

Polar Opposites:

A Look at the Role of Biblical Values in Managing Dialectical Tensions in Marriage

Presented to the Faculty

Liberty University

School of Communication

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Master of Arts

in Communication Studies

By

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May 6, 2011

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my mom, Rhonda Y. Wood (1956-2008), who always wanted what was best for me, and who always wanted more for me than what she had, or could give me, herself. You never gave up hope that I would one day succeed in completing my thesis and my master's degree. You always knew that I had it in me. Your never-ending belief in my abilities provided me with the ambition, motivation, and courage that I needed to reach my goals. Without your support and encouragement this would never have been possible. Thank you for being an example to me of what a hard-working, Godly, woman should be. I know that you are proud of me and that you are looking down from heaven smiling on me. I wish you were here to celebrate in my accomplishments with me, but I look forward to the day when we will celebrate together again. I love you, Mom.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my chair, Dr. Bill Mullen, whose patience with me throughout this process has been unparalleled. Without your belief and confidence in me, your guidance and support of me, as both an individual and a scholar, completing this thesis would not have been possible. I appreciate the countless hours you have invested in me and in my thesis. I could not have asked for a better mentor and advisor. I am honored to be your student.

I would also like to thank the other members of my committee, Dr. Faith Mullen and Dr. Lynnda Beavers. I cannot imagine a more positive and constructive group of faculty members to lead and accompany me on this extremely extended journey. I appreciate the time and effort that you put towards this thesis. Thank you for taking the time to answer my many questions and to calm my many fears. Thank you also for your willingness to always pick right back up where we left off and to continue steering me towards success. The insight and direction that you contributed is invaluable. You all have been a continual source of encouragement to me. Your faith in me never wavered, even when I was wavering myself, and for that I am truly grateful. Thank you for making me want to achieve all that I can. You have been my teachers; you have been my friends. This work is made better because of you all.

Special thanks, as well, to my husband, Daniel. You were involved in this project almost as much as I was. You were there for me from the initial brainstorming stage until the final finished product. You listened as I, often aloud, bounced ideas around in my head, and you were my sounding board when I needed to bounce ideas off of someone else. You spent time scouring the internet trying to help me locate a survey instrument, and you assisted me in applying for a parking pass and obtaining a library card at the University of Richmond so that I could access the

resources that I needed to complete my thesis. You bought me the “green book,” and you aided me in creating an overall timeline and in setting a weekly schedule and daily goals. You were especially helpful during the grueling IRB application process, assisting me with the wording on the application, informed consent form, and interview guide. You also aided me in coming up with the risks and benefits of my study.

In addition, you were particularly helpful in recruiting older married couples for my study. Along the way, you gave me feedback on the wording of my sentences and paragraphs to make sure that they made sense and that they sounded the best. You also helped me check the definitions of words and come up with synonyms for words. Basically, you were my very own writing coach. You also served as my math tutor, assisting me with my statistics in the methodology section of my thesis and detecting faulty logic in my results and conclusions. You spent numerous hours, and sacrificed many Saturdays, with me at various locations including Starbucks, the Henrico County Public Library and the Boatwright Memorial Library, and primarily at Genworth Financial as I worked on my thesis.

Most of all, you have loved me unconditionally throughout. You have been by my side supporting and encouraging me every step of the way. Without your hand to hold, your shoulder to cry on, your ear to listen, and your foot to kick me when I needed it, I never would have made it. Thank you for never letting me give up, even though I wanted to, and even tried to, many times. Your belief in me and your trust in my abilities gave me willpower when I was overcome, bolstered me when I was disheartened, and propelled me when I was stalled. You have shared in my frustrations and challenges and have celebrated in my triumphs. You have been amazing throughout this entire process. You have been a constant source of strength, and I know I can always count on you to be there for me. Though I hate that we were not able to spend as much

quality time together as we would have liked, even though we spent a lot of quantity time together, during the long road to my master's degree, my love for you is stronger now than when I first started this journey. You are such a truly giving person, and I am blessed to call you my husband. You are the best husband, and the best friend, in the whole world and I love you with all of my heart!

I must also thank my family and friends, especially my mother-in-law Cheryl for being my biggest cheerleader. Your optimism and enthusiasm are catching and repeatedly offered me encouragement. Thank you for always expressing genuine interest and concern in all that I do. Your compassion, kindheartedness, consideration, and generosity are unmatched. I am so glad you are on my team. Many thanks, as well, to my father-in-law Jim and his wife Linda who "prayed without ceasing". Thank you for supporting me by constantly interceding on my behalf. Finally, your prayers have been answered. I also owe a special thanks to my Dad, Terry, and my step-mom, Rita, for staying on my case about completing my thesis. Even though I perceived your efforts negatively at times, and they bothered me sometimes, I know that you just wanted what was best for me, and that you wanted to see me succeed at, and finish, what I started. Your "tough love" gave me the determination that I needed to reach my goal. I hope that you are proud of me. Lastly, I cannot forget my nanny, Evelyn, who was always willing to listen to, and empathize with, me, and who, no matter what, was always proud of me.

To my employers, Stephanie Taylor and Jacob Pope, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to pursue my passion of teaching while obtaining the credentials that I need to continue in my career. Thank you, also, for trusting in my abilities and for being so patient with me. Thank you, most of all, for believing that I was worth the wait. Specifically, I must thank my colleagues and lead instructors, Dr. "Doc" Charles Fischer, Nichole Moore, Dr. Glenn

Corillo, James Silver, and Louise Mason for your help. I have learned from each of you. I am thrilled to be part of the ECPI family!

Thanks, as well, to the participants who shared details of their personal lives for the goal of understanding this unique martial type. I am appreciative of all the participants' time, honesty, and interest.

Most importantly, I must thank God for the gifts and talents that He gave me that made completing this process possible. When I prayed, He listened and answered. When I was lost, He guided me. When I was weak, He carried me. When I was sad and afraid, He comforted me. When I prayed for wisdom and inspiration, He provided. When I prayed for strength and motivation, He showed me it was there all along. When I prayed for protection, He granted it. And when I asked God to bring people into my life to help me and to be there for me along the way, He sent me all the people listed above, and they knew just how to support me and encourage me to the end. So many others, who are too many to name, also prayed for me and encouraged me, and I cannot thank them enough. Even though you are not named, you are not forgotten. Thank you all more than I could ever say!

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Abstract

The purpose of the current study was to determine what role biblical values play in the management of dialectical tensions and the resolution of conflict in Christian marriages. Specifically, the research questions guiding this study were what, if any, dialectical tensions exist in Christian marriages, do dialectical tensions lead to conflict in marriage, how are dialectical tensions and conflict managed in marriage, and what role do biblical values play in the management of dialectical tensions in Christian marriages? Transcripts from interviews of ten Christian married couples were analyzed using a Relational Dialectics lens. Results of analysis revealed that all six dialectical tensions exist in Christian marriages and that all six dialectical tensions cause conflict in Christian marriages. The dialectical tensions were manifested in unique ways and were managed using a variety of strategies, some of which were based on biblical values and were unique to Christian marriages.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“Is it consistent to hold the developed woman of this day within the same narrow limits as the dame with the spinning wheel and knitting needle occupied in the past? No! No! Machinery has taken the labors of woman as well as man on its tireless shoulders: the loom and the spinning wheel are but dreams of the past: the pen, the brush, the easel, the chisel, have taken their places, while the hopes and ambitions of women are essentially changed” (Stanton 1892, 7).

Elizabeth Cady Stanton made this statement in her speech delivered to the National American Women’s Suffrage Association (NAWSA) just before she resigned as president of the association. Stanton, in her speech, tries to help the men of her time understand that women’s minds have undergone a serious change. Long gone are the days of the uneducated, submissive woman; women of the present are well educated, well informed, responsible, and fully capable of tackling any task. Society has changed with the Industrial Revolution. Likewise, minds of women have undergone a revolution. Women are stronger and more independent than ever, and they deserve to be treated as such. Because these are new women, she says, they require new rights, which includes the right to vote, and today they would include the right to equality in marriage as well.

According to Darla R. Botkin, M. O’Neal Weeks, and Jeanette E. Morris (2000) in their article entitled, *Changing Marriage Role Expectations: 1961-1996*, changes in society have also caused changes in women’s marriage roles (933). Stacy J. Rogers and Paul R. Amato (2000) in their article entitled, *Have Changes in Gender Relations Affected Marital Quality*, echo that changes in society can not only affect marriage roles, but changes in society can also affect the

quality of marriage. The authors express that changes in marriage roles has lead to increased conflict and decreased satisfaction in marriage (732-733).

Correspondingly, Rhonda A. Faulkner, Maureen Davey, and Adam Davey (2005) in their article entitled, *Gender-Related Predictors of Change in Marital Satisfaction and Marital Conflict*, offer,

Since marriage is often followed by marital disruption, an understanding of how marriage changes and develops over time and specifically what are the characteristics of marriages that succeed over time are salient issues needing to be explored. Recently, scholars have noted that the influence of gender (i.e., male and female) and gender roles (i.e., maleness and femaleness) have been largely ignored in the exploration of marriage over time, despite evidence in the extant literature that points to differences in marital satisfaction for men and women.

(61-62)

Women have made considerable progress in society since the women's movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and these changes have impacted the nature of marriage, gender role attitudes, and the quality of marriage. According to Botkin et al.,

There have been significant developments which may affect societal gender roles in general and young women's marital role expectations in particular. The contemporary 'women's liberation' movement is rooted in three major events in the early 1960s: the President's Commission on the Status of Women in 1961, whose report was released in 1963; the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963; and the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex. Concurrent with the development of the

women's movement, the family of the 1970s and early 1980s was characterized by increasing diversity, including more flexible gender roles. (933-934)

However, there was still work to be done. According to Botkin et al., During the later 1980s and 1990s, there were some setbacks and reversals in these earlier trends, including failure of the Equal Rights Amendment to pass in 1982; emergence of the antifeminist, prolife and profamily movements; increasing emphasis on 'family values,' calling for a return to the traditional nuclear family characterized by a sharp division of roles, with the female as full-time housewife and the male as primary provider and authority; and the emergence of the 'mommy track,' which refers to the subtle way the workplace discriminates against those women who take time off to bear and rear children. (934)

While Stanton and the suffragists fought for equality in politics, women today are fighting for equality in marriage. Today, women seem less concerned about the right to vote and are more concerned about gender equity in marriage roles. Because society has changed and women's minds have undergone a revolution, it is possible that the way in which women view marriage has changed as well. According to Botkin et al., "Young women's attitudes, expectations, and plans have been shifting away from traditional family roles partly because of the increased amount of time they are spending between living at home and getting married. Attending college and living independently tend to result in greater changes in attitudes and role expectations toward marriage" (933). Today, women are more independent than ever before, and it is likely that this newfound autonomy has affected women's views of marriage roles, which may have lead to increased conflict in marriage as well.

The purpose of this study is to determine what role biblical values play in the management of tensions and the resolution of conflict in Christian marriages. The following Literature Review will reveal what scholars have written about the subjects of marriage and gender roles, marital satisfaction and quality, marital conflict and conflict resolution, and biblical values in marriage and conflict. Relational Dialectics Theory will be used to determine what, if any, dialectical tensions exist in Christian marriages, if the tensions lead to conflict in marriage, and how the tensions and conflict are managed in marriage.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Marriage Types

According to Rogers and Amato, men have traditionally assumed the roles of “breadwinners” and have made money for the family, while women have assumed the roles of “homemakers” and have stayed at home and taken care of the household chores as well as cared for the children (735). However, since the 1960’s both men and women have shifted their attitudes toward marriage roles from traditional to nontraditional (731). Rogers and Amato define traditional marriages as those that “stress the distinct nature of the husband-breadwinner and the wife-homemaker-mother roles, their interdependence, and the differential power relations implied by these specialized roles” (735). Consequently, the investigators define nontraditional marriages as those that “emphasize shared capacities for economic productivity and nurturance, as well as egalitarian power relations” (735).

Similarly, Denise Haunani Solomon, Leanne K. Knobloch, and Mary Anne Fitzpatrick (2004) in their article entitled, *Relational Power, Marital Schema, and Decisions to Withhold Complaints: An Investigation of the Chilling Effect on Confrontation in Marriage*, indicate that marriages can be categorized into three distinct types, including Traditionals, Independents, and Separates. The examiners describe the first marriage type, Traditionals, as such, “People classified as Traditionals prefer stability over spontaneity within marriage. These people hold a conventional marriage ideology that emphasizes traditional sex roles and normative societal customs. They report a high degree of companionship, sharing, and togetherness within marriage” (149).

The second marriage type, Independents, “value spontaneity over stability within marriage. Independents, who adhere to unconventional relational ideology, believe that relationships should not restrict the freedom of individuals. These people value companionship and psychological closeness in marriage; however, they limit their physical space within the home” (150).

Additionally, Separates, like Traditionals, “prefer stability over spontaneity within marriage. Although Separates adhere to conventional relational ideology, they also value individual freedom over relational maintenance. Consequently, Separates engage in relatively little companionship and togetherness. Separates maintain psychological distance by limiting communicative self-disclosure; similarly, they maintain physical distance by cultivating separate space within the home. Separates retain a degree of interdependence by upholding a regular daily schedule” (150).

Social Structural Changes and Shifting Attitudes on Marriage and Family

Today, Rogers and Amato suggest more women are embracing nontraditional marriage roles (736). In her article entitled, *Wanting It All: Career, Marriage, and Motherhood during College-Educated Women's 20s*, Michele Hoffnung (2004) notes that women are not only embracing nontraditional marriage roles, but they are also embracing nontraditional careers. Women, Hoffnung offers, are foregoing their traditional roles as “homemakers” and are deciding to enter the workforce, pursuing careers of their own, but not only that, they are pursuing nontraditional as well as traditional careers (711) .

Rogers and Amato report, “In recent decades, husbands and wives have become more similar in their rates of labor-force participation. In the early 1960s, approximately 30% of wives and 90% of husbands were in the labor force; by 1994 those figures were approximately

60% and 78% respectively” (733). Accordingly, author Stephen Covey in his book entitled, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families*, writes, “The percentage of families with one parent at home with the children during the day has dropped from 66.7 to 16.9 percent” (18). Rogers and Amato continue, “Regardless of marital status, women are increasingly likely to remain employed through prime childbearing and child-rearing years, a pattern that was relatively rare as recently as 1980” (733). Beginning in the late 1990’s, Rogers and Amato found that women started planting themselves in the workforce, showing that they were dedicated to maintaining full-time careers for life whether they were married with children or not (732).

Moreover, Hoffnung states that females’ contributions to the family’s household income has become, and remains, necessary since the 1980’s because of increased cost of living, almost forcing women into nontraditional marriages (711). Likewise, Rogers and Amato notice,

Husbands’ and wives’ financial contributions also have converged. Women, especially the well educated, have benefited from the burgeoning service sector of the economy. In contrast, men, especially those with relatively little education, have experienced deteriorating work opportunities due to the declines in the manufacturing, mining, and construction sectors. Also, after a period of stagnation, the gender gap in income continued to close during the 1980s. As a result, married women’s economic contributions during the 1980s substantially decreased the likelihood that their families would be in poverty. On average, working wives contributed 30-40% of their family’s income by 1990. (733)

Consequently, in the 1980’s, as compared to the 1960’s, Rogers and Amato believe both men and women were more open to the idea that it is acceptable for women to have their own careers, that women with careers can also be good mothers, and that men should take on more

household responsibilities, such as housework and childcare (732). However, the increase of women in the workforce had both a positive and negative effect on marital quality. Rogers and Amato propose,

This trend toward greater sharing of economic roles may have increased marital quality by enhancing equity in marriage. It also may have improved marital quality by increasing the level of economic resources available to the family, which may alleviate economic hardship. In contrast, marital quality may be lowered by a decline in husbands' economic resources, which has been linked to marital discord and more problematic family relationships. An increase in wives' economic contributions also may increase marital discord to the extent that it challenges conventional power relations based on husbands' prerogative as the primary breadwinner. (733)

Whether these changes in marriage roles is positive or negative it is evident that the nature of marriage is, and has been, changing (732).

Today, people are waiting later and later to get married, if they decide to get married at all and those who do choose to get married are sometimes getting divorced. According to Faulkner et al., "Approximately half of first-time marriages end in divorce; 33% in the first ten years" (61). Accordingly, people are praising those who choose to remain single and are promoting pessimistic perspectives on marriage, viewing it as binding and restrictive. Society as a whole has not only shifted its views on marriage roles, but also on the institution of marriage (Rogers and Amato 732). Rogers and Amato state,

Increases in age at first marriage, the current high divorce rate, and the declining marriage rate suggest that marriage is a more voluntary and less permanent part of

adult life now than it was in the recent past. Changes in public attitudes also reflect a decline in the centrality of marriage, involving more positive evaluations of permanent singlehood, more negative attitudes toward marriage, and a greater emphasis on the restrictive nature of marital bonds. Furthermore, research provides some evidence that marital quality has declined in recent decades. (732)

According to Hoffnung, a growing number of women are deciding to put off marriage and children until they have secured a career. However, that is not to say, Hoffnung assures, that they are putting off marriage and children altogether; although today's career-oriented women, Hoffnung perceives, tend to desire fewer children than their past, less career-oriented, counterparts who raised larger families, they still do have the desire to have children (711). Young females, Hoffnung declares, want it all; a career, a husband, and a family, that is their ideal. In the 1980's, Hoffnung states, the number of married women in the workforce with families spiked. Now, modern women are following in their footsteps, instead of delaying their careers until after they have raised families, Hoffnung contends, women are opting to either delay having families until after securing a career, or they are opting to have both a family and a career simultaneously; the two are no longer mutually exclusive (711).

Furthermore, Hoffnung insists that not only is the number of women in the workforce increasing, but the number of women pursuing nontraditional careers is also increasing. Hoffnung maintains that the number of women pursuing advanced degrees in all fields, not just traditionally female fields, is increasing, and the higher their education the more likely women are to be employed. Upon finishing school, Hoffnung imparts, women are entering into the workforce and are maintaining jobs after marriage as well as after motherhood (711). Botkin et

al., repeat, “College-educated women show greater acceptance of women’s employment and of being a working mother” (933).

Similarly, Rogers and Amato affirm, “In 1970 approximately 10% of married mothers with preschool children were employed full-time, year round, with 44% having some employment. By 1990, these figures had increased to 28% and 68% respectively” (734). The increase of women in the workforce, the evaluators imply, is leading to increased levels of work-family conflict between couples, which is leading to decreased levels of marital quality.

According to the surveyors,

Along with married women’s labor-force participation, the potential for work-family conflict has grown in recent decades, particularly among wives with young children. A role strain perspective draws attention to the potential difficulty of performing multiples roles that make demands on individuals’ resources, especially their time. Married mothers of preschool children may be particularly vulnerable to role strain if they work full-time, given the conflicting time demands of work and family roles...Numerous observers have documented the potential for the conflicting demands of work and family to create stress for mothers – stress that often spills over and affects the quality of marital relations. Time shortages reported by married mothers affect marital quality by decreasing couples’ time together. (734)

While women maintain commitment to their spouses and family, they also have a desire for independence and autonomy, which may come in the form of pursuing their own interests, such as education and careers. However, just because women have a devotion to their education and

careers does not mean that they have less devotion to their families; nevertheless, their divided attention may lead to increased marriage and family conflict and decreased marital quality.

Gender Equity

According to Lotte Bailyn (2003) in her article entitled, *Academic Careers and Gender Equity: Lessons Learned from MIT*, while women of this generation expect to work and have careers of their own, they also expect to receive adequate time off from their careers to have, and take care of, their children before returning to work (140). At the same time, modern women demand equal treatment and equal opportunity in the workforce. Bailyn offers two definitions of gender equity. First, Bailyn mentions the traditional, or legal, definition of gender equity, which states that both male and female employees are entitled to “equal pay, equal access to opportunities to enter an occupation and to advance in it, and freedom from harassment” (139). However, Bailyn notes that there is a difference between gender equity and gender equality, and she advises that a better definition would include both. Gender equity refers to both genders receiving equal salary, equal opportunity for advancement, and equal protection from harassment. Gender equality, on the other hand, extends even further to include equality in non-work demands as well (139).

According to Bailyn, the first, or traditional, definition of gender equity is flawed. The first definition assumes that work and family are separate when in reality, one cannot compartmentalize aspects of one’s life, because they are mutually dependent, meaning that one affects or influences the other (139). Jerry A. Jacobs and Sarah E. Winslow (2004) in their article entitled, *The Academic Life Course, Time Pressures, and Gender Inequality*, confirm that various aspects of one’s life, especially work and family, are interdependent (145).

The first definition of gender equity, according to Bailyn, assumes that people's work is their life and that they do not have other responsibilities or obligations outside of the office (139). In addition, Bailyn argues that the first definition is "gender neutral," meaning that it disregards the fact that men's and women's lives outside of work are different. While both men and women each have responsibilities and obligations outside of work, they are not the same; men and women face different pressures and constraints (139). According to Afaf Ibrahim Meleis and Teri G. Lindgren (2002) in their article entitled, *Man Works from Sun to Sun, but Woman's Work is Never Done: Insights on Research and Policy*, women take on much more household responsibilities than men; in fact, females do three times as much household labor as men (744). Bailyn agrees indicating women have less time than men to devote to their work, and they are at a disadvantage because they cannot follow the "male model" as easily. Bailyn insists that careers are set up for men and that they accommodate men's lifestyles while disregarding women's lifestyles, and this needs to be changed (139).

In order for the workplace to be a truly equitable place for both men and women, Bailyn recommends that the definition of gender equity, as well as organizational policy, needs to be changed to accommodate the extra responsibilities that women must endure, including childbirth and childcare. The second, and better, definition of gender equity, according to Bailyn, includes the first definition of gender equity, which focuses on equal opportunities; but includes equal constraints (139). Bailyn contends that the main organizational policy that needs to be changed, or instituted, in order to make the competition for promotion and advancement more equitable for women is the parental leave policy for new mothers. Bailyn declares that it is important for new mothers to have the opportunity to stay at home with their children during the first few months of development without the threat of falling behind in their careers. It would be as if

someone pushed pause until the mothers return from their leaves of absence, and they could pick up where they left off without penalty (140). However, Jacobs and Winslow denote that simply implementing parental leave policies is not enough. The researchers advocate, “The challenges of being a responsible and engaged parent do not end after three or even six months but endure for many years...a way must be found to reduce the unrelenting appetite [of the professional domain] in order to achieve a better integration of mothers and responsible and engaged fathers” (158).

According to Meleis and Lindgren, while men only have one focus, work, women have many foci, including careers, children, and chores. Women today must learn to be multi-taskers, learning to juggle career and family demands, while men only have to devote their time and energy to their work. Likewise, Faulkner et al. acknowledge, “Women who work outside the home work a ‘second shift’ because often after working a full-time job, women are disproportionately faced with additional demands of caring for the home and for the children in comparison to men” (63). Furthermore, Jacobs and Winslow mention that family demands decrease the number of hours that women are able to devote to their work (145). In addition, Hoffnung insinuates that the more children a woman has, then the less she is able to be involved with her career; and thus, the less achievements she is able to accomplish (711). While men are concentrating on earning their livings, Meleis and Lindgren consider, women are concentrating on their triple roles as career-seekers, housekeepers, and babysitters (744).

Marriage and Gender Roles and Marital Quality and Satisfaction

According to Ken Dempsey (2002) in his article entitled, *Who Gets the Best Deal from Marriage: Women or Men*, women get the worst deal out of marriage (92). Dempsey states, “The home is more likely to be a place of leisure for men whilst remaining more of a place of work for

women” (91). The basic assertion Dempsey makes is that women take on more responsibility in relationships than men, not only providing the majority of the household labor and childcare, but also the emotional care as they listen when their husbands or children vent their problems and concerns (91). Because women are taking on more responsibility in relationships than men, Rogers and Amato presume that women are experiencing more “role overload” and “role conflict” and that this is “raising wives’ awareness of inequity in the household division of labor” (734).

Similarly, Faulkner et al. claim, “Feminist theory promotes awareness of power differentials associated with gender. Division of household labor is one source of gender inequity...The division of household labor falls under relatively traditional gender roles, with the wife performing a far greater proportion of household tasks than husbands, even in households where the wife earns more than her husband” (63). The theorists continue,

In his study of marital satisfaction among employed women, Greenstein (1995) found that gender role identification influenced outcomes on marital satisfaction. Hours employed per week did not have a statistically significant effect for women holding traditional gender role ideologies but it had a strong negative effect on marital stability for women identifying with non-traditional or androgynous gender role ideologies. (63)

Moreover,

In a study exploring changes in gender role attitudes, Amato and Booth as cited in Faulkner et al. (1995) found that when wives adopt less traditional gender role attitudes their perceived marital quality declines, however when husbands adopt less traditional attitudes, their perceived marital quality increases. In their

discussion, these authors hypothesize that as wives become less traditional in outlook (more egalitarian) 'they may perceive that they are disadvantaged or exploited and thus become less happy with their marriages...in terms of behavior, they may demand more decision-making power or press their husbands to spend more time doing housework and childcare. Because the status quo benefits men, many husbands resist these changes. Thus when wives' attitudes become more progressive, there is likely to be more overt conflict between spouses and less stability in their relationship'. (63)

Women desire novelty in their relationships. They do not want to do the same predictable routine everyday of taking care of the home and children. They want something different, something new; they want to work. Women today desire their marriages to be unique from the conventional marriages of the past where the husband was the "breadwinner" and the wife stayed at home. They desire more nontraditional marriages and marriage roles. Apparently, however, freedom in marriage comes at a steep price, the price being increased marital conflict and decreased marital quality and satisfaction.

What women are asking, Dempsey proposes, is simply that men assume more responsibility at home so as to alleviate the pressure from women and allow them to take a break as well as allow them pursue work outside of the household (91). Likewise, Jacobs and Winslow mention that family demands limit the time that women are able to devote to work and that professional careers demand many hours of work (145). Which is why, Dempsey states, women want an equal division of household labor. Women are not asking for much, just for their husbands to help wash the dishes, do the laundry, clean the house, and take care of the children; yet, some men, who are stuck in their traditional expectations of marriage roles, will not allow it

(99). Dempsey continues, “The great majority of husbands resist successfully the efforts of wives to shift the boundaries of responsibility for housework, childcare, or emotional work” and as a result, “There are two marriages, a man’s and a woman’s, but it is a woman’s that needs upgrading” (91).

Benefits of Marriage (Physical, Psychological, Emotional) and Marital Quality

Along the same lines, Faulkner et al. articulate that marriage is likely to be a different experience for women than for men. The authors explain, “In 1975 Bernard proposed the concept of a ‘his’ and ‘her’ marriage’ in which marriage is a qualitatively different experience for men and for women, with men receiving more psychological benefit than women. Women derive mental and physical benefits when they are in satisfying marriages, whereas men benefit from marriage regardless of its quality” (62).

Kristin D. Mickelson, Sharon T. Claffey, and Stacey L. Williams (2006) in their article entitled, *The Moderating Role of Gender and Gender Role Attitudes on the Link Between Spousal Support and Marital Quality*, reiterate that marriage is likely to be a different experience for women than for men, and that for men marriage is a more satisfying experience than for women. Furthermore, the writers argue that men receive more psychological support in marriage than women, and women receive less emotional support from their husbands than husbands do from their wives. According to the investigators,

Researchers have also found that women receive less emotional support from their husbands than men do from their wives. Thus, it is not surprising that marriages appear to be less beneficial for women than for men. Specifically, married women report poorer mental and physical health and less marital satisfaction than married men do. Rather than marriage per se, marital quality

appears to be more important for women's well-being...The one situation in which marriage is beneficial for women is when the husband is rated as highly supportive. (73)

Moreover, Mickelson et al. present that the degree of emotional support in the marriage impacts the level of marital quality; however, the examiners specify that emotional support is perceived differently, and impacts marital quality differently, in traditional versus nontraditional marriages. "Emotional spousal support predicted better marital satisfaction and less conflict for traditional women and egalitarian men, whereas both instrumental (e.g., housework or childcare) and emotional spousal support predicted better marital satisfaction for egalitarian women and traditional men" (73).

Benefits of Marriage (Physical, Psychological, Emotional) and Marital Conflict

Similarly, Lisa B. Story and Rena Repetti (2006) in their article entitled, *Daily Occupational Stressors and Marital Behavior*, retain that couples' level of emotional support predicts the amount of conflict, particularly daily job stress induced conflict, they will experience in their marriages.

The marital support that couples provide to each other is one promising avenue to explore. Emotional support may help shield the marital relationship from the negative consequences of stressors by reducing spouses' emotional distress. Marital support may also take the form of helping with household chores and other demands on stressful days, which may also facilitate the distressed partners' withdrawal-based coping. (691)

Correspondingly, Lisa A. Neff and Benjamin R. Karney (2007) in their article entitled, *Stress Crossover in Newlywed Marriage: A Longitudinal and Dyadic Perspective*, maintain,

Receiving support from a partner buffers relationships from the effects of stress. Yet husbands and wives may not provide their partners with the same level of support during stressful times. For instance, wives are more likely than husbands to increase their workload at home on days in which their partners experienced stress at work, thereby facilitating their partners' recovery from stress. (597)

Additionally,

On days when husbands had greater stress than normal, wives increased the support they provided. On days in which wives had higher stress than normal, however, husbands behaved more negatively toward their wives. If, during stressful times, wives support their husbands more than husbands support their wives, this could suggest that although the negative influence of husbands' stress may be contained by the support they receive, wives' stress may be more likely to spill into the marriage, causing marital processes of both partners to suffer. (597)

Furthermore, Story and Repetti put forth that husbands are less likely to become angry, and are more likely to withdraw from interactions with their spouses as a way to cope with stress and avoid conflict, if they receive support from their wives in the evening. They explain that this allows husbands time for "emotional recuperation," which allows them to relax and unwind and calm down before interacting with their wives so as not to take out their stress on them (691).

Activities such as watching television, reading, or listening to music may help individuals to emotionally recuperate from a stressful day by providing them with a period for relaxation, distracting them from thoughts about their day, and shielding them from the potential stressors that may arise during social interaction.

This process does not require conscious effort and may often occur outside of awareness. (691)

However, Mickelson et al. signify that while emotional support alone seems to be enough to make wives satisfied in traditional marriages, in nontraditional marriages emotional support alone is not enough to make wives satisfied. The authors reason that emotional support must be combined with instrumental support in order for wives in nontraditional marriages to be satisfied. According to the writers, “Women with egalitarian gender role attitudes consider housework a shared domain. As such, instrumental support from a husband is greatly expected, and therefore it may be as important as emotional support for these wives’ perceived marital quality. For men, on the other hand, the opposite pattern may be found; traditional men expect more instrumental spousal support from their wives than do egalitarian men” (74).

Marriage and Gender Roles and Marital Conflict

According to Hoffnung, women today do not just want their husbands to share in the household responsibilities, but rather they expect it (712). Because women are adopting these new expectations, the dynamics of the marriage relationship are changing. Women are expecting their husbands to take on responsibilities that are traditionally female, such as housework and childcare, while women are taking on responsibilities that are traditionally male, such as earning incomes and educations. The line between male and female marriage roles, the researchers observe, is blurred, and it is creating confusion and conflict among couples. Botkin et al. reveal, “Researchers have pointed out the importance of husbands and wives being aware of their own and their partners’ roles and role expectations of self and other. Marital satisfaction can be affected if one partner perceives the other as expressing roles or role expectations that are incongruent with his or her own” (933).

Likewise, Rogers and Amato report, “Research on household division of labor draws attention to two domains through which household work may influence marital quality: spouses’ actual contributions and spouses’ perceptions of equity in the division of labor” (734). Increased marital conflict and decreased marital quality can occur whether division of household labor is actually unequal or whether it is perceived to be unequal between couples. They explain,

Perceptions of fairness in the household division of labor also have become increasingly salient for marriage. The distributive justice perspective suggests that spouses’ satisfaction with the household division of labor depends not only on task completion but also on the subjective meanings attached to household work and employment. Research indicates that perceptions of unfairness in the division of household labor contribute to clashes in many marriages especially when wives hold nontraditional gender attitudes. (734-735)

Thus, changes in gender roles and contributions to household labor, actual or perceived, can lead to increased marital conflict and decreased marital quality.

Along the same lines, Mickelson et al. report that violated expectations of the division of household labor may lead to increased conflict and decreased marital quality, especially in nontraditional marriages.

Although the above research suggests that marital behaviors today are more egalitarian, egalitarian wives are not satisfied. In fact, Amato and Booth (1995) found that as women’s attitudes become more egalitarian, their perceived marital quality declined. In contrast, as men’s attitudes become more egalitarian, their perceived marital quality increased. So why are egalitarian women less happy in their marriages? One explanation may stem from the finding that an ideology of

marital equality does not necessarily translate into an outcome of marital quality.

