It appeared that Helen's husband may not share her frustrations with their marriage. She stated that he may well see things differently, noting *"I think he would see it more as we are connected and we do things together...every so often he will refer to me as "his wife" and I can see there is almost a proudness when he says that. And he knows I know him. He likes how I just get him."* I turned the question back to her and asked if she felt that he "gets" her. She replied, *"He does on many levels....I think he gets me, but he can't tolerate me. It's again his impatience with everything, with who I am."* As Helen talked, her voice became more clipped and I heard the accumulated hurts and resentment.

One of the things in her marriage that meant something to her was that her husband made a big deal out of special occasions like birthdays and anniversaries. Although she lit up a little when she told me about how he put a lot of energy and effort into celebrating her birthday, she quickly shifted back into complaint, noting *"But I say to him I want that every day, I want to feel important every day not with gifts, but with empathy and understanding and tolerance."* Helen felt unsupported in her marriage and even though her husband eventually gives in and softens, the process of going through his initial angry and critical reaction "ruins" it for her.

She confessed she has imagined her life without him *"and ...there are things I know I would miss... but it's becoming less and less so. That's why I don't know where the marriage is really going..."* Helen explained her husband was erratic and sometimes he

was more supportive, but there was no consistency. I got the impression she felt her marriage was getting worse and Helen agreed, explaining, *“It’s like I’m waiting for it to just go dry. It’s getting drier and drier and it’s going to just dry up one day.”* At the same time, she also acknowledged that, in some respects, things were easier now. *“I guess as the kids get older and I’m less responsible for them and I can lead my own life, he can’t control me.”* She added *“I mean to his credit, he’s never been the type that needs to know where I am. And if there isn’t dinner on the table, he will fend for himself.”* I reflected that it sounded as if there were some aspects of her marriage that were working for, and she agreed, adding *“he’s not a total brute. Then it would be so easy to leave, right?”*

To cope with her unhappiness Helen has issued ultimatums that he get therapy for anger issues and drinking, but she has given up hoping he will ever change, *“I don’t have any hope anymore. It used to happen every few years I would tell him to get help or I’m leaving, so he would quit drinking and go in to therapy and usually there would be some shifts and sometimes it would feel good for me in those periods but he always regresses back.”* Although she mostly blamed him for the problems in their marriage, she admitted that she has wondered about her own performance as a partner and worried that perhaps she hasn’t been understanding enough about his work pressures.

There has been no physical intimacy in her marriage for years and they no longer share a bed. Helen told me *“I have no desire to really touch him. Once in awhile I will look at him and think “I want to want to touch you.” <softly> But I can’t.”* Helen felt her inability to touch him came from years of putting up a wall to deal with what she called his *“emotional abuse.”* She admitted she has gone outside the marriage more than once and had a few affairs, but prided herself on knowing better than to leave her marriage for

another man:" *I once learned in therapy that if I leave, it's for me, not for another man. So if I left it wouldn't be for one of these men, thinking that they would rescue me – that much I knew.*"

I asked Helen if there was "deal breaker" that would end her marriage. She paused and said "*if he ever hit me.*" She said she used to wonder if they would have a big blow out that would be the last straw, but added "*I've had a lot of those "last straws" and I thought of acting on them, but I gave in.*" Helen feels other marriages are much easier than hers because the partners are more similar. She always feels she is walking on eggshells, "*it's always unsafe – will he get mad at this, will he get mad at that?*"

She conceded a big part of why she stays "*is because I know that it is within him to be kind and supportive. I think that is really who he wants to be, but he doesn't know how.*" They have been in marriage counselling on three separate occasions and while she did gain some independence from their first experience, none of their therapy produced any long standing change in their marriage. Helen stated despite all of her frustrations, she still feels tied to him, almost as if she "owes" him for rescuing her.

When she thinks of the future of her marriage, Helen shared she was uncertain, and explained "*I think ... we're growing in different directions.*" Despite her frustrations with her husband, they spend a lot of time together and Helen told me that until very recently "*we'd go grocery shopping together, we'd go to the bookstore together, if one of us needed something, we'd go with the other one to get it, we'd go for dinner alone...*"

Helen stated she has totally done a "180" in her marriage and people who used to know her see drastic changes in her ability to assert herself. As we continued to explore her marriage and what keeps her in it, Helen began to reframe her husband's controlling

nature as the grain of sand in the oyster that made the pearl: *“if I was with a passive guy. I’d be the same person I was when I entered that marriage probably. But I married someone who defied me and pushed me – so I had a choice – either just succumb and be the meek little wife or surpass that and I surpassed it.”*

Helen ended her narrative with a heartfelt wish for *“normalcy where his moods are not all over the place and not influenced by the alcohol or what happened at work.”*

Despite her frustrations, her sadness, and the fact that a part of her marvelled at how she has been able to remain with him for 27 years, for the time being, Helen said she was staying put, *“I have to just be patient and I have to be with him, I have to be in this. Because when I try to think how to get out of it there is too much anxiety and friction for me and that is saying to me 'Not now.'”*

#### *Brief commentary*

It is hard to predict whether Helen will leave her husband or stay with him. Her marriage has been built around the ever-present possibility she may leave for many years; and yet, it continues to endure. In terms of the model, Helen was the biggest contributor to the category ***Managing Conflict*** and most particularly to the subcategories of *accumulating hurts and building resentment* and *denial, deception and distraction*. In fact, in Helen’s marriage, she does not contribute to *any* positivity promoting processes but she does have many negative attributions. The dominant theme running through Helen’s narrative was ambivalence – each time Helen said something positive about her husband, her life or her marriage she was quick to find a counter-argument. McAdams (2004) calls this a “contamination story” – when good things inevitably turn bad.

It is challenging to look at a marriage where there is a marked absence of promoting positivity and attempt to account for its longevity. What processes is Helen using to emotionally anchor? She is a strong contributor to **Self-defining** processes, such as *meta-awareness of patterns* and *owning what is yours (Assuming Responsibility)* and *spaces in togetherness, following my own path* and *multiple sources of fulfillment*. Of all the 18 subcategories under **Connection-seeking** processes, Helen contributes to *shared experiences, on the same page*, and *got my back*; but her contribution to “*got my back*” has a grudging quality. Helen’s own numeric breakdown of the good parts in her marriage (15% good and 85% frustrating) accurately reflects the degree of her contribution to the more positive, connection seeking categories in this analysis.

It appears that what has enabled Helen to remain married resides in her ability to live her own life, pursue her own interests and manage conflict by using the accumulation of hurts and resentments as a rationale for invoking deception to pursue extramarital involvements. Combined, even these processes have worked to construct the emotional anchor that holds Helen in her marriage – for now.