Along these lines, Hackel and Ruble (1992) found that violated support expectations (particularly division of childcare and household labor) were related to less marital satisfaction. Additionally, egalitarian women with an unequal division of household labor experience more discontent than traditional women do with an unequal division of labor. (74)

However, Rogers and Amato recount that statistics show that men's contribution to household labor is increasing as women's contributions are decreasing. According to them

With regard to actual household work, research suggests a convergence as men's time in household work has increased and women's time has decreased, regardless of employment status. For example, among adults aged 18-64, approximately 40 hours per week were spent by women in household work and child care in 1965, compared to 11 hours spent by men. By 1985 these figures had shifted to 30 hours for women and 15 hours for men. Nevertheless, research consistently documents a tendency for husbands to perform less housework and child care than wives, even when wives are employed full-time. (734)

Likewise, Mickelson et al. express, "Research on division of household labor suggests that men and women are demonstrating more egalitarian behaviors than in the past. Since the 1960s, women have cut the time they spend on housework by nearly one-half, whereas men have nearly doubled their time (although today women are still responsible for the majority of the housework)" (74). The slight increase in men's contributions to household labor, however, may be leading to increases in marital quality, Rogers and Amato claim. "It is possible that husbands' increased contributions to household work, and the positive subjective meanings attached to

sharing such work, have contributed to increases in marital quality over time – especially among wives” (735).

Length of Marriage and Conflict

Because men tend to hold traditional expectations regarding marriage roles, and because twenty-first century women tend to hold nontraditional expectations regarding marriage roles, Rogers and Amato argue that married couples today are negotiating marriage role expectations more than their earlier counterparts; and thus, they are experiencing more conflict in marriage than couples of the past. Therefore, marriages today, the assessors maintain, are suffering more because of the strain that increased conflict is causing on couples’ relationships (734).

Meanwhile, Liat Kulik and Hagit Havusha-Morgenstern (2010) in their article entitled, *An Ecological Approach to Explaining Women’s Adjustment in the Initial Stage of Marriage*, convey, “Although research findings indicate that most couples feel relatively high levels of satisfaction in the initial period of marriage, there is also evidence of marital conflicts emerging during that stage” (192).

Likewise, Glenice A. Burchard, Mark A. Yarhouse, Marucs K. Kilian, Everett L. Worthington, Jr., Jack W. Berry, and David E. Canter (2003) in their article entitled, *A Study of Two Marital Enrichment Programs and Couples’ Quality of Life*, observe, “Conflict aside, it appears that there is a natural decrease in marital quality that occurs over time, particularly in the first four years of marriage” (240). Moreover, Kulik and Havusha-Morgenstern consider,

The finding that the duration of marriage correlate[s] negatively with marital adjustment is noteworthy, because the participants were women who had been married for a relatively brief period, and some of them were still at or near the honeymoon stage of marriage, when couples experience the greatest extent of

harmony and unity in their relationship. Against that background, it can be concluded that despite the positive and romantic feelings that tend to characterize the dyadic relationship during the initial period of marriage, the emergence of daily conflicts can generate symptoms of burnout and cause difficulty in adjustment to the marital relationship even in the early stage of marriage. (204-205)

Nevertheless, Kulik and Havusha-Morgenstern contend, “The relationships that newlywed couples establish during that period can impact the future of their marital life. Thus it is especially important to identify the variables that can contribute to marital adjustment in the early years of marriage” (192-193).

Marital Conflict and Marital Quality

According to Rogers and Amato, changing attitudes about marriage roles has added to increased conflict over six main topics in marriage, including “economic roles, work-family conflict, division of labor, perceptions of fairness regarding the household division of labor, gender-role attitudes, and the balance of marital power” (732-33). Likewise, Solomon et al. reiterate, “Relational irritations arise almost daily within marriage, even in satisfying ones. Common marital grievances include issues of finances and employment, peer and kin relationships, child-rearing, division of household labor, communicative expressivity, and relational autonomy” (146).

Similarly, Frank D. Fincham and Steven R. H. Beach (1999) in their article entitled, *Conflict in Marriage: Implications for Working with Couples*, state,

Dating, newlywed, and established married couples complain about sources of conflict ranging from verbal and physical abusiveness to personal characteristics

and behaviors. Perceived inequity in division of labor is associated with both marital conflict and more male withdrawal in response to conflict. Likewise, conflict over power is strongly related to marital dissatisfaction. Reporting problems with spousal extramarital sex, problematic drinking, or drug use is predictive of divorce, as are wives' reports of husbands' jealousy and foolish spending of money. Similarly, reporting greater problem severity increases prediction of divorce. Even though it is often not reported to be a problem, relationship violence among newlyweds predicts divorce, as does the presence of psychological aggression. (51)

Along the same lines, Story and Repetti assert that daily job stress is another source of marital conflict and marital dissatisfaction. According to this research, "Stressful work experiences have been associated with greater marital conflict, lower marital support, and more marital dissatisfaction" (690). Furthermore, "Chronic job stressors have been linked to increases in marital conflict through changes in psychological distress" (690). Moreover, the authors insist, "The quality of any couples' marriage is, to some degree, shaped by their surrounding life circumstances. For example, predictions of future marital functioning are improved when researchers consider the chronic stressors to which couples are exposed. Given the increasing number of dual-career families and the lengthening of the work week, job stressors merit particular emphasis in the study of stress and marriage" (690).

Correspondingly, Neff and Karney claim, "Marriages do not occur in a vacuum but take place within environments that may constrain or facilitate marital development. When the environment of a couple contains numerous sources of strain, such as work stress or financial difficulties, marriages tend to suffer" (594). The writers maintain that outside influences, such as

daily job stress or economic stress, may put excess strain on the marriage causing greater conflict and lesser marital quality. “Stressors external to the marriage have been associated with lowered marital quality and greater marital instability. Consequently, changes in marital quality over time cannot be fully understood without reference to the stressful events outside the relationship to which couples must adapt” (594).

Stress Spillover and Stress Crossover

Neff and Karney claim that marriages are interdependent; therefore, what happens to one partner will ultimately affect the other. “One of the defining features of marriage is interdependence, or the idea that one partner’s experiences have the capacity to influence the outcomes of the other partner” (594). Thus, when one partner is stressed the other partner will also feel the effects. Kulik and Havusha-Morgenstern replicate, “Generally, research has revealed that tension experienced by one spouse spills over to the other and may impact marital adjustment” (195). Specifically, Neff and Karney note, husbands’ stress is more likely to impact wives’ emotional state than wives’ stress is likely to impact husbands’ emotional state. “Husbands’ stress may be more likely to affect wives’ well-being than vice versa” (597). Accordingly, Kulik and Havusha-Morgenstern remark, “It has also been found that when employment demands spill over to the couple’s leisure time, less energy is invested in cultivating the marital relationship. This adversely affects the development of intimacy as well as exacerbating stress among partners. Moreover, research findings have revealed a negative correlation between the spouse’s work pressure and the quality of marital interaction” (195).

Neff and Karney indicate that how the non-stressed spouse responds to the stressed spouse will determine whether the marriage will be impacted.

The few studies that have taken a dyadic approach to stress highlight the importance of partners' responses to their spouses' stress for marital outcomes. In general, positive responses (e.g., providing support, making allowances for a spouses' negative behavior) should work to contain the negative influence of stress on marriage, whereas negative responses (e.g., engaging in negative reciprocity) are likely to exacerbate the transmission of stress between partners. (594)

Furthermore, when stress begins to impact an individual's behavior it is called stress spillover.

Spouses' stress frequently is associated with changes in their own relationship functioning, a phenomenon referred to as stress spillover. As external stress increases, spouses engage in more negative behaviors in the home and report increasingly negative relationship evaluations....Moreover, a 4-year marriage study revealed that when spouses experience higher levels of stress than normal, they not only report more specific problems in the marriage (e.g., problems with communication, showing affection) but also tend to rely on a maladaptive attributional style, blaming their partner for negative marital events. Thus, stress appears to act as a double-edge sword: Under stress spouses not only are more likely to experience negative relationship events but are less likely to process and interpret marital events in a an adaptive manner. (595)

However, as mentioned earlier, stress is not only likely to impact the stressed partner's behavior, but it is also likely to impact the non-stressed partner's behavior as well, an occurrence which Neff and Karney refer to as stress crossover (595).

The consequences of spouses' stressors, however, may reverberate beyond spouses' own relationship evaluations, as the stressful life events of one individual also may influence the emotions and judgments of the partner, a phenomenon referred to as stress crossover....Research on emotional transmission between family members argues that what happens to one family member outside of the relationship may affect how other family members think and behave inside the relationship. (595)

Specifically, the theorists denote that husbands' external stress may impact wives' psychological and emotional stability. "Husband's job stress is associated with elevated levels of psychological distress and depression in wives" (595).

Consequently, Neff and Karney claim, husbands and wives have the ability to limit the negative impact that stress has on them both individually and as couples. How couples respond to stress, specifically how they manage conflict in their relationships will determine the impact that stress has on their relationships. According to the authors,

Interdependence theory argues that ultimately all interpersonal influence travels through behavioral interactions. The transmission of stress between spouses, then, should be affected by couples' interaction styles during stressful periods.

Specifically, the couple's skill at resolving marital conflicts may comprise a second moderator of these effects. External stress has been associated with increases in specific marital problems, suggesting that one spouse's stress may create new sources of relationship conflict that the couple must negotiate as a unit. Thus, the skill with which couples resolve problem issues should moderate the toll stress ultimately takes on the marriage. If the couple is better equipped to

manage problems adaptively, any negativity resulting from one spouse's stress is likely to be handled effectively, insulating the partner's satisfaction from the effects of stress. On the contrary, couples with maladaptive conflict skills may find themselves unable to resolve problems brought about by stressors, facilitating the spread of one spouse's stress to the other partner's satisfaction. (597)

Neff and Karney, then, resolve that constructive conflict management techniques reduce the impact of stress spillover and crossover, maintaining marital satisfaction; while destructive conflict management techniques increase the impact of stress spillover and crossover, diminishing marital satisfaction. "Results revealed that couples' conflict resolution skills moderated this crossover effect. Husbands were more likely to experience stress crossover if the couple displayed a more negative conflict resolution style. Thus, it seems the ability to handle conflict effectively acts as a buffer to contain the negative effects of one spouse's stress" (604).

Marriage Type and Marital Conflict

In addition to stress spillover and stress crossover, there is evidence that marriage type may also predict the amount of marital conflict and satisfaction that couples experience. In their study, Rogers and Amato compared couples in traditional and nontraditional marriages, and tried to assess whether nontraditional couples experience more conflict, and therefore more marital discord, than traditional couples. "In the research presented here, we are interested in the manner in which changes in gender relations in marriage may have affected marital quality. Have recent changes in husbands' and wives' roles helped to strengthen marriage by increasing equity and flexibility? Or have changes in spouses' behavior further undermined an already fragile arrangement by increasing normative ambiguity and strain?" (732).

Of the two groups of people that the examiners studied and compared, the first group included those who were married before the increase of women in the workforce (between 1964 and 1980), and the second group included those who were married after the increase of women in the workforce (between 1981 and 1997) (738). According to Rogers and Amato, “To address these questions, we used a national longitudinal study of marriage to compare indicators of gender relations within marriage and levels of marital quality for two marriage cohorts: those married between 1964 and 1980 (and assessed in 1980) and those married between 1981 and 1997 (and assessed in 1997).” (732). In addition, “We used national data from two samples reflecting different marriage cohorts to examine long-term changes in gender relations within marriage, long-term changes in marital quality, and the association between the two” (731).

Rogers and Amato aimed to determine the amount of gender-related conflict and the level of marital satisfaction in both groups of married couples. They hypothesized that the first group would have little gender-related conflict and greater marital satisfaction compared to the second group, which the reporters hypothesized would have more gender-related conflict and lesser levels of marital satisfaction. They hypothesized that if the second group showed less marital satisfaction compared to the first group, then it would reveal that gender-related conflict had an effect on marital satisfaction (737).

The outcome of the study yielded expected results in regards to the gender relations variables. Six different gender related categories were examined including economic roles, work-family conflict, division of labor, perceptions of fairness regarding the household division of labor, gender-role attitudes, and the balance of marital power. Rogers and Amato found that compared to the older group of married couples, wives in the newer group of married couples were working more and were contributing significantly more to the household income than their

older counterparts. In addition, they discovered that women in the recently married group experienced a lot more pressure because they were trying to balance both work and family; thus the group of recently married couples was more prone to work-family conflict than the older married couples (741).

Furthermore, Rogers and Amato determined that the young married couples held a more nontraditional view of marriage roles than the older married couples, and, therefore, the lines between male and female marriage roles were blurred in the newer married group. Because husbands' and wives' roles in marriage are blurred in the recently married group there is more possibility for conflict between them. According to the authors, "To the extent that nontraditional attitudes create uncertainty about gender roles within marriage, this change has the potential to create tension between wives and husbands" (741).

Moreover, Rogers and Amato ascertained that men in the newer group of married couples were taking on more household responsibility than their older counterparts; although their wives reported that they were not contributing as much as they claimed. With regard to perceptions of fairness in the division of household labor, the researchers discovered that women, more than men, perceived that the division of labor was unfair to men. However, women also perceived, more than men, that the division of labor was unfair to women. Thus, the investigators conclude, "Wives are more likely than husbands to acknowledge unfairness in general" (741 – 742).

Finally, Rogers and Amato found that men reported that they were the ones with the power and control in the relationship, while women reported that they were the ones with more power and control in the relationship. However, the examiners note that both sexes agreed that wives' influence in the recently married group is increasing, while husbands' influence in the recently married group is decreasing; in spite of that, the writers found that half of the

participants reported that they had equal power in their relationships. According to the authors, “These results indicate that in spite of a decline in people’s willingness to nominate husbands as the more influential partner, egalitarian marriages were no more common in the 1997 sample than in the 1980 sample. In general, the gender relations reported by members of our two marriage cohorts are consistent with the broader social changes described earlier” (742 – 743).

In addition, the outcome of the study yielded expected results in regards to the marital quality variable as well. The investigators examined four dimensions of marital quality, including marital interaction, marital conflict, marital problems, and divorce proneness. What the examiners found was, “Marital interaction was significantly lower in the more recent cohort, and marital conflict and reports of marital problems were significantly higher. And although the coefficient for divorce proneness was not significant, it approached significance. Overall, the trends for interaction, conflict, problems, and divorce proneness were consistent in suggesting that marital quality was lower in the recent cohort than in the earlier cohort” (743-744).

“Consistent with the notion of declines in marital quality, members of the more recent cohort reported significantly lower levels of marital interaction and significantly higher levels of marital conflict than did members of the earlier cohort. In addition, wives reported significantly less marital happiness and significantly more marital problems than did husbands” (743).

While their examination of gender relation variables and marital quality variables yielded expected results, Rogers and Amato were most interested in determining whether gender related conflict caused decreases in marital quality in the recently married group as opposed to the earlier married group. Results for this phase of analysis are as follows,

In this final model, work-family demands, nontraditional attitudes, perceptions of unfairness in the division of labor, and inequalities in power all were associated

positively and significantly with marital discord. It is clear from previous models, however, that increased work-family demands was the only variable that helped to explain the higher level of marital discord in the more recent marriage cohort.

These results suggest that most of the changes in gender relations between the two samples did not contribute significantly to the higher level of discord experienced by the more recent marriage cohort. (747-748)

Rogers and Amato continue,

Unfortunately, we were unable to disentangle the specific work-family demands that may be affecting marriage. Time shortages are one source of work-family conflict, and previous research indicates that time shortages reported by married mothers affect marital quality by decreasing couples' time together, increasing wives' feelings of role overload and role conflict, and raising wives' awareness of inequity in the household division of labor. It is important for future research to clarify which of these factors may be contributing to declines in marital quality.

(750)

While Rogers and Amato could not pinpoint the specific cause of increased marital conflict in the recently married group, it is clear that recent marriages are experiencing more conflict than their earlier counterparts. The most plausible cause for heightened conflict in the recently married group is the increase of work-family conflict. Because the number of women in the workforce has increased, and because it has become necessary for both spouses to work in order to contribute to the household income, couples today are not spending as much time together as they did in the past. Thus, couples are spending more time at work and less time at home, and when they are at home their time is divided among work, household responsibilities,

and family time. Therefore, it is perhaps this time constraint between spending time together (connectedness) and spending time apart (autonomy) that is the leading cause of marital conflict and marital dissatisfaction in marriages today.

Work-Family Conflict

According to a study by Gail S. Risch, Lisa A. Riley, and Lawle Michae G. (2003), entitled *Problematic Issues in the Early Years of Marriage: Content for Premarital Education*, “balancing job and family” ranked number one on the top ten list of most significant problems couples deal with during the first five years of marriage, reiterating the findings of Rogers and Amato that work-family conflict is the most significant factor contributing to increased conflict in marriage (256). Likewise, Kulik and Havusha-Morgenstern found that balancing work-family demands proves to be especially challenging for newlywed couples. According to the evaluators, “The tension between work and family demands is one of the main challenges that newly married couples face in establishing their relationship” (195). Coming in at number six on the list was “expectations about household tasks,” which was followed closely by “communication and conflict resolution,” ranking at numbers seven and eight on the list (257). According to Risch et al., these issues are so problematic that counselors include these topics in discussion during their pre-marital counseling sessions (253). While the divorce rate in the United States is holding steady at about fifty percent, it is imperative that couples come to conclusions about these issues before marriage so they do not become part of this statistic.

Jennifer F. Marchand (2000) in an article entitled, *Husbands' and Wives' Marital Quality: The Role of Adult Attachment Orientations, Depressive Symptoms, and Conflict Resolutions Behaviors*, also stresses the importance of determining what issues may affect marital quality. Marchand suggests, “In light of the dramatic increase in the incidence of divorce in recent

decades, identifying individual factors and interpersonal processes that contribute to marital quality has become the focus of much research and investigation” (99).

Furthermore, Dempsey asserts, if husbands, instead of being stubborn and holding fast to power and authority, would give in just a little bit, then their wives would be happier and their marriages healthier. However, as soon as the issue of changing marriage roles comes up, Dempsey remarks, so do men’s guards. Men, Dempsey supposes, do not want to feel as if they are giving in, giving up power, or taking on female roles. According to Dempsey, men want to retain their masculinity at all costs. It is in men’s nature, Dempsey says, to compete when conflict arises (99). Perhaps an explanation for why it is difficult for men to take on roles that are traditionally female is because they have been inundated with masculinity from early on.

Development of Gender Identities

Sherry Macaul and William P. Dunlap (2001) maintain, in their article entitled, *Women in Education: Pathways to Advancement*, that individuals begin to develop their ideas about gender roles in childhood. The authors allege that children learn about how men and women are supposed to behave, including how to deal with conflict, by watching their parents. So it is imperative that parents set a good example for their children by establishing equal gender roles and modeling constructive conflict management behaviors in the household (232).

Consequently, Faulkner et al. propose that there are two theories concerning the development of gender identities in childhood, including essentialism and constructionism. According to the researchers the first theory, essentialism “emphasize[s] the idea that there is a clear masculine or feminine and biologically determined” (62). Additionally, the investigators explain that the second theory, constructionism “views gender roles as largely psychologically or socially constructed, and not solely biologically determined” (62). These theories represent the

ongoing debate between nature versus nurture, but Faulkner et al. ask why not both? The examiners point out that, while both theories have flaws, the second theory is better than the first because the first ignores nurture altogether, while the second at least acknowledges nature, but also incorporates nurture, making it the best of both worlds. According to the evaluators, “[Essentialism] ignores the importance of socialization and environment in shaping gender...it suggests that healthier individuals embrace their traditional gender role (traditional notions of being masculine or feminine)” (62). The assessors continue, “The important theoretical distinction is that although biological differences exist between men and women, much is socially constructed to serve patriarchy and reinforce traditional gender roles to keep women in a one-down position” (62).

Likewise, Mickelson et al. contend that there is a difference between sex, which is biologically determined, and gender, which is culturally determined. According to the researchers,

One limitation of prior research on support in marital relationships is that researchers have tended to examine differences between gender, rather than differences within gender. By collapsing across all women or all men (i.e., ‘gender-as-personality-variable-perspective’) important group differences are lost. The focus remains on the sex difference approach as opposed to the gender perspective where the emphasis lies more on the ‘interactional context of gender’ – i.e., ‘gender constructs emerge from and are enacted in the interactions of daily life’. This perspective is especially important when considering the marital relationship as one’s ideas of gender can be shaped and reshaped in the daily interactions between husbands and wives. (73)

Thus, for the purposes of this study a constructionist, or gender perspective, approach will be used.

Development of Conflict Management Styles

Additionally, Abraham P. Greeff and Tanya De Bruyne (2000) in their article entitled, *Conflict Management Style and Marital Satisfaction*, claim that, in addition to gender identities, people begin to develop their preferred conflict management styles in childhood as well (322). Similarly, William W. Wilmot and Joyce L. Hocker (2001) in their book entitled, *Interpersonal Conflict* 6th ed., present that a person's personal conflict style is developed over the course of his or her lifetime and is influenced by such factors as life experiences, family background, and personal philosophy. According to the authors, an individual's conflict style is set firmly in place by the time he or she reaches adulthood (130).

Along the same lines, Ascan F. Koerner and Mary Anne Fitzpatrick (2002) in their article entitled, *You Never Leave Your Family in a Fight: The Impact of Family of Origin on Conflict Behavior in Romantic Relationships*, express that individuals mimic the conflict resolution strategies of their family of origin. The authors indicate,

The kind of conflict behaviors that persons exhibit during interpersonal conflict depends heavily on how they were socialized in regard to conflict. Noller (1995) has argued, but not showed empirically, that how persons communicate during conflict in their close interpersonal relationships and the impact that conflict has on these relationships is largely a function of how these persons have learned to deal with conflict in their families of origin. In other words, in regard to conflict behaviors, families are children's primary socialization agents and influence children's behavior long after they have left their families of origin.

Consequently, to predict individuals' conflict behaviors in close adult relationships requires an understanding of how their families of origin have dealt with conflict. (235)

Moreover, Kulik and Havusha-Morgenstern state, "It has been assumed that dynamics in the family of origin affect the individual's personal development...Dynamics in the family of origin can have a long-term impact on the individual and on spousal relationships" (194, 204). Furthermore, Gary Creasey, Kathy Kershaw, and Ada Boston (1999) in their article entitled, *Conflict Management with Friends and Romantic Partners: The Role of Attachment and Negative Mood Regulation Expectancies*, note that individuals' conflict management strategies are learned, developed, and solidified by the time they reach late adolescence, and that those strategies are influenced by history and experiences with close friends, romantic partners, and family members (523).

Cognitive Coping Skills

Specifically, Creasey et al. maintain that several key factors influence how a person's conflict management style is learned or developed including one's own cognitive coping skills, developmental history, and attachment orientation. The authors specify that an individual's level of cognitive coping skills is a key factor in determining how he or she will behave in relationships and in conflict situations. An individual's level of cognitive coping skills will affect whether he or she will have the skills necessary to cope with conflict and whether he or she will manage conflict constructively or destructively. Consequently, the investigators allege that how one behaves in relationships may increase or decrease the probability of experiencing conflict.

For example, Creasey et al. propose that a person with a higher level of cognitive coping skills, that is someone who is able to control his or her own emotions and behaviors, especially negative ones, as well as accurately decode the emotions and behaviors of others, will manage relationships and conflict better than, and possibly experience less conflict than, a person with a lower level of cognitive coping skills. On the contrary, the writers imply that a person with a lower level of cognitive coping skills, that is someone who is not able, or who is less able, to control his or her own emotions and behaviors, especially negative ones, and who is not able to read others as well, will not manage relationships and conflict as well as and may possibly experience more conflict than a person with a higher level of cognitive coping skills (523 - 524).

Fincham and Beach duplicate the findings of Creasey et al. reporting that a spouse's level of cognition impacts the outcome of conflict encounters. The authors observe,

More useful in a clinical context are accounts that describe the processes that link problems and personal resources to conflict behavior. Within the context of the social learning framework that has guided interaction research, cognitive processes have been used to account for patterns in observed behavior. For example, the finding that satisfied spouses are less likely to respond negatively after displaying negative effects as a listener (thereby avoiding negative escalation) is attributed to their ability to 'edit' their thoughts during conflict. Attempts to investigate directly the relation between cognition and behavior have yielded encouraging results. (52)

Fincham and Beach continue,

There is increasing evidence that explanations or attributions for negative marital events (e.g. partner comes home late from work) can increase the probability of

conflict behavior (e.g. 'he only thinks about himself and his needs'). Such conflict-promoting attributions are related to (a) less effective problem-solving behaviors, (b) more negative behaviors during problem-solving and support-giving tasks, and (c) specific affects (whining and anger) displayed during problem-solving. In addition, wives' unrealistic relationship beliefs are related to higher rates of negative behavior and lower rates of avoidant behavior. As regards behavioral sequences, wives' conflict-promoting attributions and husbands' unrealistic relationship beliefs correlate with the tendency to reciprocate negative partner behavior. The removal of marital satisfaction from these relations shows that they do not simply reflect the spouses' sentiment toward the marriage. Finally, manipulating spouses' attributions for a negative behavior influenced distressed spouses' subsequent behavior toward their partners. Thus, both correlational and experimental findings are consistent with the view that spousal cognitions, particularly attributions, influence marital behavior. (52)

Relational Development History

In addition to level of cognition, Creasey, et al. offer that an individual's relationship development history is another contributing factor to how one learns or develops his or her conflict management style. For example, the authors present that adolescents learn how to deal with conflict by watching their parents and modeling their behavior. Thus, the researchers conclude, if an individual's parents modeled poor conflict management strategies, then he or she will probably emulate those strategies in the future. Likewise, the investigators deduce, if an individual's parents modeled constructive conflict management strategies, then he or she will probably emulate those strategies in the future.

An individual's history of exposure to family conflict, Creasey et al. claim, may also affect how one manages conflict in the future. According to the researchers, those who witness excessive conflict in adolescence, and especially those who witness divorce, are likely to develop unconstructive ways of resolving conflict. However, the authors note that history of exposure to family conflict is only a risk factor for developing poor conflict coping behaviors, as exposure to excessive family conflict is often linked to other negative family behaviors such as parents with mental health issues and child abuse, which may also be attributed to a person's inability to manage conflict constructively (524).

Family of Origin

Similarly, Koerner and Fitzpatrick concur that individuals mimic the conflict management strategies observed in their families of origin, and different types of families yield different types of conflict resolution behaviors. According to the researchers, "Different family types have very distinct conflict styles and therefore, knowing the family type of a person's family of origin allows researchers to draw strong conclusions about the conflict behavior they experienced in their families. Similarly, a study by Wrench & Socha-McGee (1999) also found different conflict behaviors by parents and adolescents in different family types" (236).

Koerner and Fitzpatrick identified four distinct family types each with their own unique style of conflict management, including consensual, pluralistic, protective, and laissez-faire. The writers describe the communication behaviors of the first family type, consensual, as,

Characterized by a tension between pressure to agree and to preserve the existing hierarchy within the family, on the one hand, and an interest in open communication and in exploring new ideas, on the other hand. In these families, conflict is generally regarded as negative and harmful to the family, but because

unresolved conflict is perceived as potentially threatening to the relationships within the family, these families also see the importance of conflict resolution. Therefore, as long as the conflict is perceived to be about important issues, these families will engage in conflict resolution. Conflict about less important issues, however, is avoided and family members generally are expected to have family needs supersede their individual needs. Because of the general tendency to avoid conflict and to perceive it negatively, conflict in these families sometimes leads to verbal aggressiveness. This is because initiating and engaging in conflict are perceived as violations of the rules of family relationships, and because family members often are hostile because they feel that their individual concerns are not adequately addressed and resolved by the family. More frequently, however, consensual families' practice of open communication allows them to deal productively with conflict and to prevent conflict from developing its destructive potential. (237)

Koerner and Fitzpatrick propose that children from consensual families of origin are most likely to avoid engaging in conflict over insignificant subjects, and children from consensual families are only likely to engage in conflict over important subjects. In addition, the researchers resolve that, when engaging in conflict, children of consensual families of origin are more likely to use constructive conflict management styles and are more likely to be supportive of the other person; however, they may have tendencies toward verbal aggressiveness (237).

Next, Koerner and Fitzpatrick describe the communication behaviors of the second family type, pluralistic, as,

Characterized by open, unconstrained discussions that involve all family members and an emphasis on the individual rather than the family system, which fosters communication competence and independent ideas in children of such families. Pluralistic families' dealings with conflict correspond in many ways with idealized prescriptions for conflict resolution advocated in much of the applied communication literature. Because of their emphasis on the free exchange of ideas and the absence of overt pressure to conform or obey, these families openly address their conflicts with one another, are low in conflict avoidance, engage in positive conflict resolution strategies, and most often resolve their conflicts. Also, because these families explicitly recognize that conflicts are part of ongoing relationships, conflicts are perceived as non-threatening to the family and only seldom involve personal attacks or similar forms of verbal aggressiveness. (238)

The examiners consider that children from pluralistic families of origin are most likely to use constructive conflict management styles and are less likely to avoid conflict and be verbally aggressive (238).

Subsequently, Koerner and Fitzpatrick describe the communication behaviors of the third family type, protective, as,

Characterized by great emphasis on obedience and conformity and little concern with conceptual matters. In these families, communication is a means to enforce family norms rather than to exchange ideas. As a result, children in these families are easily influenced and persuaded by authorities. Conflict in Protective families is problematic because these families place great emphasis on conformity and little value on communication. Family members are expected not to have any

conflicts with one another and to behave according to the interests and norms of the family. Because communication skills are little valued and practiced, these families often lack the necessary skills to engage productively in conflict resolution. Instead, conflict is always perceived as threatening to the family system and family members try hard to avoid conflict. Because engaging in conflict in protective families is interpreted as an act against the family system, it often triggers negative, sometimes even hostile responses from other family members. In addition, because these families avoid dealing with most of their problems, these problems remain unresolved, which increases tensions in these families. These two effects combined lead protective families to experience higher frequencies of negative feelings toward one another in conflict interactions, which is expressed through a tendency to be verbally aggressive. (238-239)

The investigators theorize that children from protective families of origin are most likely to use destructive conflict management styles and are most likely to avoid conflict and be verbally aggressive (239).

Lastly, Koerner and Fitzpatrick describe the communication behaviors of the fourth family type, *laissez-faire*, as,

Characterized by few, often uninvolved interactions among family members about a limited number of topics. Family members value their individuality, but unlike members of pluralistic families, they do not develop their individualities with the help of their families but rely more on sources from the outside. Most members are emotionally divorced from their families and children of these families are more likely to be influenced by external social groups. *Laissez-faire*

families value neither conformity nor communication very much. As a result, they do not experience their families as constraining their individual interests and incidents of colliding interests and thus conflicts are rare. These families do not engage much in conversation with one another and therefore tend to avoid conflict. When engaging in conflict, their emotional involvement is relatively low and there are only a few instances of verbal aggressiveness. During conflict, family members are not very supportive of one another. (239)

The surveyors reason that children from laissez-faire families of origin are most likely to avoid conflict, and when they do engage in conflict, children of laissez-faire families are most likely to use constructive conflict management styles and refrain from verbally aggressive behavior (239).

Thus, Koerner and Fitzpatrick conclude that there are distinct family of origin types each with their own unique conflict management styles, and that the conflict management style practiced in one's family of origin will likely carry over into other intimate, interpersonal relationships in the future, such as marriage. According to Kulik and Havusha-Morgenstern,

The establishment of dyadic intimacy is influenced by the partners' experiences in their families of origin, because each spouse will tend to incorporate these experiences into the dyadic relationship. In that way, a process referred to as 'displaced reenactment' occurs, marriage becomes a state in which functional or dysfunctional patterns are adopted from the family of origin, and unresolved conflictual relations impair the partners' ability to establish a healthy marital relationship characterized by love, intimacy, and mutuality. (194)

Attachment Styles

Creasey et al. consider that in addition to cognitive coping skills and developmental history, a third factor that influences a person's conflict management abilities is attachment orientation. According to Creasey et al. there are three main attachment styles including secure, avoidant/dismissing, and anxious/preoccupied that may affect the development of an individual's conflict management style. A secure person is one who "values emotional attachment; views self as a viable attachment figure for others; [and] is comfortable relying on others for emotional support" (524). Marchand adds, "Securely attached children use their caregiver as a secure base from which to explore and seek comfort from their caregivers in times of distress" (100).

An avoidant/dismissing person is one who "[experiences] discomfort at [the] idea of developing close relationships; [is] emotionally distant; and [has] and unwillingness to trust others" (524). Kulik and Havusha-Morgenstern add that "an [avoidant] individual seeks to maintain independence and emotional distance in interpersonal relationships due to skepticism about the good will of people" (194). Further, Marchand states, "Avoidantly attached children do not seek comfort from their caregivers. Instead, they choose to alleviate negative emotions through their own efforts" (100).

Lastly, Creasey et al. describe an anxious/preoccupied person as someone who "[has] concern over acceptance by others; and [has the] perception that attachments with others are vital for self-esteem" (524). Similarly, Kulik and Havusha-Morgenstern note, "[Anxious] people are concerned about the lack of help and support from others in their close environments at times of crisis" (194). And, Marchand says, "Anxiously/ambivalently attached children are inconsistent in their attempts to seek comfort from their caregivers. Their conflict attempts are thought to reflect their uncertainty about the caregiver's availability" (100).