## CHAPTER 4

### Discussion

#### Overview of the Study

Through qualitative analysis, using a grounded theory approach informed by Rennie's methodical hermeneutics (Rennie, 1998, 1999, 2000a, 2007a, 2010, 2012), this study endeavoured to gain a deeper understanding of how people in enduring marriages account for remaining married in the era of increasing divorce rates. Using an unstructured interview format, the present study aimed to investigate the narratives married people create to account for their lasting marriages of twenty years or more. The Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS: Anderson, Russell, & Schumm, 1983) was used to capture participant impressions of marital satisfaction prior to completion of the open ended interviews and was used to contrast and compare to the interview data. Participants were one representative of 11 marriages (five males and six females) recruited by a convenience sample and the 'snowballing' method. While the sample size is small and does not support broad generalizations, general findings and the categorical system comprised of the core category of **Emotional Anchoring** and the seven main categories identified in this study are worthy of note and will be discussed in this final chapter in light of the current literature.

There were four interrelated aims for this study: 1) To provide a qualitative, participant-generated account of lasting marriage in order to achieve a better understanding of the lasting marriage; 2) To use the qualitatively developed heuristic model of enduring marriage and compare and contrast it to existing theory within the literature; 3) To determine if there are different ways of remaining married and different types of lasting



marriages; 4) To tease apart the relationship between longevity and marital satisfaction. The following discussion shall address these key issues as they apply to the present study.

### **Discussion of Key Findings**

This study provides valuable insight into factors participants cite as being critical to their experience of remaining married. The major findings of this study suggest that the experience of remaining married varies from couple to couple and that multiple pathways to remaining married exist. The overarching theme that united disparate categories in this study was that all eleven participants created narrative accounts that reconciled the dichotomy between choosing to restrict freedom (through marriage) while valuing individuality and living in a society that extols the value of personal freedom. Thus, each account of a lasting marriage expressed the sense that - despite how it may appear to others - marriage did *not* entail giving up freedom, but in fact enabled an enhanced experience of freedom by anchoring marriage partners to a solid base while they lived their individual, yet connected lives. **Emotional Anchoring** ensures that both partners are able to pursue their own lives and interests, safe in the knowledge that they are connected, but not so tightly bound to each other that they cannot drift away to pursue their own goals and interests. Each one of the participants in this study spoke of their marriage as serving as an emotional anchor for them.

In the present study, three different types of marriages were identified: (1) the “easy” marriage, (2) the “shifting” marriage and (3) the “challenging” marriage. However, despite the different ways of remaining married, a core category named **Emotional Anchoring** was identified for the sample. **Emotional Anchoring** was comprised of certain common categories that study participants mentioned in their interviews. The

common categories were categorized as either seeking connection or self-definition, which maps onto past and present research that highlights the importance and challenge of maintaining both autonomy and connection in intimate relationships (Karpel, 1976; Schnarch, 1991, 1998; Fishbane, 2011; Perel, 2007; Finkel, Hui, Carswell, & Larson, 2014). The main categories of *Building a Safe Haven*, *Promoting Positivity*, *Keeping the Connection* and *Intuitive Knowing* were grouped as “*Connection-seeking*” while *Assuming Responsibility*, *Maintaining Autonomy* and *Managing Conflict* were grouped as “*Self-defining*” categories.

The connection-seeking sub-categories identified in the present study provide further support for the contributions of positive illusions (Fowers, 2000; Fowers, Lyons, Montel & Shaked, 2001; Murray, Holmes & Griffin, 1996), benevolent cognitions (McNulty, O’Mara & Karney, 2008), attachment (Shaver & Hazan, 1988; Bowlby, 1969, Greenberg, & Johnson, 2010 Johnson, 2008) and spousal support (Verhofstadt, Buysse, Ickes, Davis & Devoldre, 2008) and being prepared to forgive (Fennel, 1993) for the long term maintenance of marital bonds. The self-defining categories in the present study provide support for Schnarch’s (1991, 1998) concept of the passionate marriage, which he describes in terms of the capacity of each spouse to be themselves and soothe their own emotions within the context of an intimate relationship, and Fishbane’s (2011) work, which highlights the ways power is utilized within intimate relationships to balance intimacy and autonomy. The returns from the present study offer qualitative support for Perel’s (2007) contention that lasting love requires that lovers do not “confuse love with merging” (p.9) and maintain their separateness in order for intimacy and desire to flourish.

## **The Logistics of Longevity**

Robert Sternberg's (1986, 1988) triumvirate model of love which uses combinations of passion, commitment and intimacy to generate different types of love was part of the inspiration for the genesis of the present study, which has attempted to tease apart longevity and happiness. Subsequent research studies of Sternberg's work have established that happiness and longevity do not appear to operate in tandem. Specifically, studies showed that only passion and intimacy were highly predictive of marital satisfaction, while commitment was indicative of duration of marriage but not satisfaction (Silberman & Robinson-Durpuis, 1997). Thus it is conceivable that an unhappy marriage could last and the present study has endeavoured to create a model that accounts for the existence of both happy and unhappy long term marriages. What both the happy and unhappy marriages in this study all share is a space for spouses to be their true selves. This space might be just there waiting in the easy marriage, there might be a struggle to carve it out, and then peace with the shifting marriage, or there might be an on-going battle for a space to grow and this battle characterizes the challenging marriage. Spouses in the current study employed various strategies, represented by sub-categories such as *respecting differences* and having a *big picture perspective* to manage the freedom within their marriages and ensure that they do not experience their marriages as a constraint. Participants in this study all assert that their marriages, contrary to popular cultural notions that depict marriage as the end of freedom (i.e. colloquialisms that refer to spouses as a 'ball and chain'), do not really restrict them from doing what they want to do at all. As Sandra said, "*he doesn't stop me in any possible way from being the person I was meant to be on this planet. And that's it, right?*" Kevin stated "*we've never had to*

*make deals where I felt like I was giving something up that was important to me. I can't think of anything that I want to be doing that I'm not."*

By focusing on longevity instead of happiness, and deliberately including instances of unhappy marriages in the sample the model that emerged from this study speaks to the question of how an unhappy marriage endures. In the present study, two marriages can be classified as *overtly* unhappy by their KMSS answers (Helen and Jack), one marriage can be considered *covertly* unhappy (Howard) because they separated after their interview and contributed many meaning units to the sub-category of *denial, deception and distraction*; and two marriages were once identified by participants as having been unhappy but they shifted over the course of the marriage (Marilyn and Darryl). What the present study suggested was that a marriage can lack many positive, connection-seeking processes and still endure, so long as there is enough autonomy and room to find fulfillment in aspects outside the marriage. In these unhappy marriages, despite the (relative) poverty of their positive emotional connection, partners nonetheless can experience their marriage as an emotional anchor that enables them to pursue their goals, even if their partners do not actively support them doing so. In fact, it is arguable that the pursuit of individual, external goals is *more* necessary in the unhappy long term marriage than it would be in the long term happy marriage, wherein the marriage itself offers partners support and encouragement for their individual goals. The greater challenge to long term marriage might be construed as a lack of closeness *without* room to have one's own life (Karpel, 1976; Schnarch, 1991, 1998; Finkel, Hui, Carswell & Larson, 2014; Perel, 2007). One might contend that the absence of the self-defining processes in a marriage is a contraindication for longevity. Three of the marriages (Helen, Jack and

Howard) in this study made very small to non-existent contributions to many of the connection-seeking main processes identified by the model; however, *every marriage* in this study contributed significantly to the self-defining processes identified in this study. Thus, a tentative hypothesis is that the presence of autonomy based, self-defining processes are more prevalent and play a greater role in long term marriages, particularly in long term *unhappy* marriages, than connection-seeking processes. Further research is needed to explore the significance of this notion and to assess whether marriages lacking in autonomy are more likely to break down than those lacking in connection; however research does attest to the importance of balancing separateness and togetherness (Lauer & Lauer, 1986; Karpel, 1976; Schnarch, 1991, 1998; Fishbane, 2011; Perel, 2007; Finkel, Hui, Carswell & Larson, 2014), and past and current research argues that too much closeness often smothers marriage and in fact poses a greater threat than too much distance (Schnarch, 1991,1998; Perel, 2007).

### **A Brief Comparison to the Existing Literature**

One of the key findings of this qualitative inquiry into lasting marriage was that every marriage narrative attempts to reconcile the paradox of valuing freedom while choosing an arrangement that restricts it by maintaining that they have not given up anything to be married. This is consistent with the literature attesting to the importance of maintaining autonomy (Karpel, 1976; Bowen, 1988; Schnarch, 1991, 1998; Perel, 2007) within close interpersonal relationships. Schnarch (1998) makes the argument that marriage is a “people-growing machine” and normalizes problems with sexuality and intimacy by asserting that resolving such issues within the context of a loving marriage makes us grow. Like the participants in the present study, Schnarch makes the case that there is a

paradox at the heart of marriage and that paradox is that the closer one is to one's partner, the more of themselves they must develop. Closeness is inextricably tied to increased autonomy in Schnarch's (1991) view. The notion of "we-ness" (Fergus & Reid, 2001a; Reid et al., 2006) posits an expanded notion of selfhood that also corroborates participant statements that attest to the idea that they do not lose any freedom to be themselves by being in a relationship, but in fact gain an enhanced capacity to be who they are. The following quote from Sandra illustrated this idea well "*he doesn't stop me in any possible way from being who I was meant to be...he is not on my path with me, but he is right there, holding my hand.*" In a similar vein, Perel (2007) writes that "love is at once an affirmation and a transcendence of who we are" (2007, p.76). This idea of the paradoxical relationship between dependency and independence in close relationships was explored experimentally in two studies by Feeney (2007), who used multiple methods of couple self-report, and behavioural observation to assess the impact of acceptance and responsiveness to dependency needs on ratings of autonomous functioning in partners. On the basis of the attachment literature, which posits that infants are more inclined to explore the world freely when they are secure in the fact they can return to caregivers for comfort and soothing when they need to (Bowlby, 1969, 1979, 1988; Ainsworth et al., 1978), Feeney (2007) hypothesized that partners who were able to have their dependency needs met by their partners would exhibit more independent behaviour and rate themselves as more confident and self-efficacious than partners who do not get their dependency needs met. Both studies bore out the hypothesis that couples acceptance of dependency needs, both by themselves and their partner was predictive of greater independent functioning. Feeney identified this finding as paradoxical, in that it

appears counterintuitive that the acceptance of dependency needs would result in greater independence. The present study offers qualitative support for the same paradoxical finding in that partners who report having their own lives (captured by categories such as *multiple sources of fulfillment, Assuming Responsibility, Maintaining Autonomy, spaces in togetherness, following my own path*) also report closeness, satisfaction and a sense of safety and trust in their marriages.

It is a matter for further research to determine the exact nature and direction of the relationship between dependence and autonomy; in Feeney's (2007) work, independence flows from satisfaction of dependency needs; in Karpel's (1976) work on individuation, maturity consists of taking a flexible stance regarding the satisfaction of dependency needs, such that individuals are able to accept soothing by the other and self-soothe as the situation demands. Karpel (1976) writes "the more strongly individuated the couple, the more capable they are of forming a differentiated "We," a dialogic relationship that furthers their continuing self-delineation (p.3)". The present study suggests multiple pathways; in some couples, it appears that a strong individuated base led to greater connection, while in others, it appears that initial closeness and intimacy led to the evolution of increased independence and autonomy. Perhaps a helpful way to conceptualize the relationship between dependence and autonomy is to suggest that all systems seek balance and a couple's relative level of differentiation or enmeshment will determine how they need to evolve in order to sustain both polarities within their relationship. Perel (2007) identifies this tension between intimacy and autonomy as being central to sustenance of passion and desire over time.

The literature and the findings of the present study all converge around the need to straddle the paradox of being close and separate, and the role played by conflict management strategies was identified as being important in helping couples establish a secure base and allowing for the optimum balance of security and freedom within the relationship. In the current study, the relative happiness or unhappiness and the perceived difficulty within the marriage that marriage partners express seems most closely connected with how participants managed conflict in their relationships; the subcategories under *Managing Conflict* divided into two fundamentally different ways of handling and responding to conflict. One way was characterized by facing conflict through *respecting differences, talking it through, and having a big picture perspective*. The other strategy of dealing with conflict was represented by combining the categories *accumulating hurts and resentments, and denial, deception and distraction*, which speak to the ways partner(s) avoid looking at or dealing with the more troubling aspects of their marriage. Both ways (facing conflict or avoiding it) of handling the challenges of remaining married are effective in enabling people to remain married, although *accumulating resentments and denial/deception/distraction* was found far more frequently and in higher proportions in the marriages that reported being less satisfied.