A person's attachment style, Creasey et al. claim, is influenced by relationships and interactions with family members, caregivers, or important people or role models in an individual's life, and each of these attachment styles may impact a person's behavior in relationships, and the development of a person's conflict management style, in a different way (524). Marchand expresses,

According to attachment theory, internal working models of self and attachment figures develop in the context of early parent-child interactions. Internal working models are cognitive representations of early caregiving experiences, and individual differences in the quality of these working models are believed to reflect the degree to which the primary caregiver provided sensitive and consistent caregiving to the infant. A basic assumption of attachment theory is that internal working models that develop in infancy and childhood are highly stable and are carried forward into adolescent and adult relationships where they serve as a guide for one's expectations, perceptions, and behaviors. However, attachment theory also assumes that working models can change as they accommodate and assimilate current interpersonal experiences. (100)

Along the same lines, Kulik and Havusha-Morgenstern recur,

The quality of the child-care-giver relationship has a profound impact on the child's developing personality, on the child's concept of 'self' and 'other,' and on the nature and quality of close relationships in adulthood. Specifically, children internalize their experiences with caregivers, and those early experiences form a template for later relationships outside of the family. Bowlby referred to those templates as working models, which are carried forward into other relationships,

and guide the individual's expectations, perceptions, and behavior...Attachment theory can contribute important insights about the impact of early family experiences on the individual's behavior in later relationships. (194)

Attachment Styles and Conflict

Creasey et al. deem that there is a high correlation between an individual's attachment style and his or her conflict management style. The authors suspect that good or positive attachment styles may lead to better conflict management, while poor or negative attachment styles may lead to poorer conflict management. According to the examiners, those with secure attachment styles have healthier relationships and thus more constructive conflict management styles, whereas those with avoidant/dismissing or anxious/preoccupied attachment styles have less healthy, or unhealthy, relationships and thus less constructive, or destructive, conflict management styles (524 – 525). Correspondingly, Kulik and Havusha-Morgenstern profess, “Consequently, it is argued that people with high levels of avoidance and anxiety in attachment are characterized by low levels of confidence and independence in personal relations. In line with this approach, Bartholomew (1993) argues that individuals with high levels of avoidance and anxiety in attachment are at particular risk for developing hostile approaches to interpersonal conflicts” (194).

Furthermore, Marchand states,

Adult attachment orientations are a conscious set of expectancies for how to behave in intimate relationships, as well as attitudes and attributions regarding the behaviors of others, and they are believed to have a significant bearing on one's intimate relationships. Because conflict threatens the security of the relationship, Kobak and Duemmler (1994) have suggested that conflict is one context in which

the behaviors associated with a particular attachment orientation are likely to be observed. Indeed, research has shown that insecure adult attachment orientations were associated with fewer constructive problem solving behaviors during marital interaction tasks and more verbal aggression and withdrawal in the marriage.

(100-101)

Thus, Marchand discloses, “Researchers have begun to use Attachment Theory to better understand the role of individual attributes and interpersonal processes in marital quality” (100).

Fincham and Beach replicate the findings of Creasey et al. and Marchand resolving that spouses’ level of attachment impacts the outcome of conflict situations. The examiners consider,

Social psychological research on adult attachment has provided fertile ground for new hypotheses about couple interactions. In particular, spouses’ mental models of attachment may influence their communications and reactions to negative partner behavior. For example, chronically activated mental models can influence both evaluations and interpretations of ambiguous relational events and lead to the display of proceduralized knowledge (i.e. specific action patterns, strategies, or skills). Proceduralized knowledge may be particularly important for understanding marital conflict in that it is often not available to conscious introspection, leading to spouses’ failure to understand or be able to adequately explain their own reactions and behavior. (57)

Fincham and Beach continue,

Such results make more interesting the findings that persons reporting insecure attachment styles are more likely to be married to others with an insecure attachment style and to be less satisfied in their relationships. Similarly, those

with preoccupied attachment style may be particularly likely to show an elevated level of marital conflict after an involuntary separation from the partner. In addition, persons with secure attachment styles show a greater tendency to compromise and to take into account both their own and their partners' interests during problem-solving interactions, whereas those with anxious-ambivalent styles display a greater tendency to oblige their partners and to focus on relationship maintenance than do those with avoidant style. (57)

Adolescents and Conflict Styles

In their study, Creasey et al. examined the relationship between college students' attachment styles with family members, caregivers, or important people or role models in their lives, and their conflict management styles with best friends and romantic partners. According to the investigators, "Several of these central assumptions were tested by having college students complete measures assessing expectancies regarding attachment and confidence in negative mood regulation. In addition, respondents completed an instrument that provided a picture of how these individuals coped with interpersonal conflict with a best friend and romantic partner" (525).

Creasey et al. note that the conflict management strategies that adolescents use with their parents are different than the strategies that they use with friends and romantic partners. According to the researchers, adolescents use the competing conflict management style with their parents in an effort to win, and then either they or their parents give in and use the accommodating style or withdraw themselves from the situation altogether by using the avoiding conflict style. Alternatively, Creasey et al. indicate that adolescents use the collaborating or

compromising styles with their friends or romantic partners in an effort to maintain their relationships. The examiners offer,

Unlike disagreements with parents, in which winning an argument is often the goal, and submission or withdrawal of one party is often a common consequence of a disagreement, there is growing evidence that adolescents manage conflict with close friends and romantic partners more constructively through negotiation, compromise, and stop actions (i.e., stopping the disagreement and discussing the issue at a later time). (523)

Similarly, Shirley S. Feldman and Cris L. Gowen (1998) in their article entitled, *Conflict Negotiation Tactics in Romantic Relationships in High School Students*, found, in their study of high school students' conflict management styles in romantic relationships, that compromise and avoidance were the most popular conflict management tactics for high school students in romantic relationships for interesting reasons. The researchers gather that these approaches to conflict are more passive than aggressive, and because High School students in romantic relationships value their relationships and know that conflict can lead to break ups, they use more passive than aggressive forms of conflict management to preserve their relationships (710).

High school and College students are at a very delicate time in their lives. They are trying to figure out who they are, and they have not yet built up their confidences. Moreover, they are just starting to develop serious relationships with persons of the opposite sex. Everything for high school and college students is fragile, including their romantic relationships. The students do not want to do anything to create waves, which could potentially end their relationships they had waited so long to have. So they use more passive than aggressive forms of conflict management.

A possible motivation, Creasey et al. proposes, for why adolescents are choosing to use more constructive conflict management strategies with peers and romantic partners than with their parents is because, while they still value support from their parents, they are placing increasing importance on their relationships with friends and romantic partners, thus they do not want to do anything to jeopardize those relationships. The authors explain,

It is theorized that one reason that adolescents cope with peer conflict in such a manner is due to their realization that explosive outbursts, domination, or sudden withdrawal may seriously compromise evolving relationships with attachment figures outside the family system. Thus, the art of conflict negotiation appears particularly critical for maintaining close relationships with peers during adolescence. (523)

Likewise, the researchers notice, “Corrosive conflict management routines that are utilized and practiced within such relationships may have important implications for coping with conflict in future adult relationships (e.g. marriage)” (523). Therefore, learning constructive conflict management strategies is necessary for maintaining relationships, whether in adolescence or in adulthood.

For their study, Creasey et al. hypothesized that adolescents manage conflict better with romantic partners than with best friends and that attachment styles are highly correlated with conflict management styles. The reporters also considered the impact of negative mood regulation on a person’s conflict management style. The researchers reveal,

It was hypothesized that respondents would indicate that conflict management skills were better with romantic partners, and we also expected that attachment representations would be more consistently related to these appraisals than for

best friends. Also, while we hypothesized that attachment orientations would predict conflict management skills and difficulties, we also acknowledged that attachment is not the only variable that may influence interactive behavior within close relationships...we also examined how confidence in negative mood regulation also related to this construct. (525 – 526)

While some conflict management strategies are observable, Creasey et al. comment, others are not, such as “thinking of ways to avoid conflict in the future” (526). Thus, the examiners opted to have participants specify in their responses not only behavioral conflict management strategies that they use when experiencing conflict with peers and romantic partners, but also cognitive and emotional strategies that they use as well. In addition, the surveyors looked at both positive and negative conflict management strategies that college students use with best friends and romantic partners (526).

Results of the study revealed that the researchers’ initial hypothesis, that adolescents would manage conflicts more constructively with romantic partners than with best friends, was supported. Creasey et al. state, “The general pattern of results indicated that respondents used more constructive conflict management techniques with romantic partners...Thus, the predictions that conflict management skills would be better with romantic partners was confirmed” (528).

Creasey, et al. concludes that,

Relationship experts have strongly suggested that the most potent predictor of adult romantic relationship demise is how well couples manage conflict and disagreements. Adult couples at high risk for relationship distress or termination are often in relationships in which (1) partners during conflict negotiation attack

one another via contempt, domineering, or belligerence or (2) a member of the couple suddenly withdraws from the disagreement. Marshaling together the data from the present study with current attachment theory and research, suggests that attachment orientations may hold some promise in predicting these corrosive styles of conflict management in both adolescent and adult populations. While one cannot assume that the problematic conflict management styles demonstrated in adolescent attachment relationships automatically translate into difficulties in future relationship domains (e.g., marriage), until proven otherwise, one cannot rule out the possibility. (532)

Relationship Personality and Conflict Styles

In their article entitled, *Relationship Personality, Conflict Resolution, and Marital Satisfaction in the First 5 Years of Marriage*, Klaus A. Schneewind and Anna-Katharina Gerhard (2002) propose that couples' conflict resolution styles develop during the first year of marriage and are habituated after that. The researchers claim that a couple's relationship personality influences the couple's conflict management style, which in turn influences the couple's overall marital satisfaction (63). The examiners explicate,

Certain patterns of relationship personality at the individual and couple level can be viewed as 'enduring vulnerabilities' that require adaptive processes in the face of stressful events. These adaptive processes encompass more or less functional conflict resolution behaviors. The quality of these conflict resolution behaviors determines the amount and intensity of prevalent conflict episodes and influences overall marital quality and stability. (64)

According to Schneewind and Gerhard, a couple's relationship personality is comprised of three elements, including general relationship competence, empathy, and relational vulnerability (63). The authors define the first element of relationship personality, general relationship competence, as "the extent to which a person believe[s] that she or he [is] able to cope with difficult and problematic interpersonal situations in a constructive manner" (65). Next, the writers describe the second element of relationship personality, empathy as "a person's ability to put him – or herself in another's position in order to get an idea of how that person feels or thinks" (65). Finally, the assessors portray the third element of relationship personality, relational vulnerability, as "a person's inability or unwillingness to forget unpleasant transactions with another or to forgive another person when he or she has inflicted hurt and offense. (65)

Thus, Schneewind and Gerhard hypothesize, "The initial independent variable (couple relationship personality pattern) should lead to a certain outcome in the dependent variable (couple relationship satisfaction) but also might indirectly influence the outcome through a mediator (couple conflict resolution style)" (64). Furthermore, the surveyors theorize that couples with healthy relationship personalities will display more constructive conflict management styles, while couples with unhealthy relationship personalities will display more destructive conflict management styles. The reporters imply,

Couples with less functional relationship personalities use more destructive and fewer constructive conflict resolution behaviors that, in turn, engender less satisfying couple relationships. In contrast, couples who are endowed with more functional relationship personalities will express more constructive and fewer destructive conflict resolution behaviors in conflictual situations and this helps them feel satisfied with their relationship. (64)

Moreover, Schneewind and Gerhard reflect that if couples' relationship personalities are mismatched, then it will lead to destructive conflict patterns and dissatisfying relationships in the future, while couples with complementary relationship personalities will utilize constructive conflict patterns, which will lead to satisfying relationships in the future. The theorists postulate, "An inappropriate match between both partners' relationship personalities will, in the long run, continually amplify and exacerbate dysfunctional communication patterns. These dysfunctional patterns gradually develop into pronounced relational dissatisfaction. The opposite is posited to hold true for couples in which both partners begin their relationship with highly competent relationship personalities" (65). Consequently, the evaluators discuss, "The quality of communication, especially in conflictual transactions, is of particular importance to relationship outcome variables such as relationship satisfaction or separation and divorce" (64).

Schneewind and Gerhard determined, through a five year longitudinal study of married couples, that couples' relationship personality does, in fact, influence choice of conflict management style, which does, in turn, impact marital satisfaction. According to the researchers, "The results of our study lend support to a mediational model of relationship satisfaction in which relationship personality and conflict resolution are substantial contributing factors to the level of satisfaction couples experience concurrently in their marriage and over the first 5 years" (68).

Conflict and Conflict Styles

Conflict is inevitable in any interpersonal relationship, but especially in romantic relationships. Kulik and Havusha-Morgenstern declare, "Conflicts in marriage are inevitable, as partners bring different family backgrounds, personality traits, social values, and life experiences into the relationship" (195). According to Chris Segrin, Alesia Hanzal, and Tricia J. Domschke

(2009) in their article entitled, *Accuracy and Bias in Newlywed Couples' Perceptions of Conflict Styles and the Association with Marital Satisfaction*, "As couples solidify their relationship and progress into marriage, conflicts usually increase" (208). Consequently, Fincham and Beach advocate that conflicts between married couples occur about once or twice a month (50). Conflict is not something that is to be eliminated but to be managed, and some people manage conflict better than others. According to Kulik and Havusha-Morgenstern, "The ability to resolve conflicts can have a significant impact on the stability of the marital relationship and on the satisfaction of partners in the early stage of building the dyadic unit" (195). Thus, Solomon et al. advise, "As a first step in managing potential conflict issues, people must decide whether to voice their concerns to their partner or avoid confronting the problem" (146).

Everyone approaches conflict management differently, and everyone has a unique conflict style. Solomon et al. impart,

Although open and direct communication patterns are generally valued in marriage, people frequently withhold irritations from their spouses. For example, Birchler et al. (1975) found that spouses in satisfying marriages reported an average of 14 complaints, but only one argument, over a five-day period. Moreover, Scanzoni (1978) found that 7 percent of wives reported that they could not communicate a particular relational grievance to their husband. Hence, individuals may perceive irritations within the marriage, but decide not to articulate those complaints to spouses. (146)

Not all conflict styles were created equally. Some conflict styles are constructive, while others are destructive. Some conflict styles can lead to resolution of conflict, while others can lead to escalation of conflict. Kulik and Havusha-Morgenstern reveal,

Research findings on the relationship between conflict resolution strategies and marital adjustment have consistently revealed correlations between marital satisfaction and the use of constructive conflict resolution strategies such as consensus and compromise. In the same vein, negative correlations have been found between marital satisfaction and the use of destructive conflict resolution strategies such as defensiveness, aggression, and retreat. (195)

One of the keys to securing a happy, healthy, and mutually satisfying marriage, Greeff and Bruyne claim, is to learn to manage conflict constructively. According to the authors, “Marital satisfaction, which is related to emotional support, shared interests, and conflict resolution, maybe be one of the most prominent contributors to global satisfaction. There are few aspects in a marriage that influence a couple’s sense of well-being more than their ability to manage mutual conflict” (321).

Marchand repeats,

Conflict is an inevitable relationship experience, and conflict resolution strategies reflect interpersonal behaviors used to resolve disagreements in the marriage.

How conflict is managed has important relevance to relationship functioning.

Gottman (1994) has consistently found that without effective conflict resolution strategies relationships are more likely to dissolve. (100)

Marchand goes on to say, “Conflict resolution behaviors reflect interpersonal behaviors used to address disagreements in the marriage and thus, are processes that have a significant bearing on marital quality” (101).

Correspondingly, Segrin, Hanzal, and Domschke, contend, “How couples argue and disagree about issues appears to be more consequential to the success of marriage than what they

argue about or frequency of conflict. Because conflict patterns are good predictors of marital satisfaction, they play an important role in the ultimate success or failure of marriages” (208). Accordingly, Lawrence A. Kurdek (1995) in his article entitled, *Predicting Change in Marital Satisfaction from Husbands’ and Wives’ Conflict Resolution Styles*, concurs, “Identifying what specific conflict resolution styles are linked to change in marital satisfaction is important because managing conflict is one of the central tasks of maintaining a marriage and because declines in marital satisfaction herald a series of processes indicative of a deteriorating marriage” (153).

In order to successfully manage conflict in relationships one must first understand the nature of conflict and then begin to use constructive conflict management styles that are appropriate for the individual situation. Wilmot and Hocker offer that conflict can be defined as, “An expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals” (41). In addition, Thomas E. Harris and John C. Sherblom in their book entitled, *Small Group and Team Communication 2nd ed.*, add that there are two types of conflict, constructive conflict and destructive conflict. Constructive conflicts would be conflicts that allow individuals to express different perspectives, which in turn help them to make better decisions or come up with better solutions. On the other hand, destructive conflicts would be conflicts that distract individuals and prevent them from making good decisions or coming up with quality solutions (230).

Constructive Conflict Management

According to Harris and Sherblom, “Constructive conflicts share the elements of mutual interpersonal concern, interdependence, and an assumption of equifinality...[whereas] dysfunctional conflict either refuses, avoids, or suspends evaluation of ideas and often focuses

attention upon a group member's behavior, abilities, or personality" (230). Similarly, Greeff and Bruyne affirm,

Constructive conflict is characterized by flexibility, interaction with the intent to learn instead of an intent to protect, enhancement of self-esteem, a relationship focus instead of an individual focus, and cooperation...[whereas] destructive conflict management is characterized by escalating spirals of manipulation, threat and coercion (overt expression of the conflict), avoidance spirals (covert expression of the conflict), retaliation, inflexibility and rigidity, a competitive pattern of dominance and subordination, and demeaning and degrading verbal and nonverbal communication. (322)

Along the same lines, Fincham and Beach insist, "Distress results from couples' aversive and ineffectual response to conflict" (47). Harris and Sherblom convey that in constructive conflict individuals critically evaluate ideas rather than critically evaluate people, they work together rather than compete against one another or withdraw from the situation altogether, and they accept the fact that there is more than one way to solve a conflict rather than being tied to one particular approach to conflict management (230).

Likewise, Koerner and Fitzpatrick denote that certain communication behaviors lead to positive outcomes, while others lead to negative outcomes of conflict situations. According to the researchers, "During dyadic conflict, communication behaviors that are generally associated with positive outcomes for relationship satisfaction and stability are problem solving, showing positive affect, and face saving, whereas conflict avoidance, self-justification/blaming the other, and coercive/controlling behavior are usually associated with negative relationship outcomes" (234).

Accordingly, Janice L. Driver and John M. Gottman (2004) in their article entitled, *Daily Marital Interactions and Positive Affect During Marital Conflict Among Newlywed Couples*, consider that couples that use more positive communication behaviors, such as humor and affection, during everyday life are more likely to transfer those positive behaviors to conflict situations, which may in turn lead to more positive outcomes. According to the researchers, “The mundane and often fleeting moments that a couple experiences in their everyday lives may contribute to the health or deterioration of a relationship by serving as a foundation to major couple events such as conflict discussions and caring days” (301). The investigators observe that how couples behave toward one another during the little, everyday moments will predict how they will respond to one another during conflict situations, and, therefore, communication in the everyday moments is vital to couples’ relationship functioning. The examiners explain, “We found that the ability to use positive affect (such as humor or affection) during conflict is essential in predicting the future health of the relationship...Positive affect during marital conflict was the only predictor of both marital stability and marital satisfaction 6 years after the wedding...Humor and affection was a characteristic of happily married, stable, older couples” (302).

One reason, Driver and Gottman mention, that positive affect is important to conflict resolution is because positive feelings can help to improve problem-solving skills (302). According to the reporters, “Laughter turned out to be one of the most important moments in the couple’s discussions...These findings provide preliminary support for the importance of daily moments in couple relationships” (301-302). It seems that the relationship between positive affect and conflict resolution is cyclical; positive communication behaviors lead to constructive conflict management, and constructive conflict management leads to more positive

communication behaviors. The writers remark, “Prevailing marital theory contends that effective conflict resolution may be a path to increased positivity in the relationship” (302).

In addition, Driver and Gottman note that the increase of “caring days” may have a positive influence on conflict resolution. According to the evaluators,

In addition to improving conflict and communication, many interventions have included positive interactions such as ‘caring days’ as a means to increase positivity in the relationship. On an assigned caring day, a partner is asked to increase positive behaviors that will make his or her partner feel supported. These behaviors tend to involve such everyday tasks as washing dishes, putting children to bed, or calling his or her spouse during the day. Caring days are used to refocus the relationship to caring and thoughtful actions, thereby increasing positive affect between the spouses. Although caring days are not specifically related to conflict, they seem to focus on major interactions in the relationship where focused time and effort are needed. (302-303)

Finally, Driver and Gottman conclude, “Although we agree that major events are important for marital change, an added area of intervention may be the unremarkable moments of the couple’s lives. Those occasions that are fleeting, mundane, and ordinary may also contribute to marital satisfaction and create a foundation upon which the major, more memorable events unfold” (303). The authors continue, “Couples build intimacy through hundreds of very ordinary, mundane moments in which they attempt to make emotional connections” (312). In addition, the writers comment, “Positive affect is cultivated over time. Contentment, for example, builds over a period of days or weeks with a series of enjoyable events. We believe that this concept may hold true for marital interactions as well...That the way a couple responds

to these mundane and fleeting interactions may have a cumulative effect on major emotional interactions such as conflict or romance” (303).

Destructive Conflict Management

Unfortunately, Earl D. Bland (2010) in his article entitled, *Finding Self, Forming Virtue: The Treatment of Narcissistic Defenses in Marriage Therapy*, found that distressed couples usually turn to destructive conflict styles, which in turn only serves to escalate the conflict they are trying to resolve. He offers,

In the noise of conflict and damaged relational bonds, couples often resort to defensive strategies and conflict styles. While preventing personal collapse, these defensive positions often exacerbate the very relational problems the person is attempting to resolve. The strategies may vary in each couple but narcissistic defenses such as projection, blame, withdrawal, and rage are common, and significantly interfere with effective communication and problem resolution. (158)

Correspondingly, Fincham and Beach also illustrate,

Distressed couples emit more negative statements and fewer positive statements and show greater reciprocation of negative behaviors during problem-solving interactions. Indeed, level of negative affect reciprocity is more consistent across different types of situations than is amount of negative or positive affect. With regard to behavioral sequences, escalating negative sequences during conflict are associated with marital distress, and both frequency and sequences of negative behavior are more pronounced in couples where physical aggression is found. (50)

Along the same lines, Story and Repetti avow that high-conflict couples are more susceptible to triggers of conflict, such as daily job stress. The reporters expose, “Spouses in

high-conflict families may be especially vulnerable to the effects of job stressors on marital interaction” (690). The researchers continue,

Couples who are high in conflict or marital dissatisfaction may be more vulnerable to the deleterious effects of stressors on their marriage...Dissatisfied and high conflict couples may be more prone to negative escalation under stress because they are already predisposed to engage in negative marital interaction and are more likely to reciprocate emotional negativity during marital interaction.

(691)

According to Story and Repetti, there are two common responses to job stress that couples carry out, either increased anger and conflict, or withdrawal. The assessors articulate, “Two different social responses to an increase in job stress have been identified in the research literature: (a) increases in conflict and expression of anger and (b) social withdrawal” (690). A possible reason for this, the theorists contemplate, is that “stressors such as heavy work load or negative interactions with coworkers may create feelings of irritability, tension, and frustration. After work, the employed individual carries the residue of these feelings into the home, increasing the likelihood that he or she will become engaged in conflictual marital interactions” (690).

Subsequently, Story and Repetti signal, “Husbands and wives reported greater marital anger and withdrawal following negative social interactions at work, and wives reported greater marital anger and withdrawal following days of heavy workload” (690). Moreover, the researchers assert that wives are more likely to respond with anger, and husbands with withdrawal, following stressful work days. The authors detect, “There [is] some evidence suggesting that wives, but not husbands, may exhibit more angry and critical daily behaviors

toward their spouses following busy workdays” (691). With the exception of wives in satisfied relationships, the writers enlighten, “Wives with higher marital satisfaction appeared less likely to withdraw from marital interaction following busy workdays. It is notable that this was the only evidence of the buffering effects of positive relationship factors, as other research has indicated that such positive relationship factors buffer the effects of stressors over time” (698).

On the other hand, previous studies have shown that both satisfied and dissatisfied wives are more likely to respond with anger after a busy workday. According to Story and Repetti, “It was the wives in the more satisfied marriages who become angry after more stressful days at work” (691). Consequently, the investigators reference, “In another study there was a same-day link between husbands’ reports of tensions or arguments at work and tensions or arguments with their wives, but this pattern was not observed for wives” (691). However, the assessors state that satisfied husbands are less likely to express anger following a stressful workday. The theorists claim, “[Husbands] who reported more marital satisfaction tended to be less likely to express anger following a stressful workday” (691). Furthermore, the evaluators note that husbands are, “more distracted, and less involved and interested in social interaction with their wives following more difficult or busy days at work. In another study, husbands were more withdrawn after emotionally distressing workdays, and wives were more withdrawn after more demanding and faster paced workdays” (691). Thus, husbands and wives differ in their responses to stressful workdays with regard to conflict behaviors; specifically, they differ in their responses based on the type of work day they had.

However, Koerner and Fitzpatrick warn,

One has to be careful not to overgeneralize these findings, however, because not all people are affected by conflict behaviors in the same way. For example, both

Fitzpatrick and Sillars have observed that the outcomes of conflict communication depend heavily on individual differences, such as marriage types or the relationship schemas persons hold. Thus, functional conflict behaviors in one relationship might be dysfunctional in another and vice versa. Similarly, the impact that specific behaviors have also depends on when they are performed in an ongoing conflict episode. For example, an aggressive act in response to a conciliatory act has a different impact than an aggressive act in response to an accusation. For that reason, researchers have increasingly focused on the interaction sequences between the conflicting partners rather than on individual behaviors in isolation. Interaction sequences that are associated with negative outcomes for relationships are complementary behaviors such as withdraw-demand and symmetrical behaviors such as mutual negative affect. On the other hand, mutually positive behaviors such as acceptance and problem solving are associated with positive outcomes for relationships. (234-235)

Fincham and Beach echo that the demand-withdraw conflict pattern has a negative effect on couples' marital satisfaction. The assessors inform,

An interaction pattern in which the wife raises issues and the husband withdraws has often been noted by clinicians and has received empirical confirmation. For example, Roberts & Krokoff (1990) found dissatisfied couples displayed more husband-withdraw-wife hostility sequences, whereas satisfied couples displayed more husband-withdraw-wife withdraw sequences. However, it appears that demand-withdraw patterns and the use of other influence tactics vary as a function of whose issue is being discussed during conflict. (50)

Harris and Sherblom also point out that “there is no one right pattern of conflict resolution suitable for all conflicts on all occasions, at all times, or in all contexts...[however] many of us use a limited number of conflict management styles or orientations to respond to conflict” (230). Moreover, Greeff and Bruyne attest, “Certain situations or instances may affect the choice of conflict management style. The style may, for example, vary according to the nature of the conflict, previous success with the style in similar situations, or the appropriateness of the style for the specific situation” (322). According to Solomon et al., power in the relationship greatly influences whether spouses will engage in conflict, and if they do, which conflict style they choose to use. The researchers indicate, “Conflict avoidance accomplished by withholding grievances is likely to be affected by the degree of power spouses possess” (146).

Interpersonal Power and Conflict

Solomon et al. define interpersonal power as “the degree of influence one person exerts over another in a relationship; it arises from an ability to control the rewards and costs the partner experiences” (147). The investigators profess that interpersonal power in the relationship will affect an individual’s decision to express disagreements and that the presence of a chilling effect may cause spouses to remain silent about differences of opinion in the relationship. According to the authors,

Because people often weigh the consequences of action prior to confronting partners, a partner’s power should figure into decisions to express or withhold complaints. Roloff and Cloven (1990) suggested that a chilling effect on confrontation is present to the extent that a partner’s control of rewards and costs in a relationship prompts an individual to remain silent about irritating situations. More specifically, a chilling effect occurs when people withhold complaints from

a powerful partner to avoid negative outcomes for themselves and/or their relationship. Expanding on Lawler and Bacharach's (1987) conceptualization of power, the chilling effect perspective identifies two foundations of interpersonal power relevant to the expression of relational grievances: dependence power and punitive power. (147)

Solomon et al. report that dependence power is,

The degree of influence partners acquire when they have autonomy in a relationship a partner wants to maintain. In other words, people accrue dependence power when they do not depend on the relationship for specific rewards or unique benefits. Within romantic relationships, a partners' dependence power is maximized when an individual who is committed to the relationship perceives his or her partner as being uncommitted and having access to attractive relational alternatives. Consequently, dependence power exists as the amount of control people possess when they are seen as ready, able, and willing to terminate the relationship. (147)

Thus, the person who is less committed to the relationship, the person who wants to maintain his or her independence, has dependence power over the person who is more committed to the relationship.

Furthermore, Solomon et al. divulge, "Empirical research suggests that dependence power exerts a chilling effect on the expression of relational irritations. In general, people who value their relationships are likely to accommodate displeasurable partner behavior. More specifically, Roloff and Cloven (1990) found that people withhold more complaints from dating

partners who are uncommitted to the relationship and have attractive relational alternatives”

(147). The reporters continue,

Research suggests that both marital disruption and divorce are more likely when one or both spouses have access to attractive relational alternatives. Conversely, some people remain in dissatisfying marriages because they lack viable relational alternatives. Moreover, relational commitment and dependency combine to influence people’s decisions about continuing their marriage. Although decisions to withhold or express complaints are less dramatic, these findings highlight the relevance of dependence power within marital relationships. (148)

Thus, if an individual perceives that his or her spouse is not committed to the relationship and may leave the relationship in pursuit of something or someone better, then that individual is more likely to withhold complaints in the relationship in order to keep the peace and not incite his or her partner to leave.

While Solomon et al. consider dependence power as a factor influencing whether spouses choose to express or withhold complaints within their relationship, they also consider punitive power as an influential factor as well. According to the evaluators,

Whereas dependence power emphasizes the valuation of rewards gained from a relationship, punitive power arises when an individual can increase the costs or negative outcomes another party experiences. In the context of personal relationships, Cloven and Roloff (1993a) suggested that punitive power accrues to partners who are perceived as likely to engage in symbolic and/or physical aggression. According to the chilling effect perspective, an individual is unlikely

to express relational grievances to a partner who may retaliate with punitive behavior. (148)

Thus, the person who has the ability to administer punishments or remove rewards has punitive power over the other person in the relationship. Moreover, if an individual feels threatened in the relationship or fears the consequences of expressing complaints within the relationship, then he or she is more likely to withhold grievances from his or her partner.

According to Solomon et al.,

Punitive power is especially likely to inhibit confrontation about a partner's controlling behavior. Recipients of ongoing abuse in close relationships take active steps to avoid specific issues likely to elicit aggressive responses.

Accordingly, individuals who perceive their partners as potentially aggressive should be motivated to withhold those complaints associated with instigating aggressive episodes. Although any conflict issue may be risky in an abusive relationship, prior research suggest that aggressive responses are particularly likely when individuals challenge their partner's control in the relationship.

Based on this evidence, Cloven and Roloff (1993a) reasoned that the chilling effect resulting from a partner's punitive power should be most pronounced for complaints focused on that partner's controlling behavior. (148)

While the threat of punitive behavior is always present in abusive relationships, the investigators reason that the threat is heightened when partners discuss hot button issues in the relationship such as the dominant partner's controlling behavior (148).

Solomon et al. uncover, "Previous efforts have not explored the operation of punitive power on confrontation decision within marriage; however, there is reason to believe the chilling

effect perspective is relevant beyond courtships. Symbolic and physical aggression are not uncommon in marriage. Moreover, punitive behaviors exert an important influence on communication patterns between spouses” (149).

Marital Schema and Conflict

In addition to interpersonal power, Solomon et al. argue that marital schemas also affect spouses’ decisions to express or withhold conflicts in their relationships. According to the surveyors,

A marital schema is a cognitive structure that contains organized knowledge about marriage relationships. As such, a person’s marital schema exists as an internal working model of marriage and provides a foundation for processing and interpreting both self and partner behavior. People’s marital schemas influence their attention, memory, and interferences within marriage, as well as patterns of interaction. Accordingly, marital schemas may influence decisions to withhold irritations and the operation of the chilling effect within marriage. (149)

Solomon et al. suggest that an individual’s marital schema is made up of at least three dimensions, including interdependence, relational ideology, and conflict. According to the writers, the first dimension of marital schema, interdependence, “involves people’s expectations about the degree of connection versus autonomy that should exist within the marriage. Relationships characterized by high levels of interdependence contain togetherness and companionship between spouses; conversely, relationships with low levels of interdependence are marked by relative autonomy and detachment between spouses” (149). The second dimension of marital schema, relational ideology, the reporters express, “refers to people’s philosophy of marriage. Whereas some people embrace conventional ideology that values

stability and predictability within marriage, others ascribe to an unconventional ideology that emphasizes change and uncertainty” (149). Finally, the third dimension of marital schema, conflict, the evaluators indicate, “concerns people’s preferences for managing disagreement. This dimension exists as a continuum anchored by tendencies for conflict avoidance versus conflict engagement” (149). The researchers continue, “Specific combinations of the interdependence, relational ideology, and conflict dimensions yield three qualitatively different marital schemas” (149).