The pivotal role played by conflict management in the maintenance of marital bonds is supported by research by Gottman, and colleagues (Gottman, 1991, 1993, 1994; Gottman & Levenson, 1992, 2000; Gottman & Silver, 2012). Gottman contends that the way couples communicate during conflict is highly predictive of the trajectory of their marriage. Couples who criticize, stonewall and “betray” their relationship by making other things (such as work, extended family, hobbies) more important than the marriage



remain mired in negative cycles of conflict which usually ends in divorce (Gottman, 2012). However, the current study suggests that highly conflictual marriages can and do endure, despite the absence of successful conflict resolution (Lasswell & Petersen, 1981; Lauer, Lauer & Kerr, 1990). It seems that marriages that employ deception, denial and distraction to manage conflict are able to continue by finding ways to normalize or avoid the troubling aspects of their marriage. Marriages that employ this conflict management strategy are often covertly dissatisfied, such as in the case of Howard, who indicated being “very satisfied” in his KMS answers, yet subsequently separated from his wife. Evidence of normalizing as way to cope with conflict can be found in Howard’s narrative when he remarked “*well, it’s interesting, most of the time, but we’ve had our issues with kids and stuff like that, which is normal. Because I know a lot of families have those issues similar to us...but I mean its part of being married, you know, things happen in a relationship.*” Granted, even someone in a happy marriage might make a similar statement, but in Howard’s interview, he continually downplayed his subtle expressions of dissatisfaction by asserting that it was “normal”. Another example of his tendency to deny or underplay problems is illustrated by his statement “*you know there are very minor things, but so what? Nothing I can’t live with...you know my life would have to be unbearable for me to walk away from my relationship.*” This strategy of minimizing his discontent enabled Howard to stay married for 24 years, but notably, Howard informed me he and his wife had separated when I contacted him to review and approve his transcribed interview about a year after I interviewed him, which suggests that even if a marriage is able to endure for a long time with poor conflict resolution, it is still fragile and with enough pressure, it may still end. Although Helen is overtly dissatisfied, her

marriage displayed a similar vulnerability in her inability to resolve key issues in her marriage except through having affairs (deception) and escaping into her own independent life (distraction). Despite that her marriage has lasted for 27 years, it still uncertain as to whether her marriage will endure or ultimately fall prey to unresolved conflicts.

Recent research by Finkel, Hui, Carswell & Larson (2014) supports the importance and desirability of being able to be yourself and reach your full potential in today's marriage. This fits well with the findings of the current study which identify feeling free - while being connected, and being supported emotionally - while pursuing individual goals, as being key to lasting marriage. Finkel and colleagues (2014) have drawn on Maslow's (1943, 1954/1970) famous hierarchy of needs to conceptualize the current state of marriage in America. According to the authors, marriage today asks both far less and far more of marriage partners than marriages of the recent past. Using Maslow's model, which depicts needs in an inverted pyramid, with physiological needs (like food and shelter) at the bottom, needs for safety, love and belonging and self-esteem in the middle and self-actualization needs at the top, the authors attest that the trajectory of marriage from the 1700's to current day fits with "ascending the mountain" of Maslow's hierarchy and the authors make the argument that current marriages are "suffocating" due to the "high-altitude demands" placed upon them, such as providing both intimacy and passion and the realization of personal ambitions and goals with the support and involvement of their partner. They state that paradoxically, as we are asking more from marriages (in some respects) than ever before, we are allocating less resources to them and thus, they are "suffocating" and unable to achieve the high goals people have of the marriage or

themselves. They identify the failure rate of marriage as a function of this mismatch between expectation and expenditure. For the most part, participants in the current study have managed to allocate sufficient resources to their marriages, or managed to find ways to grow in spite of (and in some cases because of) the challenges of their marriage and this has enabled them to realize the lofty goals of self-actualization and mutual personal growth without falling prey to disappointment and divorce, as is frequently the case, when the expanded goals of the modern marriage are not met.

### **The Role of Novelty and Interest in Relationship Quality and Endurance**

The sample in the present study included five examples of lasting marriages that were classified as either “challenging” or “shifting.” Three of the participants in these marriages admitted to being unhappy (for at least a good part of their marriage) directly in their interviews (Darryl, Helen, Marilyn). One participant indicated being unhappy on their KMSS self-report (Jack), and Howard indicated being unhappy when I contacted him for follow up, and he shared that they had divorced subsequent to being interviewed for this study. One factor that stands out amongst the long married and (somewhat) dissatisfied is the potential role played by conflict in keeping things interesting. Darryl reported struggling for years and wondering if she had made the right choice in marrying her husband, whom she described as being very different from her. However, she also reported that their marriage, despite its challenges, always remained interesting. She stated that she chose “*the passion route*” and “*it had its tolls*”, but “*it’s never flat-lined...it just keeps it high risk. There’s never a dull moment with my husband.*” Even Helen, who likened her marriage to being in “*a dark cave*” in her interview, ends up crediting her husband with being a catalyst for her growth, and noted that if she had

married someone who was more meek, she probably would never have learned to be more assertive, but he was a challenge for her and she had to grow in her marriage if she wanted to survive – and she did. Jack alluded to conflict behind the scenes with his wife in his interview but also was quick to say that he was never bored. Marilyn shared that she and her husband were able to stay in a marriage with a frustrating dynamic of distancing and pursuing for nearly twenty years because they did “*ride the rollercoaster.*”

In her recent book, *Mating in Captivity*, Esther Perel (2007) talks about the challenges of experiencing desire and intimacy with the same person and offers suggestions for how to introduce “novelty to the enduring” (Perel, 2007, p.7). Aron, Aron, Norman, McKenna and Heyman (2000) offer further support for the role of excitement and novelty in perceptions of relationship satisfaction. In their laboratory studies of the impact of shared participation in novel or exciting activities on relationship quality, they found that exciting shared activities led to increased satisfaction in couples. Merely participating in shared enjoyable activities was not productive of the same rise in satisfaction, which highlighted the importance of heightened interest in the experience of relationship quality (Aron et al., 2000). Certainly, marriages can (and do) endure without the injection of newness, but I believe that within my small sample one notable omission from the narrative accounts was that no one mentioned feeling bored. In fact, two of my participants’ (Howard and Jack) opening gambit was that their marriages were “interesting”. Although it became clear over their interviews that “interesting” also included a tacit reference to numerous stressors and challenges, it is worthwhile to consider how finding one’s marriage “interesting” is helpful in making it last.