According to Solomon et al., the three different marital schemas produced by the combination of dimensions of marital schema (interdependence, relational ideology, and conflict) are Traditionals, Independents, and Separates, which were defined earlier. The investigators propose that each of these marital schemas affect whether an individual will engage in conflict, and if they do, which conflict management style they will use. Traditionals, the examiners theorize, “are not generally assertive with their partners, but they actively engage in conflict when they define the issue to be important. In sum, the Traditional marital schema is characterized by a high level of interdependence, a conventional philosophy of marriage, and an issue-driven tendency toward conflict engagement” (149-150). Independents, the theorists resolve, “manage conflict assertively and prefer to resolve disagreements through direct engagement of the issue. Hence, the Independent marital schema involves preferences for a high degree of interdependence, an unconventional philosophy of marriage, and a tendency for conflict engagement” (150). Finally, Separates, the assessors observe, “prefer to handle disagreements through avoidance. In sum, the Separate marital schema involves a low level of interdependence, a conventional philosophy of marriage, and a propensity for conflict avoidance” (150).

Solomon et al. conclude, Empirical findings suggest that marital schemas are associated with a variety of different communicative phenomena, including compliance-gaining strategies, control tactics, affect expression, self-disclosure preferences, and casual conversation patterns. In general, this research demonstrates that marital schemas influence communicative expressiveness, such that Traditionals limit their disclosures to positive rather than negative feelings, Independents freely express both positive and negative feelings, and Separates are closed and restrained when interacting with their partner. These general patterns of expressiveness also differentiate how Traditionals, Independents, and Separates communicate about conflicts with their spouse. Whereas Independents actively engage issues of conflict, Traditionals utilize direct conflict management strategies only when they define the issue to be important, and Separates manage areas of disagreement through avoidant communication strategies. In light of the pervasive influence marital schemas exert on communicative expressiveness and conflict management preferences, marital schemas are expected to shape decisions to withhold or express relational irritations within marriage. (150)

It seems a variety of subjects can cause conflict between couples and a variety of factors influence whether couples will express or withhold their complaints, and if couples do decide to express their complaints, they have a variety of conflict management strategies to choose from, with some being constructive and others being destructive. According to Segrin et al., “Presumably couples use a variety of styles for handling conflicts at various points in the relationship” (209). Accordingly, Greeff and Bruyne acknowledge, “It thus may be argued that

to deal with conflict effectively, functional and dysfunctional as well as the various styles of conflict management should be distinguished and defined” (322). Therefore, individuals must learn a variety of conflict styles to keep in their repertoire of conflict management strategies in order to successfully manage each conflict every time.

5-Style Conflict Approach

While conflict styles can be classified in a variety of ways, Wilmot and Hocker determine that the most popular classification is the five-style approach, thus for the purpose of this study the five-style approach will be emphasized. The authors offer that conflict styles can be defined as “patterned responses, or clusters of behavior, that people use in conflict” (130). Consequently, Kulik and Havusha-Morgenstern point out, “The original instrument, which examined conflict resolution strategies in the workplace, also was found to be effective for evaluation of conflict resolution strategies in other interpersonal contexts, including spousal relationships” (195).

Kilmann and Thomas (1975) in their article entitled, *Interpersonal conflict-handling behavior as reflections of Jungian personality dimensions*, echo that there are at least five identifiable conflict styles, including collaboration, accommodation, competition, avoidance, and compromise (130). According to the researchers, these five conflict styles can best be understood by their locations on a conflict graph, which is based on two different continuums, “concern for self and concern for other” (131). Where one falls on the two different continuums will determine his or her individual conflict style. Likewise, Kulik and Havusha-Morgenstern explain,

Rahim and Bonoma (1979) proposed a typology of marital conflict resolution strategies which was adapted from the field of conflict resolution at work. They distinguished between two basic dimensions that underlie the strategies for

resolving interpersonal conflicts: concern for self, and concern for others. The first dimension explains the extent to which individuals attempt to satisfy their own concerns, whereas the second dimension explains the extent to which individuals attempt to satisfy the needs or concerns of others. A combination of the two dimensions results in five specific conflict resolution strategies. (195)

Wilmot and Hocker believe,

Avoidance represents a low level of concern for yourself and a low level of concern for the other. Accommodation represents a low level of concern for yourself but a high level of concern for the other (you give them what they want). The opposite of accommodation is competition – you are highly concerned for yourself but have only a low level of concern for the other (you “go for it” regardless of the desires of the other). Collaboration factors in both your concerns and the other’s concerns. Compromise is a middle ground, where there are moderate degrees of concern for self and concern for other. (131)

Correspondingly, Kulik and Havusha-Morgenstern state,

The integrative strategy is characterized by high concern for self and for others, whereas the avoidance strategy is associated with low concern for self and for others. The strategy of concession is characterized by a low concern for self and high concern for others, as reflected in self sacrifice. The strategy of dominance is characterized by high concern for self and low concern for others. Finally, compromise is associated with moderate concern for self and moderate concern for others. (195)

Avoidance is characterized by an unwillingness to engage in conflict. Avoidance behaviors might include, changing the subject, walking away, or remaining silent. According to Wilmot and Hocker, "Avoidance as a style [is] characterized by denial of the conflict, equivocation, changing and avoiding topics, being noncommittal, and joking rather than dealing with the conflict at hand. The avoider may sidestep an issue by changing the topic or simply withdrawing from dealing with the issue" (139). Moreover, Greeff and Bruyne remark, "Avoiding conflict results in resurgence of conflict issues as well as emotional distance in relationships" (330).

However, Harris and Sherblom suggest that avoidance as an approach to conflict can be constructive if the avoidance is due to the following, "lack of information, understanding, or any particular opinion on the substance of the conflict" (236). Although, the authors mention that avoidance as a conflict management style is destructive when "[it] is the result of feeling disempowered or disengaged" (236). When one person holds another back from making a decision or working through an issue, then the writers claim that is not a constructive approach to conflict (236).

Accommodation is characterized by one person giving in to the needs of others. Wilmot and Hocker offer, "One who practices accommodation does not assert individual needs and prefers a cooperative and harmonizing approach. The individual sets aside his or her concerns in favor of pleasing the other people involved" (158). People who use the accommodation conflict style do not always use it willingly; sometimes they use it grudgingly, for instance, giving in to the needs of the boss so as not to get fired (158). Like avoidance, accommodation can be either constructive or destructive depending on how it is used.

According to Harris and Sherblom, when accommodation is used “to move beyond insignificant or superficial conflicts to save energy and group harmony for the more important issues, accommodation has a positive effect and can be considered constructive” (234). However, when an individual “gives in on most of the important issues that involve conflicting points of view just for the sake of group harmony, that member may eventually end up feeling resentful and angry and may withdraw altogether from the group discussion process. In that case, the group loses the value of that member’s unique perspective” and thus that approach is destructive (234).

Compromise is characterized by sacrifice; each person gives up a little so that they might meet in the middle. Both parties give some to get some. Hocker and Wilmot reveal, “Compromise is an intermediate style resulting in some gains and some losses for each party. It is moderately assertive and cooperative. When compromising, parties give up some important goals to gain others” (156).

Harris and Sherblom propose that this style is most constructive when used by those who are operating on a tight time table or when issues being discussed are insignificant. The authors denote, “This strategy is appropriate when there is insufficient time or energy to work toward consensus and when it is generally agreed that the issue is not worth the use of that time or energy. Compromise can also be used when there are no realistic ways of ‘expanding the pie’ and no easy agreement about its division” (234). However, the writers convey that compromise can be destructive “when power is used irresponsibly to force some members to give up part of their positions in the name of compromise, those who feel they have not willingly participated in the choice are apt to feel disempowered and resentful” (235). Individuals must be careful how

they use each of these styles and must keep the overall relationship goals in mind without getting blinded by their own individual goals.

Collaboration is a commitment to meeting everyone's needs. As Hocker and Wilmot mention, "A collaborative conflict does not conclude until both parties are reasonably satisfied and can support the solution that has been found. The style is cooperative, effective, and focused on team effort, partnership, or shared personal goals. Collaboration is a struggle with the other to find mutually agreeable solutions. The parties work creatively to find new solutions that will maximize goals for them both" (161). Both Hocker and Wilmot and Harris and Sherblom would agree that collaboration is the most constructive and ideal approach to conflict management. At the same time, however, collaboration is also the most involved and time consuming conflict management style, and not everyone has the time and energy to spend using this strategy, nor do all conflicts require such an involved approach to solving them. Thus, the collaboration conflict management style is both a blessing and a curse for couples (232).

Competition is characterized by selfishness and aggressiveness. People who use this conflict style are looking out for number one; they have an "all about me" attitude when it comes to conflict. Competitors show little concern for others; they do not care if they hurt people as long as they get what they want. According to Hocker and Wilmot,

A competitive, or 'power over,' style is characterized by aggressive and uncooperative behavior – pursuing your own concerns at the expense of another. People with competitive styles attempt to gain power by direct confrontation, by trying to 'win' the argument without adjusting to the other's goals and desires. The conflict is seen as a 'battleground,' where winning is the goal, and concern for the other is of little or no importance. (145)

Although the competitive conflict style is often enacted in an overly aggressive manner, it can be enacted in an assertive way. Assertiveness is characterized by self-expression, whereas aggressiveness is characterized by destruction (145). Greeff and Bruyne consider, “The use of this style lead[s] to feelings of resentment, powerlessness, and increased conflict” (330).

However, Harris and Sherblom argue that in some cases competitive conflict can be healthy for relationships. The authors discern,

There are many times and places where ‘healthy competition’ can be seen as constructive and productive. Competition, embedded in an overall orientation of mutual respect and interdependence, when the limits on the competitive forum are clear, and when everyone can agree on playing by the rules of the game, can lead to an efficient allocation of scarce time and other resources. It can also be fun and invigorating, much like when we become involved in playing or watching a football game, a vigorous debate, or a game of Monopoly. A decision to use competitive strategies in a small group is appropriate when there is limited time or resources and when the larger goals of the group are enhanced by its use. (235)

In addition to being constructive or destructive, conflict styles can also be categorized as either active or passive. Competition and collaboration can be labeled as active conflict styles because they require high-level participation from the person using each style. Wilmot and Hocker state,

Both these modes necessitate active work and high-energy involvement on your part. If you compete against another, you will expend considerable energy, engaging and pushing for what you want. While collaboration and competition use different goals and tactics, they share the ‘active’ attribute. If you are going

to collaborate, you must summon up creative energy, get involved with the other person and the topic, and work toward some resolution. Without activity, neither competition nor collaboration can be used. (134)

Conversely, avoidance and accommodation can be labeled as passive conflict styles because they require low-level participation from the person using each style. Lastly, compromise falls somewhere in between the active and passive styles. Wilmot and Hocker ponder, “Compromise as a style is somewhere in the middle – just as compromises are. When you ‘split the difference’ you use neither a completely passive approach, because you are talking about the topic, nor a completely active approach, because the agreement can be made so quickly there is little struggle. Compromise can be either active or passive, depending on its type” (134).

Gender and Conflict Styles

According to Segrin et al., men and women differ in their choice of conflict management strategies, and that the strategies that they choose to use may impact their marital satisfaction either positively or negatively. “Research on conflict styles and marital satisfaction finds that husbands and wives differ in the tendencies to enact various conflict styles and the extent to which satisfaction with the relationship is affected by the partner’s conflict management styles” (209). Segrin et al., state that “husbands’ marital satisfaction [is] more consistently associated with wives’ styles for handling conflict, then wives’ satisfaction [is] affected by husbands’ conflict resolution styles” (209). Likewise, Kurdek claims, “Overall, husbands’ marital satisfaction [is] more frequently affected by how their wives resolve conflict than wives’ marital satisfaction [is] affected by how their husbands resolve conflict” (153). Faulkner et al. reason that wives are like “relationship barometers,” “with ‘her’ marital and interpersonal functioning more predictive of ‘his’ and not vice versa” (77).

Traditionally, Greeff and Bruyne contend, females have taken both accommodating and compromising approaches to conflict, while males have taken more competitive and sometimes avoidant approaches to conflict. John A. Daly (1998) in his article entitled, *Personality and Interpersonal Communication*, reflects that one of the reasons women might take on more passive approaches to conflict is because their personalities are less confrontational than men. Daly makes the following observations about women, “Women are more tentative during disagreements with men, are less assertive and less hostile, are more likely to be interrupted by men, and are less visually dominate in settings where power is ambiguous” (142). Likewise, Nina M. Reich and Julia T. Wood (2003) in their article entitled, *Sex, Gender and Communication in Small Groups*, reference personality and gender differences as possible reasons why men are more confrontational than women. The researchers assert that men tend to communicate more forcefully than women, which means that they talk more, dominate or control the conversation more, and communicate more assertively and directly than females (222-223). Thus, according to these studies, females may have traditionally taken more passive approaches to conflict and males may have taken more active approaches to conflict due to gender and personality differences.

Although, Wilmot and Hocker exhibit, “When style studies are done on high school and college students, women report themselves as being more collaborative than do men, who report themselves as being more competitive. However, when studies are done in the workplace with older adults, male-female differences disappear” (166). According to this perspective, both males and females approach conflict actively rather than passively; furthermore, it is undetermined whether there are significant differences in approaches to conflict between males

and females. Moreover, it is undetermined whether those differences are gender, personality, or even context driven or whether they are a combination of a variety of influences.

Conflict Styles and Marital Quality

However, Greeff and Bruyne point out, one thing that is for certain is that how couples manage conflict in their relationships greatly determines the successes or failures of those relationships. They proclaim, “If conflict is managed constructively, growth and enrichment ensue. If it is managed destructively, however, the couple is doomed to endure a relatively unsatisfactory relationship” (321). The most satisfied and successful couples, according to Greeff and Bruyne, are those that use a collaborative approach to conflict management, while the least satisfied and unsuccessful couples are those that use a competitive approach to conflict management in their relationships (321). Likewise, Segrin et al. express, “Styles that involve the avoidance of conflict, competitiveness, or negativity are generally associated with lower levels of satisfaction. In contrast, more positively toned conflict styles are associated with greater happiness in marriage” (209).

Moreover, Kulik and Havusha-Morgenstern determine,

Of the conflict resolution strategies, the one that correlate[s] most strongly with marital adjustment [is] integration. Concession and compromise also correlate positively with marital adjustment, whereas dominance correlate[s] negatively with that variable. The results relating to the impact of conflict resolution strategies are consistent with existing research findings on the topic, which have revealed a positive correlation between constructive conflict resolution strategies on the one hand, and marital adjustment and satisfaction with marital life on the other. (204)

Thus, Greeff and Bruyne maintain, “The prime indicators of whether conflicts in the marriage have been handled constructively or not are whether the partners are satisfied both with their feelings about the relationship and the actual outcome of the conflict. Furthermore, a requirement for maintaining a marriage involves the ability to make creative use of conflict” (321).

Couples that collaborate with each other are healthier because they express their thoughts and feelings in a non-threatening manner. They are willing to listen to the other person’s thoughts and feelings without judgment and are able to work together toward common solutions. Couples that collaborate do not play games to win; instead, they work together toward common goals. There are no winners and no losers in collaboration; it is a team effort. Those who collaborate are open-minded and respect each other; they view conflicts in a positive rather than a negative light. When couples take a collaborative approach to conflict management they are better able to handle and resolve conflicts and thus have more satisfying and successful relationships.

On the other hand, couples that approach conflict competitively, or that avoid it altogether, do not manage conflicts effectively; they allow conflicts to get out of hand, which causes them to be miserable. When couples compete someone always loses and feels bad, which hurts their relationships. Moreover, when couples avoid conflict they build up resentments toward their partners and eventually explode, which hurts their relationships as well.

Fincham and Beach stress the importance of couples having an exit strategy for conflict situations so that they do not get caught up in a negative circle of disagreements. The authors advise,

In fact, one of the greatest challenges for couples locked into negative exchanges is to find an adaptive way of exiting from such cycles. This is usually attempted through responses designed to repair the interaction (e.g. metacommunication, 'You're not listening to me') that are typically delivered with negative affect (e.g. irritation, sadness). Distressed couples tend to respond to the negative affect, thereby continuing the cycle. This makes their interactions more structured and predictable. In contrast, nondistressed couples appear to be more responsive to repair attempt and are thereby able to exit from negative exchanges early on. Their interaction sequences appear more random and less predictable. (50)

The purpose of Greeff and Bruyne's study was to determine which of the five conflict styles successful and satisfied couples use to manage conflict in their relationships (325). In addition, the authors sought to discover whether couples were satisfied with how they deal with conflict in their relationships (325). Furthermore, the investigators also considered gender differences in relation to conflict management (321). Consequently, Greeff and Bruyne claim that if marriage counselors know which conflict management style successful couples use, then the counselors could encourage couples in counseling to use that particular conflict management strategy in their relationships (325).

Greeff and Bruyne indicate that previous studies have shown that couples are least satisfied when partners escalate or avoid conflicts or are unwilling to compromise. However, Greeff and Bruyne found that the avoidance conflict style has been linked to both satisfied and dissatisfied couples. Furthermore, the authors note that talking openly during conflict situations has not always been connected with elevated levels of marital satisfaction. Likewise, the examiners point out that being aggressive during conflict situations has not always been

connected to low levels of marital satisfaction. The investigators express, “The degree of discrepancy between wives and husbands in their beliefs about conflict was not highly predictive of either spouse’s marital happiness. However, husbands and wives who agree on how conflict should be managed are happier, especially those who agree that conflict should not be avoided” (324). The writers also reveal that when husbands withdraw from conflicts the wives are more likely to become hostile and that women are typically conflict engagers, whereas husbands are typically conflict withdrawers. In addition, the investigators discovered that, in most studies, men and women differ in their approaches to conflict management and that all of the conflict management styles led to marital dissatisfaction except for collaboration, which was the only conflict style that led to marital satisfaction (324).

Marchand reaffirms the results of Greeff and Bruyne’s study. Marchand upholds that couples that use attacking or competitive approaches to conflict report lower levels of marital satisfaction. In contrast, Marchand demonstrates that couples that use the compromising approach to conflict management report higher levels of marital satisfaction. The author writes, “In a previous study by Marchand and Hock (2000), marital satisfaction was shown to be significantly correlated with attacking and compromising behaviors in the marriage; more attacking behaviors and fewer compromising behaviors were associated with less marital satisfaction” (102). Overall, Greeff and Bruyne conclude that the most successful and satisfied couples use the same conflict management style, specifically collaboration, that choice of conflict management style does impact marital satisfaction either positively or negatively, and that gender differences do determine which conflict management style individuals choose (331).

Conflict Styles and Marital Satisfaction

Likewise, in a similar five year longitudinal study of 155 married couples, Kurdek also concluded that conflict management strategies influence marital satisfaction either positively or negatively; furthermore, Kurdek concluded that change in marital satisfaction is correlated with change in conflict management strategies (162). Kurdek offered two explanations for his findings. First, Kurdek considered that the reason that conflict management strategies determine marital satisfaction may be linked to interdependence theory.

The first causal relation – the assumption that the use of certain conflict resolution styles causes marital satisfaction – is based on interdependence theory which posits that perceived rewards to a relationship (such as the frequent use of constructive conflict resolution strategies) and perceived costs to the relationship (such as the frequent experience of negative conflict resolution styles) determine satisfaction with the relationship. (153-154)

Second, Kurdek conjectures that the reason that changes in marital satisfaction lead to changes in conflict management strategies may be linked to self-fulfilling prophecy theory. “The second causal relation – the assumption that the level of marital satisfaction is causally related to the frequency with which certain conflict resolution styles are used – is based on a self-fulfilling prophecy theory which posits that one’s attitude (e.g., level of satisfaction with the marriage) provides a psychological environment that elicits behavior (e.g., conflict resolution styles) that reinforces and is consistent with the initial attitude” (154).

Attachment Styles, Marital Conflict, and Marital Quality

In addition to conflict management styles, Marchand proposes that adult attachment styles and depression also affect couples’ marital quality. The purpose of Marchand’s study was

to explore the impact of adult attachment, depression, and conflict management style on couples' marital quality. "Although previous research has examined the role of adult attachment orientations, depressive symptoms, and conflict resolution behaviors (attacking and compromising) in marital quality, these variables have typically been considered separately. In the present study, these attributes were examined together in a community sample of 64 married couples" (99). Marchand reasoned that couples in which one, or both, of the spouses are depressed report lower marital satisfaction than couples where neither spouse is depressed. The reason for this, Marchand surmises, is that depression often manifests itself through difficulties in problem-solving which may lead to increased conflict.

According to Marchand,

Among the numerous attributes identified as having a significant impact on marital quality is depression, with studies showing that 50% of depressed women reported serious marital difficulties. Some researchers have attempted to better understand how depression impacts marital quality by considering the factors that contribute to depression. Interpersonal processes are commonly noted as factors that may promote and maintain depression. According to interpersonal perspectives, depressed persons demonstrate a range of maladaptive behaviors during their interactions with others, including impaired problem-solving abilities. (99-100)

Marchand continues,

Marital conflict is one context in which depressed persons' maladaptive behaviors have been observed....Because maladaptive interpersonal behaviors are believed to promote and maintain depression, less constructive conflict resolution

approaches may be more common in couples wherein one or both spouses are experiencing elevated levels of depressive symptoms. Indeed, research has shown that more depressive symptoms were associated with fewer problem-solving behaviors and more avoidance and attacking behaviors in the marriage. (100)

On the contrary, while Marchand argues that depression is the cause of conflict, Fincham and Beach propose that conflict is the cause of depression. The investigators put forth that three main categories, mental, physical, and family health are impacted by conflict.

Marital conflict has profound implications for individual well-being. The link with depression is increasingly well established, and a link with eating disorders has been documented. Similarly, associations have been noted for physical and psychological abuse of partners, male alcoholism, and early onset drinking, episodic drinking, binge drinking, and out-of-home drinking. Marital conflict appears less consequential for anxiety disorders, which may reflect a complex association varying according to spouse gender and type of anxiety disorder.

Increased research on psychopathology and marital functioning has given rise to recent reviews of this area. (49)

In addition to mental health, Fincham and Beach deduce that conflict impacts physical health as well. According to Fincham and Beach, "Although married individuals are healthier on average than unmarried, marital conflict is associated with poorer health and with specific illnesses such as cancer, cardiac disease, and chronic pain. Marital interaction studies suggest that possible mechanisms that may account for these links by showing that hostile behaviors during conflict relate to alterations in immunological, endocrine, and cardiovascular functioning. Although consequential for both husbands and wives, marital conflict has more pronounced

health consequences for wives. Thus, marital conflict has been linked to several facets of health and remains a vital area of research” (49).

Finally, in addition to mental and physical health, Fincham and Beach reason that conflict also impacts family health. According to the assessors,

Marital conflict is also associated with important family outcomes, including poorer parenting, poorer child adjustment, problematic attachment to parents, increased likelihood of parent-child conflict, and conflict between siblings. When manipulated experimentally, it increases subsequent parent-son conflict. Aspects of marital conflict that have a particularly negative influence on children include more frequent, intense, physical, unresolved, child-related conflicts and conflicts attributed to child’s behavior. Increasing attention is being given to mechanisms linking marital conflict and child outcomes, the impact of children on the marriage, and viewing the impact of marital conflict within broader systemic perspective. (49)

In addition to depressive symptoms, Marchand pondered the impact of attachment orientation on marital quality. For her study, Marchand examined three types of adult attachment orientations, including security, avoidance, and anxiousness/ambivalence (100).

Marchand defines each of the attachment orientations respectively,

Finally, the present study focuses on three underlying dimensions of adult attachment orientations: one’s comfort with closeness in intimate relationships, comfort depending on others, and anxiety over experiencing abandonment and rejection. Researchers have typically considered discrete attachment styles, with individuals being classified as either secure (e.g., is comfortable with closeness in

relationships), avoidant (e.g., is uncomfortable with closeness and depending on others), or anxious (e.g., has concerns over being rejected or unloved by others).

(102)

Furthermore, Marchand considered two types of conflict management styles for her study, including attack and compromise (101). Marchand defines each of the conflict styles as follows, “With regard to conflict resolution, the present study considered two approaches: attack and compromise. Attack refers to physical or verbal attacks on another person, and compromise includes listening to the other person and attempting to understand or work out a solution that is mutually acceptable” (101-102).

Marchand hypothesized that all three variables, adult attachment, depression, and conflict, work together to affect marital quality either positively or negatively. Moreover, Marchand hypothesized that couples who were more distant from each other, less reliant on each other, more insecure, and more depressed would be less satisfied in their relationship. In addition, Marchand hypothesized that couples that used more aggressive and less compromising conflict management styles would be less satisfied in their relationship. Lastly, Marchand hypothesized that couples that were more distant from each other, less reliant on one another, more insecure, and more depressed in their relationship would exhibit more aggressive rather than compromising conflict management styles (103).

Marchand concludes that couples’ level of depression, conflict management behaviors, and attachment orientation all impact marital satisfaction. However, Marchand proposes that only attachment orientation and conflict style affects wives’ marital quality, while all three variables affect husbands’ marital quality. Marchand also maintains that attachment orientation and level of depression affect how spouses approach conflict in their marriage, either

constructively or destructively. Marchand suggests that avoidant and anxious attachment orientation and depressive symptoms most likely indicate that an individual is going to engage in destructive forms of conflict management, such as attacking, which ultimately leads to marital dissatisfaction. Thus, Marchand's hypothesis that attachment orientation, depressive symptoms, and conflict management behaviors influence marital quality was supported (109).

Positive Behaviors and Marital Conflict

While much research has been conducted on causes, effects, and management of marital conflict, Fincham and Beach propose that "the isolated manner in which conflict has been studied yields an incomplete picture of its role in marriage" (55). The authors argue that the majority of research on conflict in marriage has focused on couples' negative behaviors that lead to conflict and has, for the most part, ignored the role of couples' positive behaviors that prevent conflict or allow for the successful management of conflict. The investigators explore, "Because marital interaction research has used tasks that maximize the likelihood of conflict and minimize the likelihood of supportive spouse behavior, it may have overestimated the importance of conflict and underestimated the role of spousal support in marriage" (56). The researchers claim that supportive behavior is more important than negative behavior in predicting marital satisfaction, stability, and distress (56). Accordingly, Fincham and Beach offer, "Not all conflicts of interest result in conflict, but are instead successfully transformed into opportunities for cooperative action" (61).

Consequently, Fincham and Beach note, "A rich, social psychological literature on commitment has also influenced the study of marriage. Of particular interest here is the finding that greater commitment is associated with more constructive, accommodative responses to negative partner behavior" (57). Correspondingly, Greeff and Bruyne indicate, "The

requirements for using the collaborative conflict management style are equal power and a climate of trust. The use of the style then produces mutual commitment to solutions and adds to the relationship climate of trust and openness” (329-330).

Covey suggests that couples need to learn how to utilize win-win strategies for dealing with conflict. “Win-win is really the only solid foundation for effective family interaction. It’s the only pattern of thinking and interacting that builds long term relationships of trust and unconditional love” (179). Furthermore, “Family itself is a ‘we’ experience, a ‘we’ mentality. And admittedly, the movement from ‘me’ to ‘we’ – from independence to interdependence – is perhaps one of the most challenging and difficult aspects of family life” (20). Covey continues,

But until family is really a priority, this movement does not usually take place.

Marriage often becomes nothing more than two married singles living together, because the movement from independence to interdependence never happened.

When your happiness comes primarily from the happiness of others, you know you have moved from ‘me’ to ‘we’. And the whole problem-solving process changes. (20-21)

7 Habits of Highly Effective Families

In order to move from a “me” to a “we” mentality, and to become a more successful family unit, Covey advocates that individuals, families, organizations, even civilizations, adopt the seven habits of highly effective families. Habit one, according to Covey, is to be proactive which is “the ability to act based on principles and values rather than reacting based on emotion or circumstance” (29). Covey claims,

It is so easy to be reactive! Don’t you find this to be the case in your own life?

You get caught up in the moment. You say things you don’t mean. You do thing

you later regret. And you think, ‘Oh, if only I had stopped to think about it, I never would have reacted that way!’ Obviously family life would be a whole lot better if people acted based on their deepest values instead of reacting to the emotion or circumstance of the moment. What we all need is a “pause button” – something that enables us to stop between what happens to us and our response to it, and to choose our own response. It’s possible for us as individuals to develop this capacity to pause. And it’s possible to develop a habit right at the center of a family culture of learning to pause and give wiser responses. How to create that pause button in the family – how to cultivate the spirit of acting based on principle-centered values instead of reacting based on feelings or circumstance – is the focus of Habits 1, 2, and 3. (29)

In addition to being proactive, Covey proposes that individuals begin with the end in mind which means “to create a clear, compelling vision of what you and your family are all about” (71). In order to do this, Covey offers that families should create a mission statement. Covey considers,

A mission statement will create a powerful bonding between parents and children, between husbands and wives, that simply does not exist when there’s no sense of shared vision and values. It’s like the difference between a diamond and a piece of graphite. They are both made of the same material, but a diamond is the hardest of all substances while graphite can be split apart. The difference lies in the depth of bonding in the atoms. (95)

This metaphor may be used to explain the difference between Christian and non-Christian marriages. While both are made up of the same elements, one is stronger because of a commitment to biblical values.

Next, Covey indicates that individuals should put first things first. “Habit 3, then, has to do with our discipline and commitment to live by those things. Habit 3 is the test of the depth of our commitment to ‘first things first’ and of our integrity – whether or not our lives are truly integrated around principles” (114).

Subsequently, Habit 4 – think win-win, “means that you try to have [a] spirit of win-win in all family interactions. You always want what’s best for everyone involved” (183). Covey continues, “The kind of sacrifice and service required to achieve a beautiful family culture creates the ultimate ‘win’ in terms of character and fulfillment for those who love as well as for those who are loved. And that is the true spirit of win-win. In fact, it’s really win-win-win – a win for the individual, a win for the marriage and family, and a huge win for the society that’s benefited by fulfilled individuals and strong families” (183).

In addition, Covey explains that individuals should seek first to understand before being understood. Covey observes, “We each look at the world through our own pair of glasses – glasses that come out of our own unique background and conditioning experiences, glasses that create our value system, our expectations, our implicit assumptions about the way the world is and the way it should be” (203-204). Covey continues, “One of the main reasons behind communication breakdowns is that the people involved interpret the same event differently. Their different natures and backgrounds condition them to do so. If they then interact without taking into account why they see things differently, they begin to judge each other” (204). Furthermore, Covey reasons,

As we project our conditioning experiences onto the outside world, we assume we're seeing the world the way it is. But we're not. We're seeing the world as we are – or as we have been conditioned to be. And until we gain the capacity to step out of our own autobiography – to set aside our own glasses and really see the world through the eyes of others – we will never be able to build deep, authentic relationships and have the capacity to influence in positive ways. And that's what Habit 5 is all about. (204)

Moreover, Covey argues that the reason we have conflicts with others is because we do not seek first to understand before being understood.

Why do people shout and yell at each other? They want to be understood. They're basically yelling, 'Understand me! Listen to me! Respect me!' The problem is that the yelling is so emotionally charged and so disrespectful toward the other person that it creates defensiveness and more anger – even vindictiveness – and the cycle feeds on itself. As the interaction continues, the anger deepens and increases, and people end up not getting their point across at all. The relationship is wounded and it takes far more time and effort to deal with the problems created by yelling at each other than simply practicing Habit 5 in the first place: exercising enough patience and self-control to listen first. (213)

Consequently, Covey writes, "Exercising the principle of respect and being able to genuinely and empathetically listen to another human being are among the habits of highly effective people in any walk of life" (14).

The sixth habit of highly effective families is to synergize. Covey defines synergy as "the ability to work together to create new ideas, new solutions that are better than any individual

family member could ever come up with alone” (171). At the heart of synergy is the idea that two heads are better than one, that the sum is greater than its parts. Covey explains,

Synergy is the summum bonum – the supreme or highest fruit – of all the habits.

It’s the magic that happens when one plus one equals three – or more. And it happens because the relationship between the parts is a part itself. It has such catalytic, dynamic power that it affects how the parts interact with one another. It comes out of the spirit of mutual respect (win-win) and mutual understanding in producing something new – not in compromising or meeting halfway. (249)

According to Covey, synergy is like a third person in the relationship. He articulates, “So synergy deals with the part between the parts. In the family, this part is the quality and nature of the relationship between people. As a husband and wife interact, or as parents interact with children, synergy lies in the relationship between them. That’s where the creative mind is – the new mind that produces the new option, the third alternative” (249). Covey continues, “You might even think of this part as a third person. The feeling of ‘we’ in a marriage becomes more than two people; it’s the third ‘person’” (249).

Covey mentions that the third person is derived from the family’s values. “The other ‘person’ created by the relationship is the essence of the family culture with its deeply established purpose and principle-centered value system” (250). Covey goes on to say,

This ‘third person’ becomes something of a higher authority, something that embodies the collective conscience, the shared vision and values, the social mores and norms of the culture. It keeps people from being unethical or power hungry, or from borrowing strength from position or credentials or educational attainment or gender. And as long as people live with regard to this higher authority, they

see things such as position, power, prestige, money, and status as part of their 'stewardship' – something they are entrusted with, responsible for, accountable for. But when people do not live in accordance with this higher authority and become a law unto themselves, this sense of a 'third person' disintegrates. People become alienated, wrapped up in ownership and self-focus. The culture becomes independent rather than interdependent, and the magic of synergy is gone. (250)

Thus, it may be argued that the essence of synergy, at least in Christian marriages, is a commitment to biblical values. And perhaps because Christian couples have a commitment to biblical values they experience more synergy in their relationships than non-Christian couples. And perhaps because Christian couples, because of their commitment to biblical values, may experience more synergy in their relationships than non-Christian couples, it may be argued that Christian couples are better able to manage conflicts in their relationships than non-Christian couples.