The idea of marriages being revitalized or sustained by conflict – which creates distance – echoes Perel (2007) and Schnarch’s (1991, 1998) prescription of how to perpetuate passion. Some of the couples in this study are good illustrations of how to keep some passion alive and their lasting marriages offer a window on how to remain together and yet have enough space for themselves. Richard, who married his high school sweetheart, speaks eloquently about keeping the necessary tension between familiarity and excitement when he talked about the upside of having married his high school sweetheart:

“I would never prescribe this kind of thing, but having lived it, I can certainly point out the advantages ... as long as the passion doesn’t disappear, as long as the closeness doesn’t disappear, as long as the sum level of energy between you – like electricity, urgency, passion, whatever you call it – as long as that doesn’t go away because the familiarity is so high...and that probably happens to people in five years, or eight years and we’ve been thirty years and it hasn’t.”

Although some of the participants in long marriages in this study have figured out how to manage their marriages to include both passion and commitment, as Perel (2007) points out, not all marriages aspire to passion or were ever based upon it. Sandra is an excellent example of a marriage that was based on what she called “a quiet love.” She shared her relationship with her husband was never based on “*huge passion and heart pounding, and waiting for the phone to ring...never!*” She explained, “*what we have between us is a quiet love. It’s not a fireworks love.*” When I asked her if she ever wanted that kind of excitement, she replied she had had it before, in other relationships, but “*it’s not sustainable. And what I have is sustainable.*” Perel writes that some people prefer these “calmer waters” and seek a love that is secure and serene over one that is passionate and exciting. She adds that there is no “right” way to be in love and no one path that is right for everyone. This idea is supported in the present study which demonstrated that

lasting marriage comes in different forms and that people value different aspects of being in a long term relationship. Some of the participants in this study clearly valued security over passion while others felt that the excitement/instability in their marriages was important to its longevity. It may be that other variables, such as personality or culture, play a role in determining how a couple manages to balance out the need for excitement versus safety and security.

Further support for the notion of different ways to be together comes from Dym and Glenn (1993), who identify three separate stages that reoccur in all enduring relationships. They define these as “Expansion”, the stage that marks the beginning of all relationships, characterized by feelings of optimism, promise and an enhanced experience of the self; Expansion is followed by “Contraction” which occurs when partners revert back to their old ways and feel their familiar disappointments and frustrations; Contraction is followed by “Resolution,” which is when partners are able to bridge the gap between their high hopes for themselves and their relationships and the reality of them and find meaning and renewed intimacy in their mutual acceptance of the best and worst within themselves and the relationship. Dym and Glenn (1993) suggest that different couples prefer to stay in different stages of the three part cycle as a function of their individual natures and relationship dynamic.

### **An Answer to Tolstoy**

It seems that Tolstoy’s observation that all happy families are the same but each unhappy family is unique in their misery does not quite capture the nuances of the lasting happy marriage. Even when participants are equally satisfied (as assessed by their

answers on the KMSS and their interview data) they take different roads to a similar destination.

For example, in this study, Richard focused on the importance of having a *big picture perspective*, and being *on the same page* while Marilyn found that changing her own attitudes and becoming aware of her negative appraisals of her husband was the key contributing factor to the sustenance of her marriage. Both Helen and Darryl shared their struggles with being married to someone who was very different than they are, but Helen was unable to accept her husband for who he was and continued to experience her marriage as painful, while Darryl was able to shift her view of her husband to see the real good in him and reported that her marriage underwent a radical shift after confronting the real possibility of divorce. There is literature on a phenomenon referred to as the “pseudo-divorce” which suggests that every marriage confronts the possibility of divorce and must reconstruct the marriage in order to create a true and lasting bond (Rice, 1976). Darryl clearly did this in her marriage narrative, while Helen remained stuck in an unhappy marriage because divorce doesn’t feel like an option. Rice (1976) would argue that until divorce is an actual option, marriage isn’t one either. Thus, despite certain similarities in their marital narratives – both Helen and Darryl focussed on how hard it was to be married to someone different than they were and both questioned their initial choice throughout their interviews – but ultimately, Helen and Darryl have very different marital narratives.

Comparing and contrasting the self-reported happy lasting marriages of Charlie and Richard shows a similar pattern of convergences and divergences. Both Charlie and Richard identify as being happy in their marriages and both cited the contributions of

luck (although Charlie was far more careful to check out potential trouble spots pre-marriage than Richard stated he was) yet both marriages focussed on different aspects of what has been important. Richard stressed the equality in his marriage and their mutual independence (“she’s not needy, I’m not needy); Charlie told a story of learning to accept the different opinions and interests of his wife, but he focussed on how important it has been to be fully accepted, faults and all and to love each other anyway (“if you are really yourself and that person decides to stay with you anyways, my goodness!). In terms of the literature, Richard begins with strong individuation (Karpel, 1976) to get to connection, which Charlie’s story is much better fit with the attachment literature (Feeney, 2007) that contends that total acceptance of dependency needs leads to greater self-differentiation.

### **Limitations of the Present Study**

It is challenging to get people to talk to you about what they don’t really know. Often, when things work (as in a marriage that has endured) the participants have not been motivated to explore why it works; it is enough to know that it does. We tend to “story our troubles” as Bruner (2002) observed, and a working marriage does not give rise to the kind of soul searching of a divorce. Even when people are expressly asked about what they think makes their marriage work, they often come up empty handed. Therefore, in asking people to talk to me about how they account for having remained married, I inevitably ran into the obstacles of their lack of insight into the deeper dynamics of their union and their naiveté about what the crucial ingredients are. It occurred to me that people who have had a failed marriage and then got into a lasting marriage might be able to give me more insight into what the critical components are to staying married because



they have had the benefit of contrast. People who only got married once and were able to remain married are truly in the fishbowl – they don't even know they are surrounded by water and they can't know anything outside of their little bowl, except hypothetically. My own experience with being both married and divorced was helpful in allowing me to probe participants to elaborate more on how their marriages actually worked.

Certainly the co-construction of reality that occurs within the interviewing experience means that interviewer biases and assumptions influence the client responses. The interviewing process is not immune from 'demand characteristics'; in many subtle and not so subtle ways, interviewers communicate the expectation that they believe people "know" something about the phenomenon they are inquiring about. Plus, social desirability is operative within the context of the interview situation. Participants want to please – client deference has been identified in the psychotherapy situation (Rennie, 1994b) and certainly the in-depth interview is subject to the same limitations. Another way in which social desirability impacts on the present study is interpreting participant's estimations of their marriage, both in their interviews and their answers on the KMSS. As the case of Howard aptly illustrated, people want to be perceived as happily married, even if this does not match their actual experience of being married. Thus, while interviews offer rich information about the individual's experience that cannot be accessed any other way, this information cannot be considered to be bias free.

Another variable that was hard to assess for in the current study was the role played by the initial mate selection process. It was hard to determine just how important the initial selection process was to the ultimate success of the union. People in long marriages often reported that they didn't feel that they did their "due diligence" initially by asking all the

right questions and assessing for all the commonalities that they now know are critical to the success of a marriage. This was often expressed through their advice to their children, which often had the flavour of “do as I say and not as I do.” They seemed to recognize, after the fact, that a great deal of the success of their marriage was luck because they didn’t consciously know going in, that they were on the same page on the big things in life. However, despite their lack of conscious awareness, it is entirely possible that they had a subconscious awareness (*Intuitive Knowing*) of their fundamental alignment with their spouse that proved to be a significant factor in the longevity of their marriage. Clearly, the enduring marriage owes some of its success to the initial selection process as well as the way partners behave, feel and think about each other within the marriage. Since the selection process was not the key focus in the present study and is even more mysterious to the participants than how they behave, think and feel within their marriage it was hard to tease apart the separate contribution of the selection process to lasting marriage. To do so, would be a worthy subject for future research.

The small sample size of 11 participants means that the results of this study cannot be generalized to the greater population. All of the categories and discussion points are in reference to the present study and cannot be understood to extend beyond the present study. Any results must be considered as preliminary until they have been supported by further research. The homogeneity of the sample, in terms of ethnicity (Judeo-Christian), socio-economic status (upper middle class), professional and educational status (well educated professionals) also bears upon the conclusions generated from the research. It is entirely possible that research on a different segment of the long married population would find different categories that underpinned the lasting marriage; in other words,

these findings may not be generalizable to any sample outside the one upon which this study is based.

There are also cultural and geographic factors that were not discussed explicitly in the present study that impacted upon the analysis and subsequent model of enduring marriage. In particular, the research question posed by this study privileged the Western notion of individualism. The compromises required by marriage are potentially problematic and fly in the face of the individualist and freedom-seeking ethos of Western culture. The assumption that marriage is constraint on freedom underpinned the research question from its inception. Clearly, this tension is not experienced in more collectivist cultures where the “I” is subservient to the “We” and the state of being in an interdependent relationship is more congruent with the larger cultural value system. The fact that individualism and freedom are valued so highly in Western culture makes remaining married and accounting for having remained married more complex for the participants in the present study. Each study participant had to reconcile having chosen to stay in a traditionalistic structure in a modern world. This required that their accounts make sense of the inherent contradiction of choosing to be tied down in a world that espouses the values of freedom and individualism. This also needs to be factored in when considering the general applicability of the model generated by this study; the model defined and delineated by the present study may not apply to cultures that are not faced with reconciling the tension between choosing to restrict their freedom while living in a society that values freedom. However, it is noteworthy that qualitative research on marital quality undertaken by Sharlin, Kaslow and Hammerschmidt (2000) did not reveal

any significant differences in the factors cited as being important to marital quality, cross culturally.

The fact that only one member of each marital dyad was interviewed is both a strength and limitation of the present study; while it can be argued that I only got one side of the story, there is also a counter-argument that the identity of the couple resides in each member of the dyad (Fergus & Reid, 2001). The strength of interviewing only one member of each marital dyad is that it allows for greater candour, as some reasons for remaining married may be unknown or unflattering to the other spouse, particularly in the case of unhappy partners. Indeed, some of the participants in the present study did tell me things they stated their spouses did not know. However, it is also true that I did not have access to a rich source of data given that I was not able to compare and contrast the narrative accounts of each spouse since I elected to interview only one member of each dyad.

### **Implications for Clinical Practice**

The model of the enduring marriage contributed by the present study supports both the literature attesting to the importance of the attachment (Shaver & Hazan, 1988; Bowlby, 1969; 1979; Johnson, 2008; Greenberg & Johnston, 2010) and the literature upholding the necessity of self-differentiation for long term relationships (Karpel, 1976; Schnarch, 1991; Fishbane, 2011; Perel, 2007; Finkel, Hui, Carswell, Larson, 2014). The dialectic captured by the model of enduring marriage in the present study demonstrates that every lasting relationship represents some viable answer to the question of how to remain connected and separate.

In terms of couple's therapy, the present study highlights the potential role of helping couples identify the ways they have emotionally anchored to each other in order to create change in their marital dynamic. Assisting couples to strengthen their emotional anchoring to each other could mean supporting them to experiment with incorporating less utilized processes or reducing their reliance on highly utilized processes. It could also involve psycho education on the importance of incorporating novelty into relationships as a safeguard against complacency and boredom as Aron et al., (2000) suggest in their studies attesting to the enhanced satisfaction experienced by couples who introduced novel and exciting mutual activities into their relationships.

The present study underscores the need to help couples pursue their own goals and fulfillment whilst being in a relationship. Sometimes, autonomy needs are experienced as threatening the state of the union; the present study suggests that enduring relationships benefit from some separateness. Study participants extolled the virtues of the marital relationships that didn't stifle either partner's true self or put up obstacles in their chosen path. There are times when a couple needs to focus more on building their connection; there are also times when the connection is best served by pursuing their own, idiosyncratic goals. Ironically, when couples are able to self-differentiate, by pursuing meaningful goals, retaining their own views in the face of dissension from their partner, and soothing themselves by meeting their own needs when their partner is not able to, they strengthen their connection and build a stronger, more resilient union (Karpel, 1976; Schnarch, 1991, 1998). Navigating the complex labyrinth of connection and separateness requires keen self-awareness, and an understanding of relationships that does not romanticize attachment over self-differentiation (Karpel, 1976; Fergus & Reid, 2001;

Fishbane, 2011). Couples therapists can help couples create stronger bonds by promoting both attachment and autonomy, and even enhancing an awareness of when each process is most needed, given the idiosyncratic needs of each couple.

### **Contributions of the Present Study**

The present study provides a way of conceptualizing connection that resonates with married people and fits with the current societal project of reconciling self-expression and coupledness; it uses the metaphor of *emotional anchoring* to explain the centrifugal force that keeps marriages intact over time. The present study adds to the small body of research conducted from the perspective of married people regarding how they experience and account for their marriages; this type of research promotes greater attunement between our existing conceptual categories and the perceptual of the participants' world, so that our categories more accurately reflect the real life experiences of married people.

Importantly, the present study offers qualitative, grounded support for the previous and current research (Karpel, 1976; Schnarch, 1991, 1998; Fergus & Reid, 2001; Feeney, 2007; Fishbane, 2011; Perel, 2007; Finkel, Hui, Carswell & Larson, 2014) that identifies the paradox at the heart of relationships and suggests that marriage must balance intimacy and autonomy in order to endure. The current study supports the theoretical position put forth by Finkel, Hui, Carswell & Larson, (2014) that marriages today are valued insofar as they help partners achieve self-actualization and the best marriages promote and allow for the growth of both partners.