The final habit, Habit 7, is to "sharpen the saw." Relationships, like flower gardens, need to be nurtured in order to bloom, without tending to them they will wilt. "Sharpening the saw means attending regularly and consistently to renewal in all four dimension of life (physical, social/emotional, mental, spiritual). If sharpening the saw is done properly, consistently, and in a balanced way, it will cultivate all the other habits by using them in the renewing activities themselves" (277-78).

However, if families do not regularly "sharpen the saw", then their relationships will begin to deteriorate. Covey compares neglecting to "sharpen the saw" to the process of entropy. "In physics, 'entropy' means that anything left to itself will eventually disintegrate until it reaches its most elemental form. The dictionary defines entropy as 'the steady degradation of a

system or society.’ This happens in all of life, and we all know it. Neglect your boy, and it will deteriorate. Neglect your car, and it will deteriorate. Anything that is not consciously attended to and renewed will break down, become distorted, and deteriorate. ‘Use it or lose it’ is the maxim” (276-77). Likewise, the process of entropy may be applied to relationships as well. Covey quotes Richard L. Evans saying, “All things need watching, working at, caring for, and marriage is no exception. Marriage is not something to be treated indifferently or abused, or something that simply takes care of itself. Nothing neglected will remain as it was or is, or will fail to deteriorate. All things need attention, care, and concern, and especially so in this most sensitive of all relationships of life” (277).

Unfortunately, according to Covey, “Hollywood has scripted us to believe that love is a feeling. Relationships are disposable. Marriage and family are matters of contract and convenience rather than commitment and integrity. But these messages give a highly distorted picture of reality” (35). And, in order to get back to that place where marriage and family are matters of commitment and integrity, Covey proposes that individuals, couples, families, and even society must adopt the 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families. Everyone must learn to be proactive – to choose their responses based on their moral compass rather than react based on emotions, and to be responsible for their own actions. Couples and families must begin with the end in mind – create a family mission statement to guide and direct them. Everybody must put first things first – focus on what matters most, prioritize around principles and values, around family. Every person must learn to think win-win – to collaborate with one another. Each person must seek first to understand...then to be understood – to listen empathetically to each other. Together, couples and families must synergize – put their heads together to come up with creative solutions to problems. Finally, each one must continually “sharpen the saw” – renew

the mind, body, and spirit daily. The result of applying these habits, Covey puts forth, is that, “they build moral authority into the culture by integrating the principles of mutual respect, mutual understanding, and creative cooperation into the very structures, systems, and process of the family” (171).

The Role of Faith in Conflict

Commitment and Conflict

Accordingly, Burchard et al. reiterate that couples that are committed to each other, that are committed to collaborating and synergizing with each other to come up with creative solutions to problems, solutions that are win-win deals, and couples that are willing to continually sharpen the saw and work on their relationships, are more likely to stay together and to have increased quality of life. According to the authors, “Commitment can play a role in how willing people are to work on the relationship as well as how likely they are to overlook or forgive offenses” (241).

Along the same lines, Frank D. Fincham, Scott M. Stanley, and Steven R. H. Beach (2007) in their article entitled, *Transformative Processes in Marriage: An Analysis of Emerging Trends*, recur, “The development of commitment to a future together [has] the effect of transforming two individuals into an “us”. In essence, dedication reflects the development of an identity of us with a future that is reinforced even as it reinforces relationship quality through such processes as accommodation and sacrifice” (280). According to the writers, “Commitment [is] the intrinsic desire to be with the partner in the future... [often] referred to as dedication or personal commitment” (280). Consequently, commitment in marriage is also sometimes referred to as sanctification. “Sanctification refers to the process whereby an aspect of life is perceived

by people as having divine character and significance. As such, sanctification is more explicitly religious in its content than are most constructs in the marital area” (281).

Subsequently, Fincham et al. propose that an important component of commitment is sacrifice, because, the researchers assert, commitment often involves some level of sacrifice on the part of one or both of the spouses. “Flowing directly from scholarship on commitment, and especially strongly linked conceptually to the construct of dedication, is a growing literature examining sacrifice in romantic relationships” (280). The investigators note that sacrifice plays an important and positive role in marriage. According to the examiners, sacrifice can be defined as “[the] behavior in which one gives up some immediate personal desire to benefit the marriage or the partner, reflecting the transformation from self-focus to couple focus” (280).

However, Fincham et al. suggest that spouses do not perceive sacrifice to be a cost of the relationship, but rather a source of satisfaction in the relationship due to each partner’s dedication to the relationship.

Sacrifice is not a cost of the relationship in exchange theory terms because of the transformation of motivation that occurs within an individual. Costs, by definition, represent an exchange perceived to result in a net personal loss. For those partners who report greater willingness to sacrifice, however, the very same behavior that could represent a cost is reappraised with an emphasis on us and our future, turning it into a source of satisfaction rather than a cost. (280)

In addition, Fincham et al. claim that sacrifice is an integral part of marital adjustment and is a key predictor of marital satisfaction and longevity. “Indeed, self-reports of personal satisfaction from sacrificing for one’s mate are associated with both concurrent marital

adjustment and marital adjustment over time, with attitudes about sacrifice predicting later better than earlier marital adjustment” (280). The surveyors continue,

Similarly, Van Lange et al. (1997) have found that those who report more willingness to sacrifice also report greater satisfaction, commitment, and relationship persistence. Finally, recent findings show that sacrifice attitudes and perception of personal loss are more strongly related to long-term commitment among men than women, suggesting that, on average, healthy sacrifice is more closely linked to relationship commitment among men than among women. (280)

Positive Behaviors and Conflict

While research clearly shows that positive marital behaviors, such as commitment, sacrifice, and forgiveness, are important elements of marriage, leading to greater marital satisfaction and longevity, much research on marital behavior has ignored these crucial pieces to the marital puzzle. Fincham et al. assert that much research on marital relationships has focused on negative, rather than positive, marital behaviors and their impact on marital quality and longevity; however, the evaluators denote that there is a theoretical distinction between positive and negative behaviors, and that positive behaviors may actually have a greater influence on marital outcomes than negative behaviors (278). Furthermore, the theorists claim that positive behaviors help to balance, or even cancel out, the impact of negative behaviors, thus allowing couples to maintain a positive connection, which, in turn, leads to increased marital quality and longevity (279). Moreover, the assessors persist that positive, as well as negative, behaviors in marriage must be studied in order to develop an accurate picture of the role of conflict in marital outcomes (279).

Fincham et al. mention,

We are in a new stage of marital research that reflects a growing momentum toward larger meanings and deeper motivations about relationships, including a focus on constructs that are decidedly more positive. Indeed, it appears to have taken some time for psychologists to realize what scholars in other disciplines have previously noted, namely, that a good marriage provides spouses with a sense of meaning in their lives. We suggest that this momentum has set the stage for examination of transformative, rather than merely incremental, change in relationships...In short, the seeds of change are being sown in the marital research literature. (276)

The authors continue, “We hypothesize a single dimension that is consistent with the change we have been describing: self-regulating mechanisms located within the dyad that provide the average couple with ways to forge deeper connection or to effect repairs of the relationship after experiencing distance and frustration” (278).

Forgiveness and Conflict

One way that couples can begin to bridge the gap and repair their relationships after becoming disjointed, Fincham et al. advocate, is through positive or supportive marital behaviors. Specifically, forgiveness is a powerful positive marital behavior that impacts marital outcomes.

Many researchers and clinicians believe that forgiveness is the cornerstone of a successful marriage, a view that is shared by spouses themselves” (279).

Furthermore, Burchard et al. propose, “People have an inherent need to engage in the forgiveness process, particularly in the marital dyad....When a husband and wife have experienced either a number of small offenses or one or more large ones, in order to continue successfully in their marriage they must learn and make

use of means to accept one another's faults, recognize that mistakes will be made, actively forgive one another and allow their commitment to one another and to the marriage to overshadow the anger and hurt and repair the relationship...Daily coping requires that couples be able to deal with the past effectively, so that they can continue growing and moving forward in their relationship. (242)

However, Burchard et al. point out, "Until recently, the role of forgiveness in healing has been, for the most part, neglected by the psychological community. In contrast to this neglect, religion has typically promoted forgiveness as a desirable act that can lead to mental, emotional, and spiritual freedom for the giver" (241). Mindi D. Batson and David W. Shwalb (2006) in their article entitled, *Forgiveness and Religious Faith in Roman Catholic Married Couples*, seem to agree and suggest that forgiveness occurs in five distinct stages. "Pollard et al. (1998) designed five dimensions of forgiveness: '(1) realization: the intrapsychic awareness, in either the offender or offended, of an incident which caused pain and suffering; (2) recognition: an assessment of the painful incident by either the offender or the offended; (3) reparation: three interactional elements; first, confrontation about the painful incident, second, admission of responsibility by the offender, and third, reciprocal asking for and giving forgiveness; (4) restitution: making of amends by offender; (5) resolution; relinquishment of past hurts by both the offended and the offender" (120). In addition, the investigators offer that forgiveness serves three specific functions, including healing, acceptance, and conflict resolution (121).

Moreover, Burchard et al. contend,

There are really two separate conceptualizations of forgiveness that must be considered: forgiveness from a scientific perspective as well as forgiveness from within religious tradition...Worthington (1998) described forgiveness as an act

that evolves from empathetic feelings for the transgressor as well as humility on the part of the forgiver as he or she recognizes his or her own fallibility.

Forgiveness is not an optional strategy to reach healing and/or restoration. Its benefits have been hailed as essential for recovery from small and larger hurts that are inevitable. (241-242)

Similarly, Fincham et al. determine,

Forgiveness is important in situations where marital assumptions or relationship standards have been breached...Forgiveness is important when transgressions violate partners' relational ethics and sense of justice in the marriage. Because assumptions and standards of marital relationships are threatened all too often, forgiveness may be a regular component of repair in healthy marital relationships. (279)

Later, Frank D. Fincham, Steven R. H. Beach, and Joanne Davila (2007) in their article entitled, *Longitudinal Relations Between Forgiveness and Conflict Resolution in Marriage*, state,

Conflict resolution is integral to a successful relationship, and it is likely that resentment engendered by partner transgressions may fuel couple conflict and impede successful conflict resolution. In contrast, forgiving the partner for transgression is a potential means of providing closure with regard to a painful or disturbing relationship event and reducing the extent to which that event can intrude upon future interactions. (542)

The examiners continue,

Thus, one might legitimately ask whether the spouse's failure to forgive earlier partner transgressions is related to the current use of ineffective conflict strategies

in the relationship. In the absence of forgiveness, current disagreements or conflicts may trigger renewed feelings of transgression or prompt renewed retaliation or withdrawal. Forgiveness may therefore have substantial implications for long-term relationship outcomes as well as short-term patterns of interaction. Specifically, when one partner opts out of the coercive cycle of reciprocal negative interaction, the other should be less likely to continue his or her negative behavior as well. In sum, forgiveness may provide one means to short-circuit the use of ineffective conflict strategies likely to emerge from the smoldering embers of an unforgiven transgression. (542)

In particular, Fincham, Beach, and Davila discovered that when wives forgive their husbands for current transgressions it predicts more constructive conflict resolution strategies for husbands in future interactions. On the other hand, the reporters found that the only predictor of future constructive conflict resolution strategies for wives was the use of constructive conflict resolution strategies in past interactions. “For wives, the positive dimension of forgiveness or benevolence predicted husbands’ later report of better conflict resolution...For husbands, the only predictor of wives’ reports of later conflict resolution was initial level of conflict resolution” (542).

One explanation Fincham, Beach, and Davila provide for the link between forgiveness and future conflict resolution is that when partners forgive one another they let go of negative feelings they may have toward one another and are able to start fresh, with a clean slate, in future disagreements. However, when partners fail to forgive one another they harbor negative feelings toward one another, feelings which may resurface during future disagreements.

The current investigation builds on Fincham et al.'s (2004) documentation of a concurrent association between forgiveness and conflict resolution by showing that this relationship is also found longitudinally, at least for wives. Specifically, wives who endorsed lower benevolence in response to partner transgressions had husbands who reported higher levels of ineffective arguing 12 months later. This finding suggests that erosion of good will toward the partner is likely to undermine processes, such as accommodation (responding positively to a negative partner behavior), and allow negative responses to predominate during disagreements. (544)

Furthermore, Fincham, Beach, and Davila perceive,

We can only speculate why low levels of benevolence among wives might play an important role in the way couples manage conflict. One possibility is that lack of benevolence motivation among wives increases the likelihood of using a negative start-up (responding to partner neutral affect with negative affect) and/or decreasing willingness to accommodate to negative partner behavior.

Alternatively, unresolved partner transgressions may lead to frequent cognitive rehearsals of the transgression, thereby potentially increasing the strength of the connection between the partner and negative responses. Over time, this could lead to the partner automatically eliciting these reactions, particularly in the context of conflict, leading to more intense responses and more rapid escalation of conflict. In any event, promoting more effective conflict resolution may be facilitated to the extent that we better understand not only the nature of the

association between forgiveness and relationship satisfaction but also the processes that promote forgiveness of partner transgressions. (544)

Meanwhile, Fincham, Beach, and Davila mention the link between unresolved conflict and future conflict resolution may be explained by the fact that it is harder to forgive someone in the future when things have not been resolved in the past. The theorists describe, “It is plausible that the presence of unresolved conflict makes it harder to forgive the partner, reversing the causal flow hypothesized in the current investigation. In particular, the presence of unresolved conflict may inhibit empathy or willingness to accommodate, decreasing all facets of forgiveness. Likewise, ongoing unresolved conflict could undermine felt commitment, feeding back to maintain lower levels of benevolence and potentially higher levels of retaliation and withdrawal” (544).

However, Fincham, Stanley, and Beach imply, “[Forgiveness] is more than just a positive transaction between partners. Forgiveness appears to be a relatively powerful dynamic that involves motivational transformation” (279). Fincham, Beach, and Davila add, “A transformation in which negative motivation (e.g., to seek revenge, withdraw) toward the harm-doer is lessened [and] a positive or benevolent motivational state toward the harm-doer [is cultivated]” (543). Moreover, Burchard et al. substantiate, “Research suggests that people who forgive feel freer, experience less stress and have a unique sense of peace. In retrospect, those who forgive frequently view the decision to do so as life-changing. Furthermore, the repentant ones experience emotion and physiological benefits as well” (242). Likewise, Batson and Shwalb reveal, “Forgiveness has been related to a reduction in anger, depression, and anxiety, restoring a personal sense of power and self-esteem, physical health, and improved interpersonal relationships” (120).

Forgiveness, Religion, and Conflict

Fincham, Beach, and Davila reason that couples' level of commitment to one another influences the degree to which they engage in conflict resolution and forgiveness. Because forgiveness has been linked with religious commitment, Burchard et al. deduce that couples with greater religious commitment are more likely to engage in conflict resolution and forgiveness, and thus, better manage conflict than couples without religious commitment (243). Similarly, Batson and Shwalb report, "The more religious one is, the more forgiving one reports" (121). Also, Batson and Shwalb disclose, "Religious involvement may help increase one's ability to forgive another person" (121). Additionally, Burchard et al. allege that couples with greater religious commitment (and commitment to one another) experience greater marital quality and marital longevity than couples without commitment to religion (243).

For their study, Burchard et al. examined the relationship between forgiveness and couples' quality of life. Previous research has shown that forgiveness may have a positive impact on couples' quality of life. In their article entitled, *Religiousness and Infidelity: Attendance but not Faith and Prayer, Predict Marital Fidelity*, David C. Atkins and Deborah E. Kessel (2008) articulate, "Religious teachings emphasize forgiveness, care toward others, and admonishments about anger, which will foster individual attitudes that in turn could strengthen marital relationships" (408). They explain, "Moreover, spouses that share similar religious convictions are likely to share values specifically about the relationship, including commitment and fidelity but also broader convictions of forgiveness and care that may serve to strengthen the marital relationship" (416).

Religious Homogamy

In addition to examining the relationship between forgiveness and couples' quality of life, Burchard et al. explored the relationship between religious commitment and couples' quality of life. Previous research has shown that shared religious commitment may also have a positive impact on couples' quality of life. According to Atkins and Kessel, "Previous research has highlighted religious homogamy between spouses (i.e., similar religious values within a couple) as both common and associated with positive, relationship outcomes (e.g., greater satisfaction and reduced likelihood of divorce)" (416). In the same vein, Joshua G. Chinitz, and Robert A. Brown (2001) in their article entitled, *Religious Homogamy, Marital Conflict, and Stability in Same-Faith and Interfaith Jewish Marriages*, assert that religious homogamy between couples leads to decreased marital conflict which in turn leads to increased marital stability and satisfaction (723). Consequently, Chinitz and Brown define religious homogamy as, "Similar attitudes and beliefs about specific religious practices" (723).

Specifically, Chinitz and Brown report that husbands in homogeneous marriages experience greater marital satisfaction than husbands in heterogeneous marriages. Conversely, the authors reveal that religious homogamy is only a predictor for greater wives satisfaction when husbands report having no religion (723). "It has been hypothesized that religious homogamy promotes marital satisfaction and stability. If both individuals in a marriage are of the same religious denomination then divorce is less likely, and marital satisfaction may be higher than in religiously heterogeneous marriages" (723).

Likewise, Scott M. Myers (2006) in his article entitled, *Religious Homogamy and Marital Quality: Historical and Generational Patterns, 1980-1997*, echoes that religious homogamy is linked with marital quality (292). "Research in the past 50 years routinely finds a positive

association between a couple's religious beliefs and behaviors and the quality of their marriage. Religious homogamy – the extent to which husbands and wives hold similar religious beliefs and participate jointly in religious practices – appears to be one of the stronger religious predictor of marital quality” (292). Interestingly, Myers offers, “Recent research suggests that religious homogamy (i.e. religious similarity) is more important to marital quality than the absolute levels of religion of any one spouse or the couple” (293). Myers explains the relationship between religious homogamy and marital quality, “The explanation for this long-term and contemporary phenomenon partly lies in the intergenerational transmission of religion and marital behaviors and the fluid reciprocity between the religious and family institutions. This suggests that children inherit their parents' levels of religion and marital quality and then replicate the positive link between religion and marital quality” (292).

However, Myers suspects that the significant social changes that have occurred over the past 50 years may have diminished the link between religious homogamy and marital quality; specifically, Myers argues, changes in gender relations, employment, and family matters have weakened the tie between religious homogamy and marital quality. In particular, Myers noticed that the connection between religious homogamy and marital quality dwindled from 1980 – 1997. According to Myers, “Arguably, though, the current generation of young adults who grew up and married in the past several decades experienced some of the most rapid structural and secular changes in work, family, gendered roles, and, perhaps, religion throughout their life course. Gerson (2001) labels these adults the “children of the revolution.” (292).

Generational Replacement

Furthermore, Myers proposes two causal mechanisms may have impacted the affiliation between religious homogamy and marital quality, including generational replacement and social structural changes. Myers describes the first causal mechanism, generational replacement, as

Generational change theory argues that behavioral and attitudinal changes are a product of the ongoing replacement of older generations by younger generations. The younger and older generations differ systematically in their childhood and socialization experiences, and these differences are carried into adulthood producing dissimilar life course patterns. For the present study, the offspring generation was socialized within a society that was much less traditional in terms of gender, work, family, and religious issues and roles, compared to their parents' generation. Thus, as the offspring generation reached adulthood, entered the married population by 1997, and joined and replaced the older parental generation who were married by 1980, they brought with them their less traditional upbringing. These generational differences have the potential to transform the historical link between religious homogamy and marital quality between 1980 and 1997. (293)

Social Structural Changes

Moreover, with regard to the second causal mechanism, social structural changes, Myers considers that two social structural changes may have impacted the relationship between religious homogamy and marital quality, including religious authority and changes in gender, work, and family. Myers describes the first social structural change, religious authority, as

First, over time changes have occurred in the meaning, role, and influence of religion (broadly called religious authority). This alteration is not a decline in the quantities of religion (e.g., church attendance, biblical literalism) but a decrease in the extent to which individual beliefs and behaviors are influenced by religion. Sherkat and Ellison (1999) find that traditional measures of religion over the past several decades have remained relatively stable, for example, religious participation and belief in God. Yet, as religion becomes a more private and individual pursuit, numerous studies find that religious adults increasingly emphasize personal fulfillment, self-enhancement, and gender equality; increasingly interpret religion in individualistic terms; and look to religion less for life-guiding authority. (294)

In addition, Myers continues,

These trends appear mostly among younger individuals and those aligned with mainline religions, though research documents that these trends increasingly characterize the youngest adults affiliated with conservative religious organizations Denton (2004) finds that even though conservative Protestants hold more traditional gender ideologies, their actual marital decision making practices are not different from those of liberal Protestants who hold more egalitarian ideologies. For this study, the implication is that younger married offspring who entered the married population by 1997 may be equally religious across traditional measures, but the import of religious authority on marital quality is weaker for them than among their older parents who married by 1980. These

subjective differences have the potential to transform the link between religious homogamy and marital quality between 1980 and 1997. (294)

Next, Myers describes the second social structural change, changes in gender, work, and family. Myers expresses,

A second mechanism transforming the link between religious homogamy and marital quality is temporal changes in gender, work, and family. The younger generation in this study was raised and married in a society distinct from the society in which their parents were raised and married. The distinction is marked by a societal shift toward less traditional work, family, and gendered roles that alter the landscape of marriage. Research consistently shows that younger couples encounter new complexities and conflicts stemming from these changes in work, family, and gendered roles that were and are not encountered as extensively by older couples. (294)

Specifically, Myers explains,

Compared to the older parental generation, a majority of wives in the offspring generation is employed in the labor market. In 1997, over 60% of all married women were in the labor force, which is nearly double the 32% in the labor force in 1970. Casper and Bianchi (2002) argue that the truly amazing trend since 1970 is the dramatic rise in the combination of paid work and mothering among younger married women. Another significant change is a trend toward less traditional gender beliefs, especially among younger generations. Additional temporal changes that increase marital complexity and may transform the link between homogamy and marital quality are increases in the percentage of families

that are stepfamilies, reside in urban areas, are preceded by premarital cohabitation, have spouses with college degrees, and form at later ages. (294)

According to Myers, these social structural changes have both positive and negative implications for marital quality. Myers conveys,

Research finds both positive and negative consequences for marital quality from the new gender-work-family configurations. The significant issue for this research is not whether these configurations benefit or harm marital quality but that they now dominate marital relations and may overshadow the traditional influence of religious homogamy. Even though younger marriages may reap certain benefits, they also face different obstacles in their marriage than do (and did) older marriages. Research does find that today's younger married adults have higher levels of marital conflict and problems. These marital difficulties generally stem from disagreements over children, division of labor, and general household decisions that are a result of the changing family-gender-work bargain. For this study, the marital quality of the younger offspring married by 1997 will be more a function of how well they negotiate complex and structural work and domestic demands in a more egalitarian society compared to their parents married by 1980. These contemporary gender-work-family dynamics have the potential to transform the link between religious homogamy and marital quality between 1980 and 1997. (294)

Myers came to four specific conclusions based on the results of his study. First, "The traditionally invariant relationship between religious homogamy and marital quality did weaken between 1980 and 1997" (302). Next, Myers concludes that "this weakening occurred through

generational change, whereby the link between religious homogamy and marital quality was significantly smaller in 1997 among the younger offspring generation than among their parents. This weakening also occurred through intergenerational historical change, whereby the religious homogamy–marital quality link was significantly smaller in 1997 than in 1980 among the older parental generation” (302). In addition, Myers concludes that “two structural changes from 1980 to 1997 are at the heart of the historical and generational weakening in the homogamy–marital quality link: a decline in religious authority and a rise in the relative influence of contemporary family and work lives” (302). Finally, Myers concludes that “even in the face of this weakening relationship, religious homogamy continues to be associated with marital quality, though to a lesser extent among younger married adults. The behavioral measure of joint church attendance emerged as more important to marital quality than the attitudinal dimension of religious authority homogamy” (302). Thus, even though the association between religious homogamy and marital quality waned from 1980 – 1997, religious homogamy remains a strong predictor of reduced marital conflict and improved marital quality.

Religious Heterogamy

Alternatively, Chinitz and Brown claim that religious heterogamy between couples may lead to increased marital conflict, which in turn may lead to decreased marital stability and satisfaction (725). Likewise, Annette Mahoney (2005) in her article entitled, *Religion and Conflict in Marital and Parent-Child Relationships*, defines religious heterogamy as “dissimilar religious affiliation, beliefs, and practices” (693). In any event, Chinitz and Brown assert, “While prior studies have found a relationship between spousal religious differences and marital stability, there is no empirical research on how these differences lead to instability. The present authors suggest that such differences are a likely source of marital conflict, and it is the conflict

that at least in part predicts instability, i.e., conflict will mediate the relationship between differences and stability” (725).

Religion and Conflict and Conflict Resolution

Similarly, Nathaniel M. Lambert and David C. Dollahite (2006) in their article entitled, *How Religiosity Helps Couples Prevent, Resolve, and Overcome Marital Conflict*, offer that religion can be both a source of conflict and a source to resolve conflict.

Religion can be a source of significant marital conflict if couples are not united in religious matters. Curtis and Ellison (2002) found that disparities in religious attendance were consistently linked with more frequent marital disagreements” (440). Furthermore, the canvassers express, “Call and Heaton (1997) reported that the risk of marital dissolution was nearly three times greater when the wife regularly attended religious services but the husband never attended” (440).

Moreover, the investigators note, “These findings are important because they demonstrate that religion can be a source of discord in marriage, particularly in the absence of religious congruence. (440)

Likewise, Loren Marks (2005) in his article entitled, *How Does Religion Influence Marriage? Christian, Jewish, Mormon, and Muslim Perspectives*, also considers that religion can be a source of conflict for couples. Marks explains that often religious couples spend time volunteering in the community, causing the couples to spend time away from one another rather than together, which eventually, Marks alleges, may cause a division between them. Marks reasons,

Namely, for many couples in my study, volunteer service to the faith community served as a temporal partition between husbands and wives. This sacrifice

sometimes seemed to pit religion against marriage and family in a struggle over limited time and energy. At the same time, however, these spouses shared a mutual commitment to their faith and tended to value the contribution the other was making to the faith community. Hence, such service was frequently viewed as a mutual and necessary sacrifice for which the couples believed their marriage and family were blessed. Even so, a key challenge for faith communities may be to avoid turning the temporary partition of volunteered time into a formidable wall between wives and husbands. Clinicians, especially pastoral counselors, may be beneficial in encouraging couples to avoid constructing such walls while remaining secondarily sensitive to faith community needs. (106)

On the other hand, Lambert and Dollahite indicate, “Conversely, religion may be a source to resolve marital conflict. Unified religious participation in couples was associated with greater conflict resolution...This association may be partly because of spousal similarities promoted by religious homogamy, which are conducive to a more stable and satisfying marriage” (440). In addition, the examiners report, “Scanzoni and Arnett (1987) found that through public and private religious activities, partners often cultivated a sense of purpose and values centered on loving and caring. Perhaps, religious participation enhances those relational qualities that reduce marital conflict” (440).

Interestingly, however, Chinitz and Brown found that the degree of marital conflict and marital stability did not differ significantly between same-faith and interfaith couples. “The type of marriage (i.e., same-faith or interfaith) was not significant in predicting marital conflict or stability” (731). A possible explanation for this is that the type of marriage (i.e., same-faith or

interfaith) is not what predicts marital conflict and stability, but the amount of agreement on religious issues is what predicts marital conflict and stability (731).

It appears that it is more useful to know the level of religious homogamy as opposed to simply knowing the religious denomination of the spouses...It is not the type of religious marriage, but rather the degree of agreement on issues, that predicts marital conflict and stability in both same-faith and interfaith marriages.

It appears that in order to predict marital conflict and stability, it is more useful to know how much a couple disagrees on religious issues rather than simply knowing their self-reported religious labels. (731)

Similarly, Mahoney reiterates that it is not the type of marriage (i.e., same-faith or interfaith) that predicts marital conflict and stability in religious couples' relationships, but rather it is the amount of agreement or disagreement on religious issues that is the source of conflict for religious couples. In addition, Mahoney, too, claims that religion can assist couples in either exacerbating or resolving marital conflict, and that religion provides couples with strategies that may either help or hinder the resolution of conflict in their relationships. According to Mahoney,

Religion can substantively influence the manifestation and resolution of conflict in marital relationships. Religious systems of meaning are proposed to influence conflict by promoting which goals and values should be sought in family life and the appropriate means to achieve these ends. Conflict can be amplified or inhibited based on the extent to which family members differ and agree about such religiously based parameters. Religion also offers families strategies that may facilitate or hinder the resolution of conflict after it erupts. (689)

For example, Mahoney offers that even couples of the same religious denomination may have differing views on important religious goals and values or spiritual purposes of marriage, and that their religion may impact the content, intensity, and frequency of disagreements and conflict resolution in their relationships (693; 691). “Couples’ level of unity about the spiritual purposes of marriage may also mediate their level of agreement about key aspects of marriage (e.g., sexuality, gender roles, child rearing)” (693). Moreover, Mahoney expresses,

Several sources of empirical evidence indirectly suggest that religion influences couples’ views of the purposes of marriage and therefore could influence the degree to which partners disagree/agree on certain topics. For example, members of ‘conservative,’ ‘moderate,’ and ‘liberal’ subcultures in Christianity report different attitudes about gender roles, abortion, homosexuality, and extramarital relationships. Denominational affiliation and/or degree of Christian conservatism are also tied to views on women’s labor force participation, domestic power arrangements and household labor allocation, and fertility rates. Greater religious devoutness also predicts an avowed preference for a ‘covenantal’ model of marriage that emphasizes individual sacrifice and absolute commitment to marriage, rather than a ‘contractual’ model of marriage marked by individuals’ needs taking primacy over the marital bond and an emphasis on negotiation. (693)

Furthermore, Mahoney reveals,

Couples argue more often about how they spend time and about in-laws when the wife holds much more conservative Christian beliefs than her husband, whereas more child-rearing disputes arise for couples when the husband is more

conservative than his wife. Discrepancies about the Bible in either direction are linked to more conflicts about housework and money. Thus, conservative Christian views on the Bible in general, not necessarily about marriage, impact the frequency and nature of conflict for couples who do not share this perspective. (694)

Because previous efforts have focused on “global, single-item measures to assess religiousness (e.g., type of denomination, frequency of attendance),” Mahoney asserts, it is difficult to determine whether religion represents a major source of conflict (or consensus) for couples or whether it simply indicates an incongruence between couples that has little, or nothing, to do with religion (694). Instead of using such measures, Mahoney proposes researchers should focus on “ask[ing] couples direct and in-depth questions about the extent to which each partner embraces messages embedded in various religious systems about the goals of marriage, whether behavioral practices (e.g., religious rituals) reinforce these values, and whether religiously based (dis)similarity about specific aspects of marriage generate (dis)agreements” in order to determine the significance of religion on marital conflict (694).

Specifically, Mahoney insists that researchers need to take a closer look at couples’ views on gender roles in relation to marriage and religion.

Couples’ views on gender roles in marriage deserve far more careful scrutiny. Even spouses who belong to the same religious group (e.g., a particular Conservative Protestant group) can hold strikingly different views on marriage since both nonegalitarian and egalitarian models of domestic task sharing can be defended with biblical scriptures. A thorough understanding of the role that religion plays in marital conflict requires that researchers devise methods to

capture the diversity of messages that religion holds for many aspects of marriage.

(694)

Religion and Adaptive Conflict Resolution Strategies

In addition to dictating which goals and values couples should adhere to and in what way couples should go about achieving these goals and values, Mahoney claims, religion can also provide couples with strategies for helping or hindering the resolution of conflict in their relationships. For example, Mahoney suggests that religion may influence whether couples choose to use adaptive or maladaptive strategies to resolve conflict in their marriages (694). According to Mahoney, adaptive conflict resolution strategies involve such behaviors as reflective listening and collaboration, while maladaptive conflict resolution strategies involve such behaviors as avoidance, verbal attacks, and physical violence (690). Both strategies, Mahoney notes, can be construed to be supported by biblical scriptures (694).

According to Mahoney, “Most notably, several scholars have discussed how couples may triangulate God into the marital system when conflict emerges” (696). Specifically, Mahoney describes, couples may have views of God in their relationship that either help them to resolve or exacerbate conflict in their relationships (696). For example, Mahoney explains, couples who view God in their relationship as someone who can help them resolve conflict may view Him as: (1) “being intensely interested in maintaining a compassionate relationship with each spouse”, (2) “taking a neutral stance about each partners ‘side’ of the story,” (3) “insisting that each partner take responsibility for change in the relationship instead of blaming the other” (696). Mahoney offers, “Couples who view God this way may be more able to disengage emotionally from destructive communication patterns and explore options for compromise or healthy acceptance of one another” (696). Mahoney explains,

Judeo-Christian literature encourages individuals who encounter marital conflict to engage in self-scrutiny, acknowledge mistakes, relinquish fears of rejection and disclose vulnerabilities, forgive transgressions, inhibit expressions of anger, and be patient, loving, and kind. Adherence to such ideals is likely to facilitate adaptive communication methods that secular models of marriage promote (e.g., empathetic listening, compromise). (695)

Religion and Maladaptive Conflict Resolution Strategies

On the other hand, Mahoney expresses, couples may have views of God in their relationship that serve to exacerbate their conflict (696). For example, “God could also be psychologically drawn into one of three counter-productive triangles that block resolution of marital conflict: coalition (e.g., God takes one partners’ side); displacement (e.g., adversity is God’s fault); or substitutive (i.e., partners seek support from God but avoid dealing directly with the conflict)” (696). Moreover, Mahoney observes, “The patriarchal structure of many Judeo-Christian traditions, and messages of gender-based inequalities that result therefrom, have been implicated as contributors to maladaptive conflict resolution methods. For instance, a justification of an imbalance of power and control between spouses in conservative Christian groups has frequently been hypothesized to promote husbands’ use of physical aggression toward wives” (695).

However, while Mahoney reports that “few studies have directly investigated links between religion and the types of strategies that couples use to deal with marital conflict,” he also says, “Greater religiousness has not been associated with greater maladaptive communication between partners (e.g., yelling, stonewalling)” (695). In fact, “To the contrary, couples’ reports of engaging in more joint religious activities and perceiving marriage as having

spiritual meaning have been linked with greater self-reported collaboration during disagreements. Also, couples higher ratings of general religiousness predict more adaptive communication patterns” (695). Meanwhile, with regard to physical aggression, “In three of the four quantitative studies that have systematically addressed whether religion promotes or discourages domestic violence, greater church attendance has been associated with lower, not higher, rates of marital physical aggression” (695). Thus, Mahoney concludes, “Overall, greater involvement in religion appears to dissuade individuals from resorting to maladaptive methods to resolve disputes” (695). Perhaps, Mahoney considers, “The added psychological threat of losing a connection to God may help motivate couples to acknowledge and resolve problems” (693).

In addition to these adaptive and maladaptive strategies for conflict resolution, Mahoney suggests that there are also other ways in which religious couples cope with marital conflict.

According to Mahoney,

Couples may also rely on other forms of religious coping to deal with marital conflict, including intervention from religious community (e.g., pastoral counseling), benevolent reappraisals of conflict (e.g., viewing the personal risks or pain involved in addressing conflicts as part of a spiritual journey), and religious rituals (e.g., forgiveness and reconciliation ceremonies). A recent descriptive study found that long-married highly religious couples often say they turn to prayer to help resolve marital conflict adaptively. (696)

Along the same lines, Marks states,

Marks and Dollahite (2001) have emphasized that religion is comprised of at least three dimensions: faith communities (active participation and involvement in a congregation, synagogue, mosque, etc.), religious practices (prayer, rituals, study

of sacred texts, etc.), and spiritual beliefs. They further argue that all of these need attention if we are to develop a rich, meaningful, and three-dimensional picture of how families are influenced by and draw meaning from religion. (86)

Furthermore, Marks indicates, “Of the three dimensions of religion, spiritual beliefs were most frequently identified as directly and indirectly impacting marriage” (103). Marks suggests that spiritual beliefs can have a “very definite impact” on marriage, in thoughts, words, and in everything one does (103).

Mahoney summarizes, “Clearly, social scientists should develop a better understanding of how religious systems of meaning shape the strategies that couples select to cope with marital conflict” (695). Moreover, “Inferential studies about the effectiveness and general pervasiveness of religious methods to cope with marital conflict [also] need to be conducted” (696).

Religion and Marital Conflict and Quality

Lambert and Dollahite conducted a study as Mahoney suggested. “Scholars have suggested that ‘religion offers couples theologically grounded guidelines for methods to handle conflict when it erupts.’ Indeed, research findings have generally concluded that there is a strong, positive relationship between religiosity and reduced marital conflict” (439). In addition, “other studies have shown the role of religious beliefs in helping couples forgive each other following conflict” (440). However, the authors mention that, while “the existing literature on marital conflict is enormous; only a few studies have specifically measured the impact of religion on marital conflict” (439).

Correspondingly, Fincham, Stanley, and Beach observe,

Religion ‘is rarely represented in the scientific journals devoted to family issues.’

This omission is all the more remarkable given the interests and values of most

people. Religious beliefs and practice warrant much greater attention because the very meaning and importance of marriage have been understood by many people, if not most, from a religious perspective. (281)

According to Covey, most everyone has some degree of religious commitment. “George Gallup reports that 95 percent of Americans believe in some form of supreme being or higher power, and that more than ever before, people are feeling the need to reach beyond self-help to find spiritual help,” (300). Likewise, Batson and Shwalb report, “95% of all married couples express an affiliation with a religious organization” (119). While Mahoney claims that “53-60% of married Americans attend religious services at least once a month” (703). Meanwhile, Marks reports that 60% of Americans state that religion is “important” or “very important” to them (86).

Bland suggests that marriage therapy needs to go beyond self-help and include spiritual pursuits. “Spiritual pursuits are ‘processes that work to bring people into deeper contact with the sources of meaning in their lives’. For Christians and many others the height of this meaning is a life of love. The ability to be in relationships and enjoy them as expressions of Christ’s love is a fundamental Christian ethic” (164). Fincham, Stanley, and Beach insist, “Understanding their role will be crucial in mapping out the functional system that results in marital success or failure” (281).

Fincham, Stanley, and Beach seem to agree. “There is a positive association between religiosity and marital stability and satisfaction. Further, three longitudinal studies indicate that religiousness predicts lower risk of divorce and divorce proneness and not vice versa. These findings suggest that something in deep meaning structures or cultural patterns associated with religious behavior influences marital outcomes” (281). Covey states, “Research clearly shows that worshipping together is one of the major characteristics of healthy, happy families. It can

create context, unity, and shared understanding – much in the same way that a family mission statement does. In addition, studies have shown that religious involvement is a significant factor in mental and emotional health and stability” (300). In the same way, Myers reports, “Waite and Lehrer (2003) contend that shared religious experiences increase family cohesion” (293).

Correspondingly, Faulkner et al. found that couples’ religious affiliation impacts their marital quality either positively or negatively. Specifically, the writers discovered that wives’ religious affiliation impacted husbands’ marital satisfaction. According to the researchers, “Husbands married to wives who did not identify themselves with a religious affiliation experienced decreases in marital satisfaction over time” (77).

Burchard et al. considered that religious commitment impacts couples’ quality of life. “Hadaway and Roof (1978) examined the relationship between religious commitment and quality of life. In light of the view that religion is a positive influence that enables the individual to enhance his or her perception of life, they found that religious commitment was positively associated with quality of life” (242). They also state, “Religious meaning, particularly in American society, seems to enable people to have more positive perspectives of life in general. This perspective leads to higher self-perceptions of one’s quality of life” (242-243). Likewise, Myers offers, “Couples with similar religious views and behaviors are united by their common belief in the values of their religion, which influences marital quality, commitment, dependency, and interaction, and provides a unified approach to marital and family issues” (293).

Similarly, Fincham, Stanley, and Beach report,

Mahoney, Pargament, and colleagues have greatly advanced understanding of how such meanings are related to marital quality in their research on sanctification. To examine sanctification in marital dynamics, they assessed the

extent to which spouses view marriage as a manifestation of God (e.g., ‘God is present in my marriage,’ ‘My marriage is influenced by God’s actions in our lives.’) and has sacred qualities (e.g., holy, spiritual). These sanctification measures are related to marital satisfaction, greater collaboration, and less conflict in resolving disagreements, and greater investment in the marriage. (281)

Along the same lines, Atkins and Kessel offer, “At the relational level, Mahoney and Tarakeshwar (2005) have studied how religious couples sanctify their marriages through viewing their relationships as having spiritual significance and pointing to God as the source of the relationship. Within couples that share similar religious beliefs, spiritual practices can be shared practices that sustain and improve the marital relationship” (408). Likewise, Fincham, Stanley and Beach express, “Religion has the apparent potential to help couples build marital intimacy, stimulate companionship, and perhaps offer unique cognitive and behavioral resources for couples dealing with marital stressors” (281).

Religion and Marital Conflict Prevention, Resolution, and Reconciliation

Lambert and Dollahite found that religion impacts marital conflict at three different stages. “Couples reported that religiosity affects the conflict in their marriage at three phases of the conflict process: (a) problem prevention, (b) conflict resolution, and (c) relationship reconciliation” (439). Consequently, the reporters define religiosity as “a person’s spiritual beliefs, religious practices, and involvement with a faith community. Examples of spiritual beliefs include belief in the eternal nature of marriage; examples of religious practices include prayer and study of scripture. Aspects of religious involvement include attendance at religious meetings, participation in other faith community activities, or making financial contributions to a faith community” (439). Furthermore, “Religiosity act[s] as a safe container for marital conflict

in which conflict is prevented, resolved, and overcome. The term ‘safe container’ was chosen because it denotes a secure environment in which religious beliefs and practices can prevent and mediate the effects of marital conflict” (442).

For their research, Lambert and Dollahite examined the role of religion in marital conflict, specifically how it assists couples in preventing, resolving, and overcoming marital conflict. The evaluators developed two research questions for their study, first, “Do highly religious couples perceive that their religious beliefs and practices influence conflict in their marriage,” and second, “To what extent and, specifically, how does religiosity affect marital conflict” (439).

Religion and Marital Conflict Prevention

Lambert and Dollahite uncovered three major patterns from the data regarding religion and conflict in marriage. According to the theorists, “Analysis indicated that religious beliefs and practices helped couples (a) prevent problems in the relationship, (b) resolve conflict, and (c) work toward relational reconciliation” (442). Within the first pattern, preventing problems in the relationship, two sub-themes emerged. The authors reveal, “Couples reported that the influence of religion helped them (a) cultivate a shared vision and purpose and (b) enhance relational virtues” (442). According to the writers, having a shared sense of purpose helps couples to be united and less stressed, and one way that couples are able to feel united and less stressed is by participating in religious activities together, such as reading scripture. Marks seems to agree, “For the married couples, religious practices (including prayer and sacred rituals) were mentioned as positive influences on marriage and family life. The salience and influence of family rituals is certainly not limited to religious families, however. Previous research emphasizes the importance of deliberate, planned family rituals and practices in countering intra-

and extra-familial demands and challenges that can diffuse and weaken families” (107). Furthermore, Marks insists, “Faith beliefs, we are reminded, are not only spiritual but also serve as a family framework and as foundations for culture and subculture. Indeed, for those who are deeply connected to their faith, faith’s influence may literally carry into jokes, foods, holidays, rituals, and—in a word—life. This may offer a partial explanation of lower divorce rates among same faith marriages” (106). Myers adds that religious homogamy increases couples’ sense of unity by minimizing the need for couples to seek out similar views apart from the marriage (293). Finally, Marks perceives that couples’ shared faith forges a strong connection between them which pulls them together whilst other forces are trying to pull them apart (103).

In addition, Lambert and Dollahite offer that having a shared sense of purpose helps couples reduce conflict in their marriage. “One of the best forms of conflict prevention for couples in the study was having a shared sacred vision and purpose. Shared vision helped to reduce marital conflict by decreasing stress levels in the marriage and unifying marital partners...Sharing religious activities together also seemed to reduce stress levels in marriage” (442). Marks also suggests, sharing religious activities together such as prayer can help reduce conflict in marriage. “Prayer reportedly influence[s] marriage through pathways including providing a “connection with God,” a sense of caring for spouse and children, bringing in “a spirit of love,” and offering a valuable tool for conflict resolution” (98). Lambert and Dollahite go on to say, “Seeking spiritual guidance through scripture and finding the same answers together helped reduce marital stress. Not only did having a shared religious background decrease the amount of stress in relationships but it also brought about relational unity by preparing couples to deal more effectively with inevitable conflict” (443).

Lambert and Dollahite perceive that couples' commitment to religion helps them to enhance relational virtues, such as selflessness and unconditional love, which, in turn, helps them increase their marital quality and decrease their marital conflict. According to the investigators, "Aside from unifying couples by providing a shared vision, religiosity seemed to help prevent marital conflict by fostering what we call relational virtues. Several of the couples were inspired by their religious beliefs and commitments to develop qualities that improved their relationship and reduced marital conflict. Selflessness and unconditional love were especially emphasized" (443). Consequently, findings in the current research mimic the findings in previous research on the role of religion in marital conflict. The canvassers note, "One of the main themes identified by Dudley and Kosinski (1990) about the effects of religiosity on marriage was that religious participation helped couples more often 'think of the needs of others, be more loving and forgiving, treat each other with respect, and resolve conflict'" (446).

Religion and Marital Conflict Resolution

Next, within the second pattern, resolving conflict, three sub-themes emerged. According to Lambert and Dollahite, "The three most common religious beliefs and practices that helped couples resolve marital conflict were (a) scriptural teachings, (b) attendance at religious services, and (c) prayer" (443). For the purpose of their study, the examiners define conflict resolution as "what couples [do] to try to restore harmony to their relationship during active conflict" (443). With regard to the first sub-theme, scriptural teachings, the reporters express, scriptural teachings assist in conflict resolution by providing couples with guidelines for interacting with others and present role models and examples for couples to follow. Marks explains, "Faith is expressed not only in sacred practices like prayer, but also in [one's] avoidance of behaviors that are not congruent with one's professed beliefs" (101). According to

the Lambert and Dollahite, “Study participants frequently discussed scriptural teachings as something that helped them resolve conflict. Several couples mentioned that in time of conflict, they turned to scripture. Scripture also contained helpful examples of relating to others” (443). Furthermore, the evaluators convey, “Scriptural writings provided the couples with role models to ‘emulate’” (444).

In addition, Lambert and Dollahite note that attending religious services assists with conflict resolution by allowing couples to shift their focus and by giving them strength. “Attendance at religious services helped couples to resolve conflict by changing their focus and aide them in working through serious problems by giving them needed inner strength. By attending religious services together, couples were able to change their focus from trivial arguments to what they perceived to be most important. Once this focus was altered, the causes of disagreement were often forgotten or dismissed as petty” (444). Likewise, the theorists mention, “Dudley and Kosinski (1990) found that church attendance is related to an increased ability to resolve conflict” (447). Similarly, the assessors note, “A study by Curtis and Ellison (2002) revealed that men’s religious attendance had a modest inverse association with the frequency of marital arguments” (441). Marks adds that couples have a “desire to move beyond their own parents’ approach to religion, which reportedly consisted primarily of ‘making appearances’ at worship services. This desire included, going beyond ‘pew-warming’ and serving the faith community” (95).

In the same vein, Atkins and Kessel also suggest that attendance at religious services may help couples to shift their focus and gain strength through support given by fellow members of the congregation. “Attending religious services almost certainly means that an individual is hearing religious teaching on marital fidelity and the general importance of marriage” (416).

Furthermore, the authors figure, “An individual who is regularly attending services will have a network of relationships within the church, synagogue, or mosque. These relationships may provide social support to the spouses” (416). Similarly, Batson and Shwalb express, “Religious institutions also offer stability to families...offering social and emotional support in times of stress” (119). Moreover, Marks offers, “For good or ill, the influence of clergy [is] salient for many individuals and their view of and approach to marriage” (95).

In addition to scripture reading and church attendance, Lambert and Dollahite observe that prayer also assists with conflict resolution by decreasing feelings of anger and increasing open communication between couples. “In addition to religious attendance, couple prayer has been found to decrease negativity, contempt, and hostility, as well as emotional reactivity toward one’s partner” (441). Moreover, the canvassers express, “Prayer was another means of resolving marital conflict. Several couples talked about prayer alleviating anger and facilitating open communication” (444). Along the same lines, the examiners reveal, “Butler et al. (2002) found that prayer facilitates couple empathy, increased self-change focus, and encouraged couple responsibility for reconciliation and problem solving. Also, Greenberg and Johnson (1998) found prayer to be critical to relationship softening, which facilitates conflict resolution” (447).

Religion and Marital Conflict and Relationship Reconciliation

Finally, with regard to the third pattern, working toward relational reconciliation, two sub-themes emerged. According to Lambert and Dollahite, “Religious involvement seemed to help couples reconcile by (a) increasing their commitment to relationship permanence and (b) kindling a willingness to forgive” (444). Consequently, the investigators define relational reconciliation as “the attempts couples make to heal their relationship following resolution of active conflict” (444). With regard to the first sub-theme, increasing commitment to relationship

permanence, the reporters indicate that religious couples are more committed to each other than nonreligious couples because their religious traditions teach them that marriage is a permanent, rather than a temporal, relationship. The evaluators explain, “Couples reported that their religious beliefs increased their commitment to relationship permanence. ‘God hates divorce’ or ‘marriage is forever’ were some of the common expressions couples made regarding commitment to relationship permanence. This commitment generated a desire within couples to reconcile with each other and work through difficult times” (445).

Accordingly, Michael G. Lawler (1991) in his article entitled, *Faith, Contract, and Sacrament in Christian Marriage: A Theological Approach*, asserts that Christian marriages are different from secular marriages because, unlike secular marriages which involve only a civil contract, Christian marriages involve a religious contract, a contract that is binding “until death do us part”. Lawler declares that Christians view their marriages as a lifelong covenant between them and God. Lawler states that marriage is “a ritual that publicly proclaims to the spouses, to the Church, and to the world not only ‘I love you,’ but also ‘I love you in Christ and in His Church’” (723). Because religious couples know that they are committed to one another for life, they are more inclined to work out their differences so that they can enjoy a happy life together rather than suffer through an unhappy life together. When people know that they will have something for a long time, or forever, then they are more likely to take care of it and maintain it, whereas if people know that they are only going to have something for a short time, or if they know they are eventually going to throw it away, then they are less likely to treat it with care; the same goes for relationships.

Lambert and Dollahite report, “Those interviewed emphasized being committed to the relationship no matter what problems might arise” (445). Furthermore, the evaluators indicate,

“Several couples concluded that because they were committed to a permanent relationship, they were much more inclined to reconcile and heal the relationship” (445). Moreover, the assessors express, “Many of the couples in the study found that their commitment to relationship permanence, which was strengthened by their religiosity helped them better address conflict and reconcile with their marital partner. Indeed, many of the couples stated that likely they would not have remained married without the strong commitment to marriage and the assistance in resolving conflict that religious belief and practice provided them” (445). Similarly, Marks expresses, “The most pervasive and salient spiritual belief reported by couples in connection with marriage [is] that faith in God offer[s] them marital support. A sizable minority of the couples explicitly stated that they did not believe their marriages would still be intact were it not for their faith in, and support from, the Divine” (104). In addition, Marks states, “The couples viewed faith as a multi-faceted support in their marriages to ‘weather the storm[s]’ and ‘to help you overcome’ flaws. Additionally, faith reportedly provided a ‘framework,’ a ‘strength,’ and a strong belief during marital challenges” (105).

With regard to the second sub-theme, kindling a willingness to forgive, Lambert and Dollahite reveal that religious couples are likely to forgive one another out of their obligation and thankfulness to God forgiving them. According to Batson and Shwalb,

One of Christianity’s core principles is forgiveness. Specifically, Christians believe that God sent Jesus to bring salvation or forgiveness to all of humankind. In Christianity, people who seek forgiveness from Christ are forgiven for their sins and encouraged to forgive those who have offended them. Because Jesus Christ preached forgiveness, the principle of forgiveness is considered an important part of a Christian’s relationship with God and other people. (119)

Specifically, Lambert and Dollahite note, “Religiosity fostered forgiveness through worship services, scripture, and as a reciprocation for divine forgiveness. Some couples described forgiveness as an actual part of their worship services” (445). In addition, the surveyors observe, “Religious couples had an increased willingness to forgive out of gratitude for God forgiving them” (445).

Thus, Lambert and Dollahite conclude that highly religious couples do perceive that their religious beliefs and practices influence conflict in their marriages; in fact, their religious beliefs play a significant role in assisting them in conflict prevention, management, and resolution. Specifically, couples’ religious beliefs aid them in preventing problems in their relationship by helping them facilitate a shared vision and purpose for their lives and by enhancing relational virtues, such as selflessness and unconditional love. In addition, couples’ religious beliefs assist them in resolving conflict by providing models and examples for them to follow through scriptural teachings, by allowing them to shift their focus and gain strength through attendance at worship services, and by relieving feelings of anger and opening the lines of communication through prayer. Finally, couples’ religious beliefs help them to reconcile by increasing their commitment to one another and encouraging them to forgive each other.

Marital Enrichment Programs and Marital Quality

Because previous research has shown that religion can assist with conflict resolution, Burchard et al. chose to consider the impact of two religious-based marital enrichment programs on couples’ quality of life; specifically, the theorists assessed the impact of a forgiveness-based and a hope-focused marital enrichment program on couples’ quality of life (243). Burchard et al. hypothesized that individuals that are more likely to forgive others are also more likely to have better quality of life than individuals that are less likely to forgive. Second, they hypothesized

that individuals with higher levels of religious commitment would have higher levels of quality of life than individuals with lower levels of religious commitment. Third, they hypothesized that couples that participate in marital enrichment programs would experience greater quality of life than couples that do not participate in marital enrichment programs. Fourth, and finally, they hypothesized that couples that participate in forgiveness-based marital enrichment programs would have enhanced quality of life compared to couples that participate in hope-focused marital enrichment programs, which they hypothesized would experience lesser quality of life (243-244).

Results of the study revealed that the first hypothesis, that individuals that are more likely to forgive others are also more likely to have better quality of life than individuals that are less likely to forgive, was supported (246). However, the second hypothesis, that individuals with higher levels of religious commitment would have higher levels of quality of life than individuals with lower levels of religious commitment, was not supported (247). Burchard et al. propose that the small sample size may account for this unexpected finding, but that there also may have been a problem with the validity of the RCI-10, and that it may need to be re-evaluated (248). Meanwhile, the third hypothesis, that couples that participate in marital enrichment programs would experience greater quality of life than couples that do not participate in marital enrichment programs, was supported, as the couples that participated in the forgiveness-based and hope-focused marital enrichment programs experienced increased quality of life, while the couples that participated in the control group experienced decreased quality of life over time (248). Finally, the fourth hypothesis, that couples that participate in forgiveness-based marital enrichment programs would have enhanced quality of life compared to couples that participate in hope-focused marital enrichment programs, which the reporters hypothesized would experience lesser quality of life, was not supported (250).

Interestingly, Burchard et al. found that couples that participated in the hope-focused marital enrichment program experienced significant increases in quality of life, while couples that participated in the forgiveness-based marital enrichment program only approached significance in increase of quality of life. The theorists offer that this finding may be attributed to the larger number of participants in the hope-focused group (248). Thus, Burchard et al. conclude that forgiveness and participation in marital enrichment programs leads to increases in marital quality and in couples' overall quality of life.

Furthermore, Burchard et al. propose, "Communication, forgiveness, religious commitment, hope, and intimacy all influence the quality of one's life. If this assumption is true, then this study may lead to further research regarding factors in marriage that can improve overall quality of life or well-being" (243). Moreover, Marks suggests, "While it is true that religion is not an important factor in many American marriages, religion is 'the single most important influence in [life]' for 'a substantial minority' of Americans" (108). Therefore, it is imperative that researchers do not exclude religion when considering factors that influence marriage. Additionally, Fincham, Stanley, and Beach consider, "The thinking in this line of research represents a strong movement toward incorporating both a cultural context and a personal meaning into our understanding of marital functioning" (281). According to Bland, "When a narcissistic husband musters the courage to experience his shame and remorse in front of the therapist and his wife, virtue is afoot. When a wife is able to let down her emotional walls and give her husband another chance to meet her needs, forgiveness is finding space in the interactions. The list could continue and includes relational exchanges that promote hope, generosity, justice, love, and many other expressions of the Christian character" (164). When couples commit to biblical values and to each other, Bland suggests, "Illusions and dreams can

be released for the more palatable and satisfying experience of real hope and authentic connection” (164).

Relational Dialectics Theory

Relational Dialectics Theory can be explained in relation to magnets. Like magnets, which are made up of two opposing poles existing within the same object, dialectics are two opposing tensions, contradictions, or needs, existing within the same relationship. Contradictions are made up of “centripetal” and “centrifugal” forces that work against each other to push and pull an entity, or relationship, in different directions. Because magnets are polarized, meaning that each end has an opposite charge which is either positive or negative, when two magnets are placed on the side with the same charge, both positive or both negative, then they repel or push each other away; this is called “centrifugal” force, that is, a force that pushes something away from a center. However, when two magnets are placed on the side with the opposite charge, one positive and one negative, then they attract or pull each other together; this is called “centripetal” force, that is, a force that pulls something toward a center.

Like the magnets, relationships are subject to these two opposing forces, as well. In relationships, partners have basic needs that must be met in the relationship. However, partners’ needs are not always the same; in fact, partners’ needs are sometimes in complete opposition to one another. To complicate matters even further, the needs are usually mutually exclusive, meaning that they cannot both be met at the same time, which leads to dialectical tensions in relationships. Dialectical tensions are tensions between two or more contradictory needs in a relationship. In relational dialectics, opposing tensions, or needs, have the same effect on relationships as the magnets do on each other, pushing and pulling them in different directions, causing growth and change in relationships. The pushing and pulling of tensions, or needs, in

relationships is a natural and necessary process and is essential for the development of relationships. Relationships are shaped and defined over time by the way that partners manage the dialectical tensions within their relationships. Therefore, a dialectical approach to studying in interpersonal relationships focuses on the way relationships grow or change, how they shift, in response to the tensions.

Development of Relational Dialectics Theory

Leslie A. Baxter and Barbara M. Montgomery developed relational dialectics theory in 1996, which was inspired by both Hegelian-Marxian dialectics and Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism. In their book entitled, *Relating: Dialogues & Dialectics*, Leslie A. Baxter and Barbara M. Montgomery (1996) reveal, "Our relational-dialectics perspective has emerged out of our real and imagined conversations with a number of other dialectical theorists and with many nondialectical theorists as well" (18).

In the early development of a relational dialectics perspective, Baxter was most influenced by Hegelian-Marxian dialectics. Hegel and Marx are thought to be the fathers of dialectics. According to Baxter and Montgomery, "Mircovic (1980), among others, argues that dialectics came into its own as a philosophical worldview in the nineteenth century writings of the German philosopher Hegel and the works of one of his students, Karl Marx" (21). However, Hegel and Marx came to hold fundamentally different views on dialectics. For Hegel, dialectics was a process that occurred in an individual's mind, but for Marx, dialectics was very much a social experience.

Hegelian Dialectics

Baxter and Montgomery observe that,

Hegel was committed to a philosophical idealism, that is, he believed that human reason or thought was the creative force behind the natural world and the propelling force of history...Hegel's intellectual writings capture his efforts to provide a philosophy of the development of consciousness and, thereby, an ontology of reality, since reality was but a manifestation of mind. Everything concrete is embedded in a totality of what is not, according to Hegel.

Furthermore, everything is in a process of motion, development, and change. (21)

Much of Hegel's philosophy is centered on concepts that he calls "Becoming", "Being", and, "Nothing" (21). Baxter and Montgomery describe Hegel's concepts of "Becoming", "Being", and, "Nothing", as follows,

'Truth' to Hegel is the realization of the interconnectedness and fluidity of phenomena, a realization he calls 'Becoming.' From Hegel's perspective, the philosophy of his time falsely represented phenomena as autonomous, finite, and fixed entities, a condition he calls 'Being.' Instead, asserted Hegel, our perception of phenomena is organized around the principle of 'Nothing,' that is, the realization that our perception of something is always predicated on the awareness of what is not, coupled with the realization that everything is in a continual state of flux or transition to a new form that results from the interplay of a phenomenon and its opposite. (21)

According to Hegel, consciousness is the result of the coupling of the concepts of "Being" and "Nothing", which is also known as, "Becoming" (21). Baxter and Montgomery elucidate,

Consciousness is the synthesis of Being and Nothing, or ‘Becoming,’ the comprehension that a phenomenon and its opposite ‘pass over’ into one another and that ‘each immediately vanishes in its opposite.’ To Hegel, ‘Becoming’ is a higher truth, a deeper reality, than the static superficialities of ‘Being.’ Whether ‘Becoming’ references the development of consciousness in the individual or the evolution of knowledge in society, Hegel regarded it as the teleological unfolding of the ‘Idea’ or the ‘Spirit’ (*Geist*), that is, the immanent and rational order of the universe. (21-22)

For Hegel, the concepts of “Being”, “Nothing”, and, “Becoming”, are spiritual in nature.

Baxter and Montgomery explain,

The theological implications of *Geist* are self-evident: Hegel envisioned ‘Becoming’ as an evolutionary process in which humankind comes to know God’s plan of the universe. To summarize, then, the task of Hegel’s philosophy was to move beyond an ontology of ‘Being’ to an ontology of ‘Becoming,’ thereby achieving knowledge of the ‘Idea,’ or ‘Spirit,’ through the higher consciousness of mind. Contradiction, that is, the interplay of ‘Being’ and ‘Nothing,’ was not a negative phenomenon to Hegel but essential in achieving the higher consciousness of ‘Becoming’. (21-22)

Today, Baxter and Montgomery note, “Hegel’s work is widely regarded as the classic treatise of the modern era in its systematic expression of the dialectical assumptions of contradiction, change, and totality” (22). However, the theorists consider, Hegel’s work was incomplete and needed more flushing out, which is where Marx comes in.

Marxian Dialectics – Dialectical Materialism

Marx took the basic principles of Hegelian Dialectics and adapted them for his own purposes to create his own theory of dialectics, which was based on capitalist systems and became known as dialectical materialism. Marx's dialectical materialism was a complete contrast to Hegel's dialectical idealism. According to Baxter and Montgomery, "Marx used Hegel's dialectics as the basis of his own dialectically based theory of capitalist systems, known as dialectical materialism. However, Marx (1961) argued in the first volume of *Capital* that he was rejecting Hegel's idealism in favor of a materialistic view of reality" (22).

Baxter and Montgomery illustrate Marx's position,

My dialectical method is not only different from Hegel's, but is its direct opposite.

To Hegel...the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of 'the Idea' [the process of thinking]. With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind...The mystification which dialectic suffers in Hegel's hands, by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner. (22)

While Hegel argued that consciousness exists within the mind, apart from real world Marx argued just the opposite, that consciousness can only exist in partnership with the material world. Baxter and Montgomery expound on Marx's critique of Hegelian dialectics,

Marx was critical of the Hegelian view that the world revolved around consciousness and other cognitive processes in which the ideal essence of 'Spirit' became known. Marx viewed this philosophy as a conservative ideology that functioned to perpetuate people's oppression by the materialist forces of their existence. While Marx recognized the capacity of humans to display

consciousness of themselves and their situation, he argued that such awareness was grounded in their daily, class-defined existence and not in the realm of ideas that were somehow independent of the material world. (22)

At the crux of Marx's dialectical materialism are the concepts of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Using the magnet metaphor depicted earlier, when the magnets are placed on opposite sides, one positive and one negative [contradiction], then one side, or pole, of the magnet is always dominant [the thesis] and it attracts the other side, or pole [the antithesis]. This attraction, or tension, which results in a change in the relationship of the magnets to one another, thus creating an entirely new thesis, is called the synthesis. The tension, struggle, or conflict between opposites that leads to advancing change is at the heart of dialectical thinking.

Baxter and Montgomery explicate,

Some dialectical theorists endorse a teleological view of change in which contradictions are transcended in a thesis-antithesis-synthesis dynamic. At any given point in time, one pole or aspect of a given contradiction is dominant (the so-called thesis), which in turn sets in motion a qualitative change that leads to the salience at a second point in time of the opposing aspect or pole (the so-called antithesis), after which a transformative change occurs in which the original opposition of poles is somehow transcended such that the contradiction no longer exists (the so-called synthesis). (12)

For example, Baxter and Montgomery illuminate,

Consider the following example of the thesis-antithesis-synthesis model from the domain of personal relationships. Imagine a romantic pair who feels smothered by the interdependence of their relational commitments (thesis), a condition that

teleologically oriented dialectical theorists posit as the catalyst for distancing or independence-oriented actions by the partners (antithesis). The struggle between thesis and antithesis eventually will get resolved, according to the model, when the pair develops a new relationship definition in which independence and interdependence are seen as mutually reinforcing of one another rather than oppositional (synthesis). This kind of transcendent change is the form of change most popularly associated with dialectics, because it is the position attributed to Hegel and Marx, arguably the two most prominent dialectical thinkers in Western culture in the last century. (12)

Marx took this concept of thesis-antithesis-synthesis and applied it to market capitalism and the tension between the proletariat and bourgeoisie classes, tension which ultimately leads to growth and change in society. Baxter and Montgomery portray Marx's worldview,

Central to people's daily existence was the process of production, for people needed to eat, drink, find shelter and clothing, and so forth. The organization of the means of production led to division of labor, which was alienating to workers because their control of their productive activities became fragmented. Such division of labor led to exploitation in ways that generated private property and capital for the ruling class. However, because humans had the capacity for consciousness, they had the potential to reflect on their conditions of oppression and to construct new material conditions that liberated them from oppression. (22-23)

Baxter and Montgomery continue,

Mircovic (1980) has argued that Marx was the first scholar to bring a systematic, social scientific perspective to bear in the study of dialectics. In situating contradiction and change in the economic process of production and consumption, Marx moved dialectics out of Hegel's domain of the mind into the concrete practices of society. Marx did not ignore consciousness; instead, he reconceptualized it as a social phenomenon. With this reconceptualization, Marx provided systematic explication of praxis. Through consciousness of the material conditions of their oppression, people were positioned to alter those very conditions. Marxian dialectical materialism was a critical social theory, one that committed the theorist to the emancipation of the working class by liberating workers from the constraints of their economic existence. (23)

While Baxter was heavily influenced in her early career by this ground-breaking theory of dialectics developed by Hegel and Marx, later in her career she began to feel constrained by it. According to Leslie A. Baxter (2004) in her article entitled, *A Tale of Two Voices: Relational Dialectics Theory*, "My 1988 essay in the *Handbook of Personal Relationships* marks the apex of my Hegelian dialectical view. However, even before this essay reached publication, I was feeling constrained by the almost mechanistic quality of Hegelian dialectics. I had moved beyond it before it was a line on my curriculum vitae" (183). Shortly afterward, Baxter discovered that another theorist by the name of Mikhail Bakhtin shared her concerns over Hegelian dialectics.