The present study differs from previous qualitative studies in that it does not limit its understanding of lasting marriage to a few pre-determined variables. Rather, by

remaining open and broad, and deliberately not reviewing the most current research on marriage before commencing and completing the analysis, this study uncovered a variety of intrapsychic, interpersonal and contextual factors that were involved in the experience of lasting marriage from the participants' perspectives. By trying to limit and isolate a few variables in the lasting marriage, researchers may undermine the complexity of the experience. However, it is noteworthy that the current study did identify a number of variables that were also cited by previous qualitative studies as having been important to remaining married, such as the importance of sharing values (Lauer & Lauer, 1986) the role played by flexibility and adaptability (Mackey & O'Brien, 1995; Klagsbrun, 1985; Lauer & Lauer, 1986, Wallerstein, & Blakeslee, 1996), the importance of keeping interest alive (Aron et al., 2000), the role of forgiveness (Fennell, 1993) and Klagsbrun's (1985) finding that luck is a factor frequently noted in the narratives of the long married.

### **Directions for Future Research**

The core category *emotional anchoring* and the seven main categories/processes identified by the present study remain to be verified, refuted or refined by future research. Additional studies are needed to assess the robustness and generalizability of all of the categories suggested by this study. Investigations using larger sample sizes and less homogeneous samples would also be useful in supporting or refuting the categorical system generated by the present study. Further investigations using quantitative methods could provide support for the tentative conclusions regarding the relative contribution of autonomy versus attachment processes to longevity. More targeted qualitative studies that inquire about exactly how marriage partners balance autonomy and intimacy would be

helpful in developing a more nuanced understanding of the micro-processes involved in the maintenance of autonomy and intimacy in lasting marriage.

## **Conclusions**

It seems that on the whole, the present study supports the importance of maintaining one's own life while being intimately connected through marriage – a finding that is echoed in some of the past literature, (Schnarch, 1991, 1998) and even more notably in the current literature (Fishbane, 2011; Perel, 2007, Gilbert, 2010, Finkel, Hui, Carswell & Larson, 2014). So, while the present study has not invented the wheel, I am comforted by Delacroix's sage observation that it is not the original idea or the novel thought that motivates men, but the idea that no matter how much has already been said, it is still not enough. Despite the proliferation of books, plays, movies, poems, scholarly articles and studies devoted to understanding how people remain married, it will never be enough. It is a mystery that will always require our renewed efforts to solve. The minute we create a formula we think accounts for every instance of lasting union, we will have failed to appreciate the role of reinventing and reimagining that must be the companion of continuity.

The origin of the phrase "tying the knot" comes from the Roman tradition of the elaborate Herculean knot tied in the otherwise simple wedding gown worn by the bride on her wedding day. The knot was affixed in a complicated manner and it was the untying of the knot by the groom that actually marked the start of the marriage. The "untying of the knot" is also a metaphor for what must occur within a marriage; a real marriage is not about being tied up, but about becoming free. Common folk wisdom interprets the tying of the knot as the entering into matrimony, but in fact it is quite the



opposite; people enter into marriage with a knot that they must untie in order to become free and truly joined. The difference in the two interpretation of the knot at the heart of the ties that bind might prove a self-fulfilling prophecy. As the present study suggests, a marriage that feels like a noose does not endure; but those who struggle to use their marriages to untie their own psychic knots and forge a greater freedom to be who they are untie the knot and enter into a true and lasting marriage.

As I worked to understand what was at the heart of the lasting marriage, it was humbling and a little frustrating to grasp that I would not be able to untie the knot and then tie it back up again into a neat little bow. Untying the ties that bind left me a lot of loose rope. There is a creativity involved in the tying of knots – no two knots are alike, even if they serve a common purpose. So too it is the case with marriage; no two are alike, each serves its partners’ distinctive needs and is a unique answer to an idiosyncratic question. Nonetheless, there is universality to the longing for connection, the purpose of connection and the manner that relationships endure. Something *anchors* us to each other; every story illustrated this notion, despite the diverse narrative of each marriage story.

Every story of union requires a subplot of agency and autonomy. We cannot come together without coming apart; the processes of differentiation and affiliation (attachment) must be running in tandem in order to sustain longevity. Too much autonomy will be our undoing, as we will drift apart. But too much togetherness puts us at equal, if not greater peril; we cannot merge without loss of self and a losing ourselves makes it impossible for us to truly join. Joining implies separateness. As the great poet Kahlil Gibran observed “let there be spaces in your togetherness.” In the end, the

enduring marriage must be able to navigate the slippery slope of traveling together and being on a separate journey.

-The End-

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## **Appendix A**

### **An Example of My Theoretical Memoing**

February 15, 2012

Over the course of conducting this analysis, I have considered the idea that there are different “stories” of lasting marriage and that these different stories might contain slightly different ingredients, although it is also possible that they contain some fundamental similarities. I have been looking at the interviews in terms of how they differ and how they converge and I’m noting what emerged. This seems to fit well with the grounded theory method of constant comparison. I wonder which perspective will be a more natural “fit” with the data – the perspective that each lasting marriage is a unique tale or the view that all lasting marriages share common features? I keep thinking about whether Tolstoy’s sage observation that every happy family is the same, but each unhappy family is unique in its misery will be proven valid with my sample. Perhaps every story of a marriage that works is a unique story; but perhaps there are common elements in each account, more foundational than the apparent differences? Maybe there is a list of necessary ingredients; maybe without these key ingredients, a marriage cannot last, even though there are a myriad of ways the ingredients can be combined. I am weighing a number of potentially fitting metaphors (analogies) in my mind as I go through the interviews, attentive to the stories and what the participants stress as being most important to them and their lasting marriages.

**Appendix B**  
**Interview Questions**

1. Tell me about your marriage. Describe it for me. **What is it like being in your marriage?**

a) How you account for the fact that you have remained married?

b) **What did you value most about your marriage?**

c) What was been the biggest challenge you ever faced in your marriage

d) Why did you get married? Or: What made you decide to get married?

e) What first attracted you to your partner? OR Do you remember the first time you met?