According to Baxter,

I was discussing my frustrations with a colleague of mine in cultural anthropology, who happened to occupy the office next door to mine at the college

where I was working. After listening to my intellectual woes, she asked me to read a draft manuscript of hers in which a theorist by the name of Mikhail Bakhtin featured prominently. Although the manuscript was something about which I knew very little (I vaguely remember something about the discursive voices in Senegalese fashion), I was struck by the analytic moves positioned by Bakhtin's dialogism. I started reading everything I could get my hands on by, or about, this dead Russian guy. He appeared to share my frustrations with Hegelian and Marxist dialectics and had 50 years worth of writing to elaborate his point. (183-184)

Mikhail Bakhtin – Theory of Dialogism

Thus, the second theorist who heavily influenced, and helped frame, Baxter's dialectical approach to studying interpersonal relationships was the Russian philosopher, Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin composed the majority of his work, which consisted of a critique of the dialectical materialism of Marx and Hegel, in the 1920's and 1930's in the Soviet Union. However, his work was largely unpopular; thus, it took a long while for it to be published, and even longer for it to be translated. Yet, in the 1970's and 1980's, Bakhtin's work was rediscovered by a new generation and gained prominence with Soviet scholars, and eventually with scholars from around the world, including Baxter and Montgomery (24).

Baxter explains the basic premise of Bakhtin's theory,

Mikhail Bakhtin (1984a), a Russian theorist of literature, culture, language, and philosophy, developed, over a prolific career of some 50 years, a theory now known as dialogism. Bakhtin's lifelong effort was a critique of theories and practices that reduced the unfinalizable, open, and varied nature of social life in

determinate, closed, totalizing ways. To Bakhtin, social life was not a closed, univocal ‘monologue,’ in which only a single voice (perspective, theme, ideology, or person) could be heard: social life was an open ‘dialogue’ characterized by the simultaneous fusion and differentiation of voices. (181)

Baxter continues the explanation of Bakhtin’s theory,

To engage in dialogue, participants must fuse their perspectives to some extent while sustaining the uniqueness of their individual perspectives. Participants thus form a unity in conversation but only through two clearly differentiated voices or perspectives. Just as dialogue is simultaneously unity and difference, Bakhtin regarded all of social life as the product of ‘a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies’: the centripetal (i.e., discourses of unity or centrality) and the centrifugal (i.e., discourses of difference, dispersion, and de-centering). This dialogic view—that social life is a process of contradictory discourses—is a centerpiece of relational dialectics. (181-182)

According to Baxter and Montgomery, Bakhtin believes that “the self is constructed in the ongoing interplay of the centripetal and the centrifugal. According to Bakhtin, the self is possible only in fusion with another” (25). Bakhtin’s conception of the individual self, or one’s self-concept, is that it is not established autonomously, apart from social influences, but rather, that it is only created and developed through interaction with others and is reliant on social influences. Baxter and Montgomery clarify,

Like Marx, Bakhtin viewed individual consciousness as fundamentally a social process rather than the cognitive workings of an autonomous entity. As Voloshinov/Bakhtin (1973) stated, ‘The organizing center...of any experience is

not within but outside – in the social milieu surrounding the individual being’.

However, unlike Marx, Bakhtin did not limit his conceptualization of the ‘social milieu’ to the economic process of production. Bakhtin viewed social reality as everything in the human experience that was constituted through communicative or symbolic practices. Thus, the consciousness of Bakhtin is not limited to class consciousness, as with Marx, but refers to all possible bases of conscious awareness about self and others. (25)

On the other hand, while Bakhtin believes that the individual self is only created through social interaction, Baxter and Montgomery suggest that Bakhtin also believes that the individual self must be complemented by distinguishing oneself from the other. “In other words, the self is constructed out of two contradictory necessities – the need to connect with another (the centripetal force) and the simultaneous need to separate from the other (the centrifugal force)” (25). It is the interaction between these two opposing needs, the authors claim, which allows the individual self to develop, grow, and change. Baxter and Montgomery articulate, “The centripetal-centrifugal dialogue is the indeterminate process in which the self is in a perpetual state of becoming as a consequence of the ongoing interplay between fusion and separation with others” (25-26).

Chronotopes

However, in order to truly understand the dynamic relationship between centripetal and centrifugal forces one must grasp the concept and importance of the “chronotope” (Baxter and Montgomery 26). “‘Chronotope’ literally means ‘time-space,’ and the term captures the notion that every dialogue is enacted in a concrete temporal-spatial context” (26). Because dialogues take place within unique contexts, the meaning of conversations are determined and influenced

by the contexts in which they are carried out. Baxter and Montgomery express, “Chronotopes are socially constructed, maintained, and changed. People shape their chronotopic landscape, and, in turn, their shared chronotopes influence the dialogues and meanings that can be sustained” (26).

“Chronotopes” can serve to open or close the channels of communication and can dictate what communication behaviors are appropriate, or inappropriate, in certain settings. According to the researchers,

Chronotopes both constrain and enable human dialogue. Chronotopes that have become standardized through shared meanings constrain the range of communicative events that are regarded as appropriate in those contexts. For example, a married couple might have a shared understanding that confrontational exchanges between them are inappropriately enacted in public settings or late in the evening when they are tired. (26)

While “chronotopes” can serve to open or close the channels of communication and can dictate what communication behaviors are appropriate or inappropriate in certain settings, they can also serve to pull people together or to push them apart. The investigators indicate,

The interplay between centripetal and centrifugal forces is Bakhtin’s master trope for the contradicting process. The specific phenomena that compose the forces of unity and difference are evident only in the particulars of the chronotopic context at hand. In the chronotope of initial interaction between strangers, for example, guarded small talk might very well constitute a unifying or centripetal force, whereas total openness might function to separate the parties from the prospect of a second meeting. By contrast, in the chronotope of a seriously committed

relationship, openness might function more centripetally, whereas guarded and superficial talk might drive the parties apart. Thus, the particular phenomena that constitute centripetal and centrifugal forces could change dramatically from one chronotope or context to another. (26-27)

Utterances

In addition to understanding “chronotopes,” it is also important to comprehend the concept of the “utterance” in order to truly perceive the subtleties and complexities of the theory of dialogism. Baxter and Montgomery express,

Thus far, we have largely emphasized ‘dialogue’ and ‘voice’ in a metaphorical sense. In addition, Bakhtin argued for the significance of these concepts in a literal sense. Put simply, social life is accomplished through talk between people. Social structures are constituted in the mundane ‘stuff’ of everyday interaction, as are all forms of creativity and change. The utterance is envisioned as the place where the multivocal interplay between centripetal and centrifugal tendencies is realized: ‘Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. The processes of centralization and decentralization, of unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance’. (27)

Every “utterance” takes place within a temporal context, containing within it meanings and connotations of past interactions and conversations which serve to influence the meanings and connotations of present interactions and conversations. Baxter and Montgomery elaborate,

It is important to emphasize that Bakhtin’s use of the term ‘utterance’ invokes meaning far more complex than the individuated act of an autonomous speaker.

Instead, as Bakhtin (1986) indicated, an utterance exists at the boundary between consciousnesses. Several different kinds of boundaries are implicated in a single utterance. Bakhtin (1986) envisioned the utterance as a link in a chain of dialogue, a link bounded by both preceding links and the links that follow. Some of a conversation's preceding links are quite distant and remote from the immediate conversation. These links represent the boundary with the already-spoken of the distant past that occurred prior to the current conversation. When we speak, we use words that are 'already populated' with our memories of others' and our own past conversations. (27)

For example, Baxter and Montgomery describe,

An idiomatic expression of love between intimates whose meaning derives from an incident in their relationship's past illustrates an already-spoken, distal link. Our consciousness at a given moment is constructed in part through the inner dialogues that we have with the already-spoken from the distant past. These inner dialogues refer to our cognitions, our thought processes. However, to Bakhtin, cognition is social, not psychological, in its origins. Bakhtin's stance on the social bases of mind was far from unique; a number of Bakhtin's contemporaries, including Mead (1934), Vygotsky (1978), and Wittgenstein (1958), articulated similar positions. (27)

However, not all "utterances" occur within the distant past of former conversations; some "utterances" can occur within the immediate past of current conversations. Baxter and Montgomery enlighten,

Other links in the chain of dialogue are more proximal in nature: for example, the immediately prior utterances in the conversation that is being enacted at the moment. These links represent the boundary with the proximal past; the already-spoken of the current conversation. For example, the verbalized statement ‘I feel the same way’ can only be read as an expression of love toward one’s relational partner when it is linked to the immediately prior verbalization by the partner, ‘I love you more than words can say’. (27-28)

Even though “utterances” seem to be based in the distant or near past, they do not only bring something old to the current interaction, but they also bring something new. Baxter and Montgomery convey,

Despite the fact that already-spoken echoes are ever present, a speaker also imparts something new, something unique, in the act of expressing an utterance. True to the ‘both/and’ – ness of dialogic thinking, an utterance echoes the past at the same time that it contributes something new in the present. The tone or style of the expression is what imprints an utterance with the individuality and uniqueness of the situated speaker. As Morson and Emerson (1990) indicate, ‘Tone bears witness to the singularity of the act and its singular relation to its performer’. The expression ‘I love you’ has been uttered countless times between relationship partners, but each verbalization is unique because it is always expressed slightly differently each time and always in a different space-time context. (28)

Thus, one’s paralinguistics, or verbal and nonverbal nuances, are what make up the “utterances” of the present.

Finally, while most “utterances” seem to be based in the distant or near past, they can also be based in the near or distant future, such as responses in anticipation of near and far future responses. Baxter and Montgomery evince the near future “utterance”,

A given utterance is also situated at boundaries with the conversational links that are anticipated to follow. Similar to the distal and proximal links with the already-spoken, proximal and distal links can be identified with respect to the not-yet-spoken. When a speaker is constructing an utterance, he or she is taking into account the listener’s possible response; the link between an utterance and the anticipated response of the listener is the proximal link in the anticipated chain of dialogue. The expression ‘I love you’ means one thing when it is about to be uttered for the first time in a relationship and the speaker is unsure of the partner’s reaction, and it means something slightly different when it has been expressed many times to the partner and the anticipated reaction is matter-of-fact acknowledgement. (28)

Furthermore, Baxter and Montgomery denote the far future “utterance”,
In addition, Bakhtin (1986) introduces the notion of the ‘superaddressee’ whose distal response is also anticipated. Sampson (1993) compares Bakhtin’s ‘superaddressee’ to Mead’s (1934) notion of the generalized other. Both concepts refer to a generalized set of normative expectations that lies beyond the immediate situation. When a person contemplates saying ‘I love you’ for the first time to a given partner, he or she anticipates whether such a declaration is considered appropriate within the broader societal conventions of sociality. The anticipated responses from the listener and from the superaddressee are what Bakhtin (1986)

refers to as the ‘addressivity’ of an utterance. Because of its addressivity, Bakhtin argued that the expression of an utterance was constructed as much by the listener as by the particular speaker. In this sense, an utterance can never be ‘owned’ by a single speaker; utterances exist at the boundaries between a person and the particular other and the generalized other. (28-29)

Baxter and Montgomery summarize Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism, In sum, interaction between parties is laced with a variety of dialogic reverberations. At the level of the utterance, we have identified four dialogues: the dialogue of the distant already-spoken with the expressed utterance of the present; the dialogue of the immediately prior utterances with the present utterance; the dialogue of the present utterance with the anticipated response of the listener; and the dialogue of the present utterance with the anticipated response of the generalized superaddressee...An utterance is far from a solo performance enacted by the individual. An utterance is not even a duet between speaker and listener. An utterance is closer to an ensemble composed of the speaker, the listener, the inner dialogues of the speaker, and the superaddressee. To these four dialogues of the utterance we add the ongoing centripetal-centrifugal ‘dialogue’ discussed earlier, that is, the ongoing interplay between the ‘voices’ of unity and the ‘voices’ of difference as they are realized in the immediate context of the moment. The metaphorical and literal ‘dialogues’ and ‘voices’ of dialogism are thus many and varied. (29-30)

Bakhtin’s two major critiques of Marx’s dialectical materialism, which consequently Baxter and Montgomery share, are first, that it oversimplifies the concept of contradiction

because it is removed from social experience, it ignores the subtleties and complexities of human interaction and focuses on one rather than many voices; and second, that it is mechanical in nature, it represents teleological, or systematic, evolutionary, change rather than indeterminate, or ongoing change (30-31). According to Baxter and Montgomery, Bakhtin explains the differences between dialectics and dialogism in the following way, “Take a dialogue and remove the voices (the partitioning of voices), remove the intonations (emotional and individualizing ones), carve out the abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness – and that’s how you get dialectics” (30).

However, Baxter and Montgomery argue that dialogism is not so separate from dialectics. “The concept of centripetal-centrifugal interplay clearly evidences a dialectical voice. Centripetal-centrifugal interplay is, at its base, alternative vocabulary for the dynamic interplay of opposing forces. Dialogism is thus a member of the general dialectics family but with its own unique variations” (30). Baxter and Montgomery were influenced by both dialectics and dialogism, finding both strengths and weaknesses in each theory and combining elements of the two to create their own Relational Dialectics Theory.

Relational dialectics is both like and not like other dialectical perspectives on communication in personal relationships. We share with other dialectical approaches our commitment to the principles of contradiction, change, praxis, and totality. However, our perspective differs from other dialectical views in its reliance on dialogism...Our relational-dialectics approach emphasizes a social self instead of a sovereign self, multivocal oppositions instead of binary

contradictions, and indeterminate change instead of transcendent synthesis. (xiii-xiv)

It is to this theory which the discussion will turn to next.

Leslie A. Baxter and Barbara M. Montgomery – Relational Dialectics Theory

In the opening paragraph of their book entitled, *Relating: Dialogues & Dialectics*, Leslie A. Baxter and Barbara M. Montgomery (1996) urge the reader to “consider the following pairs of folk proverbs common to many Americans: ‘Opposites attract’ but ‘Birds of a feather flock together.’ ‘Out of sight, out of mind’ but ‘Absence makes the heart grow fonder.’ ‘Two’s company; three’s a crowd’ but ‘The more, the merrier’” (3). According to the evaluators,

We are not the first authors to open a book by drawing attention to the contradictions of folk wisdom; many authors of introductory social scientific textbooks and research methodology books have done so. However, we suspect that we differ dramatically from the many others who point to such inconsistencies as evidence of the ‘muddleheadedness’ of nonscientific wisdom and thus as a warrant for the need to bring scientific methods and knowledge to bear in discovering where the actual truth lies. Instead, we believe that such contradictory themes illustrate the multifaceted process of social life, not the muddleheadedness of nonscientific knowledge. Further, we believe that the social scientific enterprise needs to focus more concertedly on the complexity and disorder of social life, not with a goal of ‘smoothing out’ its rough edges but with a goal of understanding its fundamental ongoing messiness. In particular, we subscribe to a dialectical perspective on social life, that is, a belief that social life

is a dynamic knot of contradictions, a ceaseless interplay between contrary and opposing tendencies. (3)

Through their real and imagined dialogues with various dialectical and nondialectical theorists, Baxter and Montgomery have discovered their own relational dialectics voice. The authors express this voice in four themes which both highlight and distinguish their relational dialectics perspective from previous dialectical voices. The four themes include “‘dialogue’ as enacted communication, ‘dialogue’ as centripetal-centrifugal flux, ‘dialogue’ as chronotopic, and ‘dialogue’ as distinct from ‘monologue’” (41-42).

Communication Bridges the Relational Gap

With regard to the first theme, “‘dialogue’ as enacted communication,” Baxter and Montgomery propose that relationships are established and sustained through communication. “Foremost in our thinking is the assumption that personal relationships are constituted in communication” (42). The researchers use the word “communication” purposefully and specifically.

We use the term, ‘communication,’ judiciously and with specific meaning...It encompasses, simultaneously, referential and relational information. It is an interactive, involving, and situated process that produces multiple meanings that simultaneously differentiate and connect participants. Communication is the vehicle of social definition; participants develop a sense of self, partners develop a sense of their relationship, and societies develop a sense of identity through the process of communication. (42)

Like Bakhtin, Baxter and Montgomery believe that the individual self, as well as relationships, and even whole societies, is created and developed through interaction with others

and that the relationship between the individual self and the other is revealed through communication. “From the perspective of relational dialectics, social life exists in and through people’s communicative practices, by which people give voice to multiple (perhaps even infinite) opposing tendencies” (4).

Moreover, the writers cogitate that words create a bridge between self and other and that the relationship is the gap, thus “communication bridges the relational gap” (42-43).

While Bakhtin focused on the individual as a social being, we focus on the relationship as a social entity. Relationships exist in this ‘world between consciousnesses’. In more intimate relationships, the gap undoubtedly narrows and can even appear to approach merger from time to time, but merger is never quite accomplished. Multivocality is inherent in social existence; interpersonal voices are always unmerged; assumed ‘oneness’ never hold up under scrutiny. Even when partners appear to hold the same view, they do so from different perspectives. Moments of complete or pure ‘joint action’, of merger, cannot exist. Rather, personal close relationships, like all social systems, are always composed of both fusion with and differentiation from, both centripetal and centrifugal forces, both interdependence and independence. Within each is the seed of the other. From a relational dialectics perspective, bonding occurs in both interdependence with the other and independence from the other. Perhaps Bakhtin’s greatest contribution to our thinking about personal relationships is his celebration of this assumption. (43)

Centrifugal-Centripetal Dynamics are at the Core of Personal Relationships

Next, with regard to the second theme, “‘dialogue’ as centripetal-centrifugal flux,” Baxter and Montgomery claim that contradictions are at the center of relationships and that communication influences the oscillation of the contradictions. “Our voice has joined the others in clearly and explicitly proclaiming that contradictions are a ubiquitous aspect of social relationships and that communication plays a most significant role in the ongoing experience of contradictions” (43).

In addition to this observation about contradictions in relationships, Baxter and Montgomery also make three other observations about contradictions in relationships. First, the researchers note that “dialectical contradictions are not represented well with simple, binary oppositions, which have been the tendency among most scholars, including ourselves, currently working from a dialectical perspective” (43). The investigators perceive that reducing dialectics to binary contradictions is too simplistic and mechanistic and does not encompass the complexity of contradictions within personal relationships. Instead, dialectics should be viewed as many centrifugal forces coinciding with one another while also simultaneously coexisting side by side with centripetal forces.

We have come to realize that it is much too simple and mechanistic to reduce the dialectics of relationships to a series of polar opposites like openness versus closedness, autonomy versus connectedness, and certainty versus novelty. Rather, contradictions are better conceived as complex, overlapping domains of centrifugal forces juxtaposed with centripetal forces. Thus, connection as a stable, centripetal force in personal relationships is in dynamic and opposing associations with a host of centrifugal forces like autonomy, privacy, self-assertion, and

independence. Understanding connection in personal relationships depends on exploring this range of associations; connection is not unitary but varies in meaning depending on the particular centrifugal force that one is emphasizing.

(44)

Second, Baxter and Montgomery discern that primary and secondary contradictions should not be separated.

We are uncomfortable in distinguishing primary from secondary contradictions, although many do and although we have done so in the past. Such a distinction seems premature, given the current level of understanding of relationships, and also assumes a pattern of efficient causality that we have not observed in our study of everyday interactions. We emphasize, instead, formal causation in the dynamic patterning that characterizes a system of contradictions. We invoke the notion of efficient causation only in its most general sense to indicate that the ongoing interplay between opposite tendencies is what drives change. (44)

The third, and final, observation that Baxter and Montgomery make is that there is no set number of contradictions waiting to be uncovered; instead, there is a limitless amount of contradictions depending only on the topic of conversation.

There is no finite set of contradictions in personal relationships to be ‘discovered.’ We are persuaded by Billig (1987) that infinite possibilities for oppositions exist, depending upon the historically salient topics of conversation. Another way of thinking about the limitless potential for contradictory themes is Bakhtin’s (1984) notion that social moments are polyphonic, involving multiple, fully valid voices representing different perspectives, no matter the issue. Thus, as couples cocreate

their relational world in the dynamic context of a society, they are bound to realize oppositions and contradictions. The issue of the moment, the agenda of the day, the expectations of the era are all potential chronotopic breeding grounds for centripetal and centrifugal forces. The meaningful challenge for scholars is not to catalogue the definitive set of contradictions in personal relationships but to contribute to the understanding of the process by which couples create, realize, and deal with dialectical tensions. (44)

Couples “Act Into” a Context

With regard to the third theme, “‘dialogue’ as chronotopic,” Baxter and Montgomery contend that the meaning of a particular communication act is embedded in the context and that the numbers of contexts that can be enacted are endless.

We are eloquently reminded by Voloshinov/Bakhtin (1973) that ‘meaning is context bound, but that context is boundless’. Communication is always situated in historical, environmental, cultural, relational, and individual chronotopes, or contexts. The chronotopic nature of communication obligates researchers to take both sociospatial and temporal contexts into account, whereas existing work has tended to privilege only sociospatial context to the relative neglect of temporal context. (44-45)

Furthermore, the theorists continue,

People ‘act into’ a context. They are, at once, going with the flow; but in doing so, they are affecting the flow and becoming part of the pattern. In adopting these notions of praxis and formal cause, we have developed some uneasiness with perspectives that have people acting primarily out of, because of, or in response to

the context. Context is not an independent phenomenon, apart from the relationship. Instead, communication between the relationship parties, and with third-party outsiders and social institutions, shapes the dynamic boundary that distinguishes the 'inside' from the 'outside' of a relationship. 'Relationship' and 'context' bleed into each other in complex ways. (45)

Monologic, Dualistic, and Dialectical Visions

Finally, with regard to the fourth theme, 'dialogue' as distinct from 'monologue'," Baxter and Montgomery maintain that a dialectical view of personal relationships stands in stark contrast to a monologic or dualistic view of personal relationships. "Dialectics, in its many variants, including dialogism and relational dialectics, contrasts markedly with alternative monologic and dualistic views" (45). The writers point out that "monologic approaches treat communication as one-sided and unvoiced. As in a monologue, the focus is on sameness, on the centripetal to the neglect of the centrifugal-centripetal dynamic, a force that creates a fiction of consistency and completeness" (45).

On the other hand, the researchers remark, "Dualism, in contrast to monologism, does acknowledge and give expression to countervailing forces in relationships. Dualistic perspectives are characterized by simple, static polarities, each element of which is an anchoring point on a single dimension. Communication between relational partners reflects either a choice of one polarity over another or the independent enactment of each polarity" (46).

Lastly, the investigators present,

Dialectical approaches, including relational dialectics, implicate interactive opposition. Multiple points of view maintain their voices as they play with and off of one another. Dialectics detours communication scholars from the search

for 'shared meanings' and homeostatic 'solutions' by celebrating the multiplicity of opposing perspectives. Dialectical thinking is not directed toward a search for the 'happy mediums' of compromise and balance, but instead focuses on the messier, less logical, and more inconsistent unfolding practices of the moment.

(46)

In summary, Baxter and Montgomery recount,

To commit to a relational-dialectics view is to accept that individuals are socially constructed in the ongoing interplay of unity and difference. Communication events, relationships, and life itself are ongoing and unfinalizable, always 'becoming,' never 'being.' There are no ideal goals, no ultimate endings, no elegant end states of balance. There is only an indeterminate flow, full of unforeseeable potential that is realized in interaction. We think of this phenomenon as akin to an off-balance pendulum moving unsymmetrically through time at an irregular pace. This view, which is admittedly unmethodical and indefinite, necessarily flows from accepting the integrity of multiple, valid, and contradictory perspectives engaged in dialogue. (47)

According to Baxter and Montgomery, "A healthy relationship is not one in which the interplay of opposites has been extinguished or resolved, because these opposing features are inherent in the very fabric of relating. Instead, a healthy relationship is one in which the parties manage to satisfy both oppositional demands, that is, relational well-being is marked by the capacity to achieve 'both/and' status" (6). Furthermore, the evaluators point out, "The ongoing interplay between oppositional features is what enables a relationship to exist as a dynamic social

entity” (6). However, the examiners comment, “The social sciences are not theoretically well positioned to understand this ‘both/and’ quality of relating” (5).

A relational dialectics perspective, though, attempts to understand and explain the ‘both/and’ – ness of relationships, Baxter and Montgomery uphold. While relational dialectics is more of a metatheoretical orientation – that is, it is made up of many different theories and perspectives compiled together – rather than a theory in the traditional sense, the theorists maintain it is still a useful approach for understanding and explaining the dynamics of interpersonal relationships. Baxter and Montgomery put forth,

Dialectics is not a ‘theory’ as the term is traditionally used. It lacks the structural intricacies of formal, traditional theories; it offers not extensive hierarchical array of axiomatic or propositional arguments. It does not represent a single, unitary statement of generalizable predictions. Dialectics describes, instead, a small set of conceptual assumptions. These assumptions, which revolve around the notions of contradiction, change, praxis, and totality, constitute what is better thought of as a metatheoretical perspective. (6)

It is to these four core principles, contradiction, change, praxis, and totality, of a dialectics perspective which the discussion will subsequently turn.

Contradiction

The first foundational concept of Relational Dialectics Theory is contradiction. According to Baxter and Montgomery, “The term ‘contradiction’ holds a technical meaning to dialectical theorists and refers to ‘the dynamic interplay between unified oppositions’” (8). While in most contexts the word “contradiction” implies something negative, in the context of

relational dialectics the word “contradiction” conjures neither positive nor negative feelings, but instead is viewed as an important and necessary part of life. The assessors impart,

In some respects, it is unfortunate that the term ‘contradiction’ is used by dialectical theorists to reference a core concept. After all, in common language use, a ‘contradiction’ connotes something negative, an incongruity or inconsistency in a person’s reasoning or action. One of the most powerful criticisms a person can make about others is that they have ‘contradicted’ themselves. However, from a dialectical perspective, the term ‘contradiction is liberated from any negative connotations whatsoever. Contradictions are inherent in social life and not evidence of failure or inadequacy in a person or in a social system. In fact, contradictions are the basic ‘drivers’ of change, according to a dialectic perspective. (7)

Oppositions

Baxter and Montgomery break down the definition of “contradiction” beginning with the concept of “oppositions” (8). “In general terms, two tendencies or features of a phenomenon are ‘oppositions’ if they are actively incompatible and mutually negate one another” (8). The surveyors contend that there are two types of oppositions, negative and positive, which, the theorists suggest, are better classified as “logically defined” and “functionally defined” (8).

The first type of opposition, negative, or “logically defined,’ according to Baxter and Montgomery,

Takes the form ‘X and not X.’ That is, an opposition consists of some feature and its absence. For instance, ‘loving’ versus ‘not loving’ is a logically defined contradiction in personal relationships. Although ‘loving’ has specific properties,

‘not loving’ is defined by the absence of those properties and thus contains everything that is different from ‘loving’. For example, one is arguably not ‘loving’ while undertaking such divergent actions as insulting, interviewing, swimming, and so on. (8)

On the contrary, the second type of opposition, positive, or “functionally defined,” according to Baxter and Montgomery,

Take[s] the form ‘X and Y,’ where both ‘X’ and ‘Y’ are distinct features that function in incompatible ways such that each negates the other. For example, ‘hating’ could be argued as a functional opposition to ‘loving.’ Functionally defined oppositions are easier to study than logically defined oppositions simply because functional polarities reference distinct phenomena. (8)

However, Baxter and Montgomery caution, there are a couple of difficulties with functionally defined oppositions. First, the authors identify, it is up to the researcher to show that “X” and “Y” are in fact functionally opposite, which can be challenging because what comprises a functional opposition may vary depending upon the context, culture, time period, and so on (8-9). Second, the writers highlight, a particular phenomena may have more than one opposition. The researchers elaborate,

A second complication of functionally defined opposites is that they are not likely to function in a binary manner. Many oppositions, not just one, are likely to exist in relation to a given bipolar feature. Thus, for example, the researcher interested in examining the feature of ‘certainty’ from a dialectical perspective might identify several dialectical oppositions that coexist: certainty-unpredictability, certainty-novelty, certainty-mystery, certainty-excitement, and so forth. The

complete dialectical understanding of ‘certainty’ rests on the researcher’s ability to understand the complexity of multiple oppositions of which ‘certainty’ is an element. (9)

Therefore, Baxter and Montgomery resolve, the study of contradiction must not stop with an understanding of oppositions, but must also include an understanding of the unity of oppositions. According to the writers, “Opposition is a necessary but not sufficient condition for contradiction. In addition, the oppositions must simultaneously be unified or interdependent with one another. This brings us to the second element of contradiction – the unity of oppositions” (9).

Unity of Oppositions

Baxter and Montgomery specify that there are two types of unity of oppositions, unity of identity and interactive unity. The basis of the first type of dialectical unity, unity of identity, the investigators expose, is that “each oppositional tendency in social life presupposes the existence of the other for its very meaning...The concept of ‘certainty,’ for example, is meaningful only because we have an understanding of its logical and/or functional oppositions; without knowledge of ‘uncertainty,’ ‘chaos,’ ‘unpredictability,’ and so forth, the concept of ‘certainty’ would be meaningless” (9).

The foundation for the second type of dialectical unity, interactive unity, the examiners disclose, is that,

The oppositional tendencies are unified practically and interactively as interdependent parts of a larger social whole...For example, in the context of personal relationships, individual autonomy and relational connection are unified oppositions. The two tendencies form a functional opposition in that the total

autonomy of parties precludes their relational connection, just as total connection between parties precludes their individual autonomy. However, individual autonomy and relational connection form a practical, interdependent unity, as well. Connection with others is necessary in the construction of a person's identity as an autonomous individual, just as relational connection is predicated on the continuing existence of the parties' unique identities. Thus, in a contradiction, oppositions negate one another at the same time that they are interdependent or unified with one another. Practical unity is the basis of the 'both/and' quality of contradictions. (9-10)

Dynamic Interplay of Oppositions

Finally, in order to completely understand the concept of contradiction one must realize that unified oppositions are not static, but rather are dynamic. The unified oppositions play off of one another, struggling against each other, creating tension between them that generates movement and change in personal relationships. According to Baxter and Montgomery,

The third requisite condition for a contradiction is dynamic interplay or tension between the unified oppositions. Dialectical tension is not a negative force according to a dialectical perspective; instead, the term simply refers to the ongoing dynamic interaction between unified oppositions. In fact, it is the interplay of opposing tendencies that serves as the driving force for ongoing change in any social system, including personal relationships. (10)

It is the interaction between opposites that differentiates a dialectical perspective from a dualistic one. While both perspectives focus on opposites, a dualistic perspective views

opposites as static and parallel, while a dialectic perspective views opposites as dynamic and perpendicular. According to Baxter and Montgomery,

In dualism, opposites are conceived as more or less static and isolated phenomena that coexist in parallel but whose dynamic interaction is ignored. For example, research efforts to understand self-disclosure and its binary opposite, privacy regulation, have usually proceeded quite separately from each other. This research is dualistic so long as each phenomenon is conceived to be definitionally and developmentally independent. (10)

To the contrary, Baxter and Montgomery find, “A dialectical perspective emphasizes how parties manage the simultaneous exigence for both disclosure and privacy in their relationships and, especially, how the ‘both/and’ – ness of disclosure and privacy is patterned through their interplay across the temporal course of the relationship” (10).

Dialectic Moments

As expressed by Donna R. Pawlowski (1998) in her article entitled, *Dialectical Tensions in Marital Partners’ Accounts Of Their Relationships*, the dynamic interplay of oppositions operates in the way of “dialectic moments,” that is, the degree to which a particular pole is dominant. Pawlowski presents four such “dialectic moments” that regulate the interplay of oppositions, including “Pole-A Dominant Moment,” “Pole-B Dominant Moment,” “Double-Negotiation Moment,” and “Moment of Equilibrium”. Concerning the first “dialectic moment,” “Pole-A Dominant,” Pawlowski offers that pole A is favored at the expense of pole B. For example, Pawlowski poses, “If pole A is interdependence and pole B is independence, this particular ‘moment’ would assume that relational partners are being more dependent on each other at the expense of individual autonomy” (397).

Conversely, Pawlowski posits that in the second “dialectic moment,” “Pole-B Dominant,” pole B is favored at the expense of pole A. For example, Pawlowski provides, “In this instance, the interdependence of the relationship would be the submissive force and the individual partners would be acting more in their own interests” (397). However, Pawlowski proposes that sometimes neither pole is dominant because each pole is equally competing against the other and neither need in the relationship is being met; this “dialectic moment” is referred to as the, “Double-Negotiation Moment”. For example, Pawlowski portrays, “Neither openness nor closedness is the dominant pole and relational partners’ struggle between each state in the relationship” (397).