What were your first impressions?

f) **When you think back to the first year you were married, what stands out?**

g) Did anything ever make you consider divorce? Can you imagine anything that might? Tell me about that.

h) What did you consider to be best and worst part of being married?

i) **What was the “same old story” in your marriage? What conflicts continually reappeared?**

**Tell me about how you dealt with them.**

j) Your idea of the secret to a good marriage? Or: Why do you think some marriages work and some marriages don't? How does your marriage fit with or not fit with this notion?

k) **Can you think of a marriage that works, other than yours? How was yours different or the same?**

l) What was your parents' marriage like? How did it impact you?

m) Based on your own experience with marriage what advice would you give your children or someone close to you who was getting married?

n) What advice do you wish you had been given?

o) What you would do differently if you had it to do over again?

p) **How would you describe the evolution of your marriage from it's inception until now?**

q) What aspects of your relationship were helpful and unhelpful?

i) **What moments stand out as really good times in your marriage?**

ii) **What moments stand out as the really hard times? Why do you think you**

**stayed together?**

**iii) How do you think your husband or wife would answer these questions differently?**

- r) How do you think other people would describe your marriage?
- s) What do you wish was different about your marriage? If you could change one thing about your marriage, what would it be and why?
- t) What do you think your spouse values most about your marriage?
- u) Can you imagine life without your spouse?
- v) Why do you think some people divorce?
- w) Tell me about the context (value system, family, culture) of your marriage. How have external factors contributed to your marriage?
- x) What if you never had sex with your spouse again? How would that impact your marriage?

## Appendix C

### Meaning Unit Derivation

The following excerpt is an example of how a participant utterance was parsed into one sentence and then coded and categorized into the main and subcategories of this study. 3 one liners were extracted from the following quoted passage from Darryl's interview.

Even within this small example, it is possible to see how the categories work together to allow Darryl to construct her emotional anchor by utilizing the processes of Managing Conflict (by talking it through), to Promoting positivity (by extending forgiveness) and Keeping the Connection (by invoking shared experiences and the little moments).

*Excerpt from Participant Darryl – MU #D90.A*

//There was finally one night when we were just sitting in the hall. Like it's so bare bones, because you have gone through every fight, every problem...its just like to the bare bones. And we were just sitting there, like there was, you know, nothing left to fight about, and we were just talking...and it was just really nice, and then we went out for dinner and there, you know, he took my hand and he kissed my hand, and it just all gets washed away, and that love, just, you just realize you know you've got a lot of history with this person, and you know, let's just get it right.//

***Property Statements derived from MU#D90.A:***

#1. We've gone through every fight and problem and it's down to the bare bones.

Coding: Main Category: ***Managing Conflict*** → *talking it through*

#2. He kissed my hand and it just all gets washed away and the love rushes in.

Coding: Main Categor(ies): *Promoting Positivity* → *prepared to forgive* AND *Keeping the Connection* -→ *the little moments*

#3. You realize you've got a lot of history with this person and let's just get it right.

Coding: Main category(ies): *Keeping the Connection* → *shared experiences*.

**Appendix D**  
**Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS)**

**Section 2: Please answer the following questions only if you're currently married or in a common law relationship.**

**1. How satisfied are you with your marriage?**

- Extremely Dissatisfied
- Very Dissatisfied
- Somewhat Dissatisfied
- Mixed
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Very Satisfied
- Extremely Satisfied

**2. How satisfied are you with your relationship with your spouse?**

- Extremely Dissatisfied
- Very Dissatisfied
- Somewhat Dissatisfied
- Mixed
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Very Satisfied
- Extremely Satisfied

**3. How satisfied are you with your spouse as a partner?**

- Extremely Dissatisfied
- Very Dissatisfied
- Somewhat Dissatisfied
- Mixed
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Very Satisfied
- Extremely Satisfied

**Appendix E**  
**Demographic Questionnaire**

Client Initials \_\_\_\_\_

1. How long have you been married? \_\_\_\_\_

2. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_

a) How old is your spouse? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Please indicate your gender F M

4. Do you have children? Yes No

a) If yes, please indicate how many? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Race/ethnicity:

- African American/Black
- Hispanic/Latino(a)
- Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander
- Native American
- White, non-Hispanic/Latino(a)
- Multiethnic

6. Highest educational level:

- middle school/junior high
- some high school
- high school diploma or GED
- technical school
- some college
- associate's degree
- bachelor's degree
- graduate degree

7. Combined Household Income:

- Over \$200,000
- \$100,000- \$150,000
- \$75,000 - \$100,000
- Under \$75,000

## Appendix F

### Informed Consent Form

**Study Name:** Untying the Knot: A qualitative inquiry into the enduring marriage.

**Researchers:** Fern Kagan, MA  
*Doctoral Student, Clinical Area, Department of Psychology, York University*  
*fern1@yorku.ca*

**Purpose of the Research:** The purpose of the research is to gain an understanding of the factors that promote longevity in marriage from the perspective of those who are currently in such a marriage. This research will use interviews and results will be reported descriptively, using the grounded theory method.

**What you will be asked to do in the Research:** Participants will be asked to fill out a brief questionnaire to assess marital satisfaction, (KMSS) prior to commencing the 1 hour interview with the primary researcher. The interview will be audiotaped and fully transcribed. Once the results of the study have been described, participants may be contacted for their feedback to ensure that the results reflect an accurate portrayal of their thoughts and feelings.

**Risks and Discomforts:** We do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research. However, a list of referrals to therapists will be provided to participants, upon request, should the interview bring up any uncomfortable material that they wish to explore further in therapy with a registered therapist.

**Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You:** By participating in this study you may gain a deeper appreciation and understanding of what has enabled you to remain married. Additionally, your feedback may help in the design of more targeted marital interventions in the future.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the nature of any ongoing relationship you may have with the researchers.

**Withdrawal from the Study:** You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. If you decide to stop participating you will still be invited to view the results of the study if you are interested in them. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed.

**Confidentiality:** All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. The data will be digitally audiotaped and stored in a private sound file on the primary researcher's personal computer that no one else has access to. Transcriptions of your interview will not have any of your identifying information on them and will be identified by code numbers. Your data will be safely stored in a locked facility for two years and only research staff will have access to this information. Any identifying data will be destroyed after completion of this study. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

**Questions about the Research?** If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact me or my Graduate Supervisor - Dr. Lynne Angus either by telephone at 416-, 736-2100 ext33615 or by e-mail ([langus@yorku.ca](mailto:langus@yorku.ca)). You may also contact my Graduate Program – Psychology Department , Office Address, Office Phone number>. This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, York Research Tower, York University (telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail [ore@yorku.ca](mailto:ore@yorku.ca)).



**Legal Rights and Signatures:**

I \_\_\_\_\_ consent to participate in *Untying the Knot; a qualitative inquiry into the enduring marriage* conducted by Fern Kagan. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
Participant

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Investigator

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_