In contrast, Pawlowski claims that, on rare occasions, both poles are dominant at the same time and each partners’ opposing needs are met equally in the relationship; this “dialectic moment” is referred to as the, “Moment of Equilibrium”. For example, Pawlowski perceives, “This state is a temporary interval of ongoing motion between the poles in which individuals are content with the simultaneous fluctuation of the poles. Partners may be comfortable feeling both openness toward and privacy from each other” (397).

Therefore, Pawlowski concludes,

Opposing forces struggle with and against one another for dominance. One pole of an opposition is not necessarily dominant at all times and may change places or shift in dominance at different times in the relationship...These moments are not seen as permanent states, but fluid changes within relationships. The contradiction, or tension, is guided by the dominance of the dialectical moment at a particular time. Although previous research has examined separate poles of the tensions, current views prefer a ‘both-and’ perspective on these tensions. This

perspective examines the contradiction as a whole in which both sides of the poles are operating at the same time. (397-98)

Furthermore, Baxter and Montgomery conclude, “Dualism emphasizes opposites in parallel, whereas dialectics emphasizes the interplay of oppositions. Dualistic thought is ‘either/or’ in nature, in contrast to the ‘both/and’ emphasis in dialectical thought” (10).

Change

The second assumption of Relational Dialectics Theory is change. According to the Baxter and Montgomery, “Change is inherent in contradiction because the interplay of unified oppositions results in a system that is perpetually in flux. Thus, the second core concept of a dialectical perspective – change – is virtually inseparable from the first concept. Nonetheless, we will discuss it separately in order to elaborate on some important features of dialectical change” (10). In order to understand change one must also understand its opposite, stability. The evaluators expand, “Stability and change form a dialectical unity. Stability punctuates change, providing the ‘baseline’ moments by which change is discerned. Put simply, dialectical change is the interplay of stability and flux” (10). While all dialectical perspectives include the concept of change, a relational dialectics perspective differs from other dialectical perspectives in its emphasis on “formal cause” as opposed to “efficient cause,” and indeterminate change as opposed to teleological change.

Causation

“Efficient cause” is a type of linear change where one thing causes another; whereas “formal cause” focuses on patterns and relationships between phenomena where one thing is not necessarily the cause of the other. According to Baxter and Montgomery,

Aristotle's 'efficient cause' refers to linear antecedent-consequent relations – that is, the familiar cause-effect relation – and whether this relation is one-way (X is a cause of Y) or reciprocal (X and Y cause and are caused by one another). By contrast, Aristotle's 'formal cause' refers to the patterned relation among phenomena – that is, the 'pattern, shape, outline, or recognizable organization in the flow of events or in the way that objects are constituted'. Unlike an emphasis on one-way or reciprocal cause-effect relations, formal cause focuses attention on how phenomena fit together into patterns, how events flow and unfold over time, and how patterns shift and change; from the perspective of formal cause, none of the component phenomena is 'caused' by any prior occurrence of another phenomenon. (11)

Theorists that emphasize "efficient cause" also distinguish principal from secondary contradictions; whereas theorists that emphasize "formal cause" focus on the relationship between opposites or contradictions, not on contradictions as causing and affecting phenomena. According to Baxter and Montgomery, "A case for efficient-cause thinking can be argued for those dialectical theorists who differentiate principal from secondary contradictions. Of the many contradictions that coexist in a social system, the principal contradiction is identified as the primary driver of change, that is, the contradiction whose existence and development determines or influences the existence and development of the other secondary contradictions" (11). For example, the surveyors show, "From the perspective of dialectical materialism, the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is regarded as the principal contradiction. The differentiation of primary and secondary contradictions clearly implicates an antecedent-

consequent causal logic in order to sort out which contradiction has the greatest effect on the others” (11).

In contrast, Baxter and Montgomery expose,

Work in transactional dialectics by Altman and his colleagues emphasizes ‘formal cause’. Work in this tradition focuses on the processes of individual/communal interplay as they are patterned holistically in social, physical, and temporal environments. Emphasis is not on contradiction as an independent variable that affects other phenomena, nor is it the focus on contradiction as a dependent variable affected by other forces. The individual/communal contradiction simply is, and the research task is to captures its fluctuating pattern through time. (11-12)

Teleological vs. Indeterminate Change

The second distinction that separates a relational dialectics perspective from other dialectical perspectives is its emphasis on indeterminate versus teleological change. Teleological change is goal-oriented, meaning that change is necessary to direct phenomena to an ideal end state; whereas in indeterminate change there is no ultimate goal, change is necessary only to move and shift phenomena from one place to another. According to Baxter and Montgomery, “A teleological approach to change presumes that change is the servant of ideal end states, or goals; phenomena are more or less ‘pulled’ toward an ideal outcome. By contrast, indeterminacy presumes that change is not directed toward some necessary or ideal end state; rather, change involves ongoing quantitative and qualitative shifts that simply move a system to a different place” (12).

Indeterminate change can include either cyclical or linear change. Cyclical change is a back and forth movement between two unified opposites; whereas linear change is a one-way change that results in a permanent change in the relationship. The researchers explain,

The ongoing indeterminate interplay of opposites can involve both cyclical change and linear change. That is, change can be characterized by a repeating pattern (cyclical) and/or a series of changes representing movement from one quantitative or qualitative state to another (linear). Cyclical change occurs when the interplay of oppositions takes on a back-and-forth flavor, with relationship parties emphasizing first one oppositional tendency and then the other in an ongoing ebb-and-flow pattern. Visually, such an ebb-and-flow pattern would look like repeating sine waves, although the cycles would typically be characterized by varying amplitudes and rhythms through time rather than the uniformity and regularity of sine waves. In contrast, linear change involves a series of nonrepeating moves in which the system is permanently change, either quantitatively or qualitatively, with no return to a previous state. (13)

When the two types of change are combined it creates what Baxter and Montgomery refer to as “spiraling change” (13). According to the examiners,

These two types of change can be combined into linear, cyclic change, or what Werner and Baxter (1994) refer to as spiraling change. Strictly speaking, cyclicity assumes that phenomena recur in identical form. Because cyclicity in this strict sense is impossible in the interplay of oppositions, ‘spiraling change’ is probably a more accurate label by which to describe repeating change. A spiral involves recurrence but recognizes that phenomena never repeat in identical form;

a spiral thus combines elements of both cyclical change (recurrence) and linear change (the absence of identical repetition). (13)

Praxis

Thus far, the interplay of oppositions has only been discussed at an abstract level; however, the third core principle of Relational Dialectics Theory, praxis, occurs at a more concrete level. According to Baxter and Montgomery, “The interplay of oppositions is a conception of change that is cast at a highly abstract level. Giving voice to the opposing tendencies in the concrete actions of social actors brings us to the third tenet of a dialectical perspective: praxis” (13).

Baxter and Montgomery characterize praxis in the following way, “People are at once actors and objects of their own actions, a quality that dialectical theorists have termed ‘praxis’” (13). As per the concept of praxis, individuals both influence and are influenced by their current and future choices and actions. For example, at one moment in time an individual may decide that he or she does not want to spend time with his or her friends, perhaps because the individual is upset with the friends or is too busy to spend time with friends. Whatever the reason, the individual’s decision to neglect his or her friends in the present may affect the individual’s future relationship with the friends. For example, because the friends felt neglected in the past, they may choose not to invite the individual to future social gatherings. Therefore, an individual’s past choices or interactions can influence or affect an individual’s future choices or interactions.

According to Baxter and Montgomery,

People function as proactive actors who make communicative choices in how to function in their social world. Simultaneously, however, they become reactive objects, because their actions become reified in a variety of normative and

institutionalized practices that establish the boundaries of subsequent communicative moves. People are actors in giving communicative life to the contradictions that organize their social life, but these contradictions in turn affect their subsequent communicative actions. Every interaction event is a unique moment at the same time that each is informed by the historicity of prior interaction events and informs future events. (13-14)

The reporters continue their explanation of praxis,

Praxis focuses on the concrete practices by which social actors produce the future out of the past in their everyday lives. Dialectical theorists situate praxis in different domains of social life, depending on their particular interests. Marxist dialectical materialists, for example, center their study of contradiction in the material resources of production and consumption by the proletariat and bourgeoisie classes in capitalist societies. By contrast, dialectical theorists who study communication in relationships situate the interplay of opposing tendencies in the symbolic, not material, practices of relationship parties. They emphasize communication as a symbolic resource through which meanings are produced and reproduced. Through their jointly enacted communicative choices, relationship parties respond to dialectical exigencies that have been produced from their past interactional history together. At the same time, the communicative choices of the moment alter the dialectical circumstances that the pair will face in future interactions. (14)

A couple's communicative choices or actions may result in a variety of patterns of dialectical change. Baxter and Montgomery illustrate,

A pair that perceives too little interdependence and too much partner autonomy in their relationship could respond in any of several ways, ranging, for example, from naively optimistic efforts to gloss over or ignore the tension, to efforts that emphasize increased interdependence and decreased autonomy, to fatalistic efforts to accept the inevitability of their situation, to efforts to redefine what they mean by togetherness and separation. Whatever their choices at the moment, their future interactions will be constrained by those choices. (14)

Totality

Up until this point, the contradictions have been examined individually; however, the contradictions do not function independently of one another and thus cannot be examined that way. Instead, the contradictions must be studied in conjunction with one another to complete the picture of a relational dialectics perspective (Baxter and Montgomery 14). According to Baxter and Montgomery, “To this point, we have tended to discuss contradictions one at a time, as if each contradiction functioned in isolation from the interplay of other opposing tendencies. In turning to the fourth dialectical tenet, we complicate this oversimplified view” (14).

The fourth foundational principle of Relational Dialectics Theory, totality, Baxter and Montgomery regard, can be defined as “the assumption that phenomena can be understood only in relation to other phenomena” (14). However, the word “totality” does not equal completeness, as in a complete picture. The world, especially the relationships within it with all of their subtleties and complexities, cannot be wrapped up or tied up in a neat little package that contains everything there is to know about it because it is always in motion, it is always changing. Instead, totality only catches a glimpse of the world and its relationships, with its ephemeral and fluctuating patterns, at a particular moment in time. Baxter and Montgomery illuminate, “From

a dialectical perspective, the notion of totality does not mean ‘completeness’ in the sense of producing a total or complete portrait of a phenomenon; the world is an unfinalizable process in which we can point, at best, to fleeting and fluid patterns of the moment. Totality, from a dialectical perspective, is a way to think about the world as a process of relations or interdependencies” (14-15).

The tenet of totality, at a glance, seems to be shared with several other theories; however, upon closer inspection one can see that dialectical totality differs distinctly from other perspectives. Dialectical totality differs from the totality of other theories in its focus on, and analysis of, contradictions; specifically, on the location of contradictions, the interdependency of contradictions, and the contextualization of the interplay between and among contradictions (Baxter and Montgomery 15). As laid out by Baxter and Montgomery,

On its face, the concept of totality appears to be the same as any number of other theoretical orientations that emphasize such holistic notions as contextuality or relatedness. Put simply, dialectics endorses one form of holism, but not all holistic theories are dialectical; the criterion that distinguishes dialectical holism from other holistic perspectives is the focus on contradictions as the unit of analysis. Dialectical totality, in turn, implicates three issues: where contradictions are located, interdependencies among contradictions, and contextualization of contradictory interplay. (15)

Location of Contradictions

The first distinguishing characteristic of dialectical totality is the location of contradictions. As stated by Baxter and Montgomery, “The tension of opposing dialectical forces is conceptually located at the level of the interpersonal relationship. Dialectical attention

is directed away from the individual as the unity of analysis and toward the dilemmas and tensions that inhere in relating. Dialectical tensions are played out, relational force against relational force” (15). Thus, Relational Dialectics Theory focuses on the tensions that occur between pairs, not on the tensions that occur within individuals, as they are enacted through communicating with, and relating to, one another.

When two individuals join together in a relationship it can create a multitude of dialectical tensions. Sometimes the pair can recognize and explain the tensions they are feeling, but individuals do not need to be aware of, and do not need to be able to express, the tensions in order for them to be present. According to Baxter and Montgomery, “As people come together in any social union, they create a host of dialectical forces. Although partners are aware of and can describe many of the dialectical dilemmas they face, a dialectical tension does not need to be consciously felt or described. Dialectical interplay may work ‘backstage’ beyond partners’ mindful awareness, nonetheless contributing to relational change” (15).

Each of the individuals in the relationship have joint stake in the dialectical tensions that are created by their union. However, just because the relationship partners are co-owners of the tensions does not mean that their undertaking will be a harmonious one. More often than not the pair will be out of sync in their experience of contradictions and that this asynchronism may show itself in the form of interpersonal conflict. According to Baxter and Montgomery,

Dialectical tension is thus jointly ‘owned’ by the relationship parties by the very fact of their union. But joint ownership does not translate to perfect synchrony in the parties’ perceptions; often there is little commonality in partners’ experiences of relational contradictions. As Giddens (1979) has noted, dialectical interplay may surface as interpersonal conflict between parties if they are ‘out of sync’ in

their momentary experience of a contradiction, such that one person aligns his or her interests with one pole and the other person aligns his or her interests with another pole. (15)

For example, the examiners exhibit,

Consider, for example, a situation in which one relational partner wants more autonomy of action free from interdependence with the other, whereas the other person wants even more interdependence and connection. This pair is likely to engage in interpersonal conflict because their synchrony is so low. Whatever the pair does in the conflict at the moment will help to shape the relational dilemma between autonomy and connection that they will face in the future. The underlying dilemma between forces of independence and forces of interdependence will never leave the pair so long as their union persists, although subsequent manifestations of the dilemma may or may not be enacted in the form of interpersonal conflict. In sum, interpersonal conflict is not the equivalent of dialectical tension, although under asynchronous circumstances dialectical tension may be manifested in interpersonal conflict between the parties. (15-16)

Interdependence Among Contradictions

The second factor that sets dialectical totality apart from other perspectives is its concentration on the interdependence among contradictions. As articulated by Baxter and Montgomery,

A system usually contains not one but many contradictions; Cornforth (1968) describes this as the 'knot of contradictions' that coexist and that change in relation to one another over time. In analytically disentangling this dialectical

'knot,' dialectical theorists have introduced two basic distinctions in type of contradictions. The first of these distinctions, between primary and secondary contradictions, was discussed earlier. The second distinction is that between internal contradictions and external contradictions. (16)

Relationships are guided by contradictions, or dialectical tensions, and these tensions can occur both from within the relationship, internal contradictions, and from without the relationship, external contradictions. According to the canvassers,

As the term 'internal' might suggest, an internal contradiction is constituted within the boundaries of the system under study, whereas an external contradiction is constituted at the nexus of the system with the larger suprasystem in which it is embedded. Within the context of personal relationships, internal contradictions are those oppositional forces that function within the boundaries of the dyad and that are inherent to dyadic relating: for example, how the partners can be open and expressive at the same time that they sustain privacy and protectiveness. (16)

By the contrary, Baxter and Montgomery construe, External contradictions are those inherent oppositional forces that operate at the nexus of the dyad and its external, social environment: for instance, how partners can conform to society's conventions for relating at the same time that they construct a unique relational bond. External contradictions underscore that relationships are inherently social entities. That is, couples and society sustain a relationship of sorts, and in so doing they engage inherent contradictions of such relationships. (16)

Both internal and external contradictions interact with one another in unique ways. The reporters confirm,

From a dialectical perspective, internal and external contradictions are presumed to interrelate in dynamic ways. For example, society's conventions for self-disclosure in relationships no doubt relate to a given couple's experience of their internal dilemma between openness and closedness. One task for the dialectical researcher is to determine the complex pattern of interdependencies among internal and external contradictions that characterize relationships as they move dynamically through time. (16)

Contextualization of Dialectical Interplay

The third, and final, feature that separates dialectical totality from other theoretical orientations is its attention to the contextualization of dialectical interplay. Dialectical tensions are universal, but how they are enacted can vary depending upon the context in which they are carried out. According to Baxter and Montgomery,

Contradiction is universal but the particulars of the contradicting process vary from one context to another. Dialectical scholars are thus obliged to study contradictions *in situ* at both universal and particular levels, in contrast to efforts that might seek to reduce contradictions to abstractions stripped of their localized particularities. Social phenomena encompass concrete, environmental, situational, and interpersonal factors that are integrally related with issues of praxis and dialectical change. (17)

Internal Dialectical Tensions

According to Leslie A. Baxter (2004) in her article entitled, *A Tale of Two Voices: Relational Dialectics Theory*, three main internal dialectical tensions consistently occur within the context of interpersonal relationships. However, this list of tensions was never meant to be exhaustive, as there are infinite possibilities of tensions that can exist in personal relationships, but these three tensions were the ones that continued to show up over and over in the research. The three internal dialectical tensions are autonomy-connection, openness-closedness, and predictability-novelty.

As described by Baxter,

Although I articulated three recurring families of contradictions that kept popping up in study after study dialectics of integration–separation, stability–change, expression–nonexpression—it was never my intent to claim that these contradictions were exhaustive, and it also was not my intent that these contradictions should be used as abstract categorical ‘cookie-cutters.’ I have accumulated several years of empirical work to examine contradictions *in situ*, many of which have involved coauthored work on family relationships with my colleague, Dawn Braithwaite. Considered as a whole, these situated studies underscore that contradictions such as integration–separation have multiple strands of meaning that are constituted differently depending on the particular kind of relating under study. (185-186)

Autonomy vs. Connectedness

The first internal contradiction is autonomy-connection. As posited by Baxter and Montgomery,

The themes of closeness and distance are fundamental in our culture's understanding of personal relationships. These themes are reflected in self-help books for 'women who love too much' and 'men who can't let go.' They provide the metric for identifying 'long-distance relationships' and 'cohabitators.' They underlie such metaphors as 'my other half,' 'soul mates,' and 'two peas in a pod.'

The themes of closeness and distance are just as popular in scholarly understandings of personal relationships. (79)

However, this perception of the internal dialectical tension, autonomy-connection, is flawed. Baxter and Montgomery explain,

In both venues, closeness tends to be equated with relational 'goodness' and distance with relational 'badness.' The purpose of this chapter is to rethink the constructs of closeness and distance from a relational-dialectics perspective.

From this view, relationship parties are, as Bakhtin suggests, always poised on the dialogic edge between unity and differentiation. They face the challenge of sustaining fused interdependence with one another while simultaneously sustaining differentiated, independent selves. The dialogic boundary between connectedness and separateness is the dynamic threshold where the 'both/and' – ness of connectedness and separateness is negotiated on an ongoing basis. (79)

Thus, relational autonomy does not reveal that something is wrong, missing, or lacking in a relationship; just as relational connectedness does not reveal that all is well and complete in a relationship. Likewise, relational connectedness does not equal greater relational intimacy and affection, nor does it equal greater closeness. Neither is relational connectedness equivalent to relational interdependence or partner similarity. Furthermore if two people have increased

connectedness in their relationship it does not mean that their relationship is good, or better, than those who have increased autonomy in their relationship. Instead, a balance of both autonomy and connectedness is needed in order to sustain healthy relationships (Baxter and Montgomery 80).

As indicated by Baxter and Montgomery, “An individual relationship party does not ‘negotiate away’ his or her separateness to become dependent on the other person. Instead, it is the joint dialogue of the two parties that simultaneously constructs ‘connectedness’ and ‘separateness,’ both of which are inherent to the parties’ relating. Relationship parties are thus dependent on their relationship, not on one another” (90). In addition, Baxter and Montgomery add, “Relationship parties experience the connection-separation dialectic as two oppositional freedoms. The contradiction inherent in these two freedoms, of course, is that one party’s freedom of dependence constrains the other party’s freedom of interdependence” (91). Thus, one of the most common dialogues between relationship parties, that illustrates the contradiction, autonomy-connection, in its most basic form is about wanting to spend time together with one’s partner versus wanting to spend time apart from one’s partner.

Leslie A. Baxter (2004) in her article entitled, *Relationships as Dialogues*, exemplifies the tension between integration and separation. “At a more mundane level, integration-separation can be constructed by relationship parties in terms of their negotiation surrounding how much time to spend with one another versus time spent apart to meet other obligations. This time-management radiant of the integration-separation contradiction appears to be particularly salient in romantic and friendship relationships” (9).

However, as previously expressed by Baxter and Montgomery, contradictions do not operate in a binary manner; thus, a single contradiction may subscribe to a multitude of opposites.

Furthermore, the meaning of a particular contradiction, and how that contradiction is acted out, will also vary depending upon the context. Baxter mentions, “Such multivocality is readily apparent, for example, in the integration-separation contradiction. The dialogue of integration and separation has been given a variety of labels in my program of research, and in the research of others. Although some of these labels are mere synonyms, others reflect subtle, situation-specific constructions of the interplay of integration and separation” (9).

One such specific context in which the tension, autonomy-connection, is played out is in dual-career marriages. As exhibited by Baxter and Montgomery,

Conceptions of ‘connectedness’ and ‘separateness’ are not only fluid within a relationship’s history, but, in addition, qualitatively different meanings of the dialectic seem likely to emerge for relationships embedded in different contexts. Spouses in dual-career marriages, for example, are likely to experience the dialectic in qualitatively different ways from spouses in single-career marriages. In single-career marriages, dilemmas of connectedness and separateness can be experienced as ‘home versus work,’ with each opposition aligned with the vested interests of the home-based spouse and the out-of-home spouse, respectively. (97)

Alternatively, Baxter and Montgomery present,

The connection-separation dialectic becomes qualitatively more complex in marriages where both spouses have professional careers outside the home. In her qualitative study of several couples who had dual careers in the corporate world, Hertz (1986) observed a struggle so intense between autonomy and contingency (connection) that she noted how remarkable it was that such pairs were able to exist at all. Dual-career partners faced a series of difficult choices in organizing

the competing demands of their respective autonomous careers and the ‘third career’ of their marriage. Job-related responsibilities such as extensive travel commitments and long hours at the office and working at home in the evenings and on the weekends constrained time available to both partners to invest in the ‘career’ of their marriage; similarly, the demands of their ‘marital career’ detracted from their respective professional responsibilities. The competing demands of career and marriage appear to be exacerbated for couples who decide to have children. (97-98)

Another unique context in which the contradiction, autonomy-connection, may be represented is in the tension between individual and relational identity. As expressed by Baxter, I discussed above one possible radiant of integration-separation interplay— similarity and difference between partners [similarity in meanings assigned to the relationship, not similarity between individual attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors]. I have also invoked this contradiction as a dialogue of identity construction for the parties; that is, constructing and sustaining an identity as an individual beyond the ‘we’ of the relationship, while relying on the partner to construct and sustain that ‘I’. (9)

In addition, the contradiction, autonomy-connection, may also be enacted in the form of rights versus obligations. On the word of Baxter, “This contradictory interplay can also be enacted as a discourse of rights versus obligations, as, for example, the individual’s right to have his/her own needs fulfilled versus the obligation to fulfill the partner’s needs. This radiant of the integration-separation dialectic has been identified for both friendships and romantic relationships” (9-10).

Thus, the contradiction, autonomy-connection, may take shape in a variety of forms, including both physical (i.e. the tension between being physically together versus physically apart) and emotional (i.e. the tension between being emotionally connected versus emotionally distant) and that the possibilities are only restricted by the contexts (Baxter 10). Baxter and Montgomery append, “‘Connectedness’ and ‘separateness’ hold qualitatively different meanings depending on a relationship’s changing chronotopes. Furthermore, at any given dialogic moment, multiple constructions are likely to coexist in dynamic interplay, together forming a cacophony of connectedness-separateness oppositions whose contrapuntal harmonies we have yet to understand fully” (98).

To complicate matters even further, at the same time as partners are trying to manage dialectical tensions between each other in the relationship, they are also trying to deal with tensions within themselves. As imparted by Baxter and Montgomery,

Research on the perceived salience of the connectedness-separateness contradiction, and on qualitative shifts in the contradiction’s meaning, assumes that both relationship parties are fully synchronized in their perceptions. Instead, relationship partners are quite likely to be in various degrees of synchrony at any given moment with respect to their perceptions of the connection-separation dynamic. While relationship parties share the dialogue of their present utterances together, each party is simultaneously participating in his or her ‘inner dialogues’ with superaddressees and with recalled voices from the past, and differences in these inner dialogues are integrally woven together with the dialogue of the moment. The issue of synchrony complicates the praxis improvisation at any given time; synchrony affects the extent to which interpersonal conflict will take

place between parties as they respond to the dialectic exigencies of the moment.

(98)

Spiraling Inversion

In order to reduce the likelihood of experiencing interpersonal conflict, partners must learn to manage the internal dialectical tension of autonomy-connection effectively. Couples typically respond to this particular dialectical tension in three specific ways, including spiraling inversion, segmentation, and privileging one polarity. With regard to the first tactic, spiraling inversion, Baxter and Montgomery explicate,

First, pairs appear to enact spiraling inversion, that is, spiraling back and forth through time between efforts to respond first to one oppositional demand and then to the opposing demand(s). When the relationship is excessively constraining to individual autonomy and independence, parties respond by initiating any number of autonomy enhancements, for example, spending less time together and more time alone in activities independent of their partner. Of course, such efforts create pressure from the opposing dialogic exigency, thereby necessitating a spiraling back at some point in the future with connection enhancements such as spending more time in joint activities. Such spiraling inversion is like a pendulum that forever moves back and forth; however, the movement of the pendulum is uneven and the trajectory of motion may vary depending on qualitative shifts in what ‘connectedness’ and ‘separateness’ mean to the pair. (99)

Segmentation

Concerning the second approach, segmentation, Baxter and Montgomery explain,

Segmentation is the second praxis improvisation reported with some frequency among couples, that is, efforts by the pair to segment the topics and activity domains of their relationship such that domains specialize in responsiveness to a particular dialectical demand. Some activities are negotiated as ‘Me Zones,’ whereas other activities are ‘We Zones.’ Hause and Pearson (1994) found that marital couples later in life were particularly likely to handle the tension between interdependence and independence by such segmentation. The particular activity domains are likely to change over time in response to the ongoing construction of ‘separateness’ and ‘connectedness’ in the dialogues of relationship parties. Thus, for examples, weekends might be framed by partners as ‘We Time’ at one point in their marriage and ‘Me Time’ at another point. (99)

Privileging One Polarity

Finally, with respect to the third method, privileging one polarity, Baxter and Montgomery elucidate,

A third praxis pattern reported with some frequency among couples is an effort to ignore the contradiction by privileging only one polarity, typically connectedness...Because the interplay of connectedness with autonomy is inherent in relating, such wishful efforts to ignore the opposing demand are likely to be short-lived; before long, the exigence of the neglected demand for autonomy will become salient to the pair. Thus, this third effort glosses over the presence of autonomy-connection tension. (100)

Openness vs. Closedness

The second internal contradiction is openness-closedness. One of the most common reasons couples cite for breaking up is the lack of openness between them (Baxter and Montgomery 135). Thus, one of the most frequent conversations between relationship partners, that depicts the contradiction, openness-closedness, in its simplest form concerns the tension between wanting to share information with one's partner versus wanting to keep information to one's self.

Openness and closedness are perceived as gate-keeping activity, where individuals choose what information to reveal and what information to conceal from others. As specified by Baxter and Montgomery, this type of gate-keeping activity can take on four different forms, including "openness with," "closedness with," "openness to," and "closedness to". The first two forms of gate-keeping activity, "openness with" and "closedness with" are controlled by the speaker; whereas the second two forms of gate-keeping activity, "openness to" and "closedness to", the evaluators asservate, are controlled by the listener (Baxter and Montgomery 132-133).

The first form, "openness with," refers to the act of self-disclosure, that is, revealing information about oneself to another, usually information that would normally be kept private. In opposition, the second form, "closedness with," refers to the act of nondisclosure, that is, keeping information to oneself. Finally, the third and fourth forms, "openness to" and "closedness to," refer to how open and responsive the listener is to the speaker's disclosures. Baxter and Montgomery summarize, "The 'with' conception of openness and closedness thus captures a person's gatekeeping with respect to the information contained within the territory of his or her self. By contrast, the 'to' conception of openness and closedness captures a person's receptivity to the other's gatekeeping decisions and actions" (132-133).

Openness With

Individuals self-disclose for a variety of reasons, including descriptive, evaluative, and relational. Individuals may reveal personal information about themselves (descriptive), how they feel about themselves (evaluative), or information or evaluations about their relationship with another (relational). These sorts of confessions produce a variety of benefits for the speaker, including contributions to his or her physical and emotional well-being (Baxter and Montgomery 133). Some of the benefits of self-disclosure include, catharsis and stress relief, building, maintaining, and enhancing intimate relationships and reducing loneliness, building trust, facilitating an environment of comfort and openness, obtaining emotional security and gaining confirmation from another, garnering social support, gathering feedback, enhancing self-understanding, presenting a particular image to another, and controlling and/or manipulating another's actions (Baxter and Montgomery 134-135).

Openness To

Consequently, listeners also listen in a variety of ways, including cognitive, affective, and behavioral. Individuals may listen by taking the point of view of another (cognitive), by understanding and relating to how another feels (affective), or by attending to another both verbally and nonverbally (behavioral) (Baxter and Montgomery 135).

Closedness With

While many scholars associate "closedness" with withholding information, or with nondisclosure, Baxter and Montgomery adduce that there are some types of closedness, such as "informational closedness," that include disclosure of impersonal, or superficial, matters (136). This kind of closedness serves beneficial social purposes, such as showing that relationship parties value the relationship for its own sake, not for the sake of their own personal motives or

gain. Furthermore, acquaintance, or non-intimate, relationships are also an essential part of one's social network. Because non-intimate relationships are high in small talk, or phatic communication, and are low in self-disclosure, they perform several important functions, including exposing relationship parties to new, rather than "recirculated," ideas, providing relationship parties with opportunities for social comparison, and facilitating "social cohesion" by bringing together groups of people who otherwise may not have been connected (Baxter and Montgomery 136-137).

Still, even though the benefits of self-disclosure are great, there are also dangers involved in revealing information about oneself to another. While it is tempting to want to share everything about oneself with another, one must be careful not to indulge in "excessive disclosure" (Baxter and Montgomery 137). Instead, one must establish boundaries, or "privacy territories," and abide by "informational privacy" (Baxter and Montgomery 137). According to Baxter and Montgomery,

The communication boundary management model developed by Petronio (1991, 1994) suggests that individuals need to establish a 'privacy territory' with clear boundaries that mark 'ownership' of a private self. Important to this privacy boundary is the sense of control that it gives the individual in determining others' access. Petronio has argued that people proactively control their privacy boundaries in order to prevent 'invasions' of privacy by others. Petronio, like other scholars of privacy, has not argued for absolute privacy but rather an equilibrium-driven balance between privacy and access. (137)

The risks associated with invasions of privacy are many, including others learning about one's negative side which may result in embarrassment or rejection, risking one's individual

autonomy which may diminish one's opportunity for self-reflection and growth apart from others, losing one's sense of efficacy and control, and embarrassing or hurting the invader which may, in turn, harm the relationship (Baxter and Montgomery 137-138). Meanwhile, the benefits of "informational privacy" are also great, and include protecting oneself from putting across a bad image, maintaining control, shielding the relationship from harm, saving oneself from being hurt, and keeping relationships with others from being negatively affected (Baxter and Montgomery 138).

Closedness To

While much attention has been given to how the speaker controls the gates of openness and closedness, that is, how he or she controls what information is revealed to, and what information is concealed from, the listener, much less attention has been given to how the listener controls how much or how little the speaker reveals to, or conceals from, him or her. According to Baxter and Montgomery, there are risks involved in responding to another's disclosures. For example, listening to someone tell about a serious personal struggle that he or she is going through could cause uneasiness or anxiety for the listener. In addition, always being available to another as a concerned and supportive listener could result in one's becoming a continuous caregiver to that person, a role that, consequently, comes with much emotional strain and loss of independence. Finally, by responding to another's disclosures, one runs the risk of being rejected by the other, especially if one's response is contrary to what the other person wants to hear (Baxter and Montgomery 139). Thus, there are both benefits and costs associated with self-disclosure and nondisclosure, and each individual performs his or her own cost-benefit analysis when deciding whether to confess or withhold information (Baxter and Montgomery 139-140).

Take, for example, the relationship between step-children and step-parents. Step-children experience strong tension between sharing information about themselves to their step-parents versus keeping information to themselves, because their relationship with their step-parents is greatly uncertain. Thus, step-children heavily weigh the rewards against the costs before deciding whether to disclose information to, or conceal information from, their step-parents. According to Baxter,

The interplay of expression and nonexpression also is constructed in multivocal ways, as can be illustrated with our stepchild-stepparent study mentioned above. Stepchildren reported several strands of complexity in this contradiction. For example, in important ways, open expression was opposed to the protection of self afforded by nonexpression—because the stepchild-stepparent was high in uncertainty, stepchildren feared that they could be embarrassed or hurt, yet they wanted to speak their minds openly. At the same time, open expression was opposed to the protection of others afforded by discretion—stepchildren wanted openness but felt that the absence of expression protected the feelings of fellow family members (particularly members from the family of origin)...A third strand of this contradiction was framed in terms of loyalty issues, with both openness and nonopenness regarded as matters of loyalty and disloyalty to various family members, especially the nonresidential parent. A fourth strand of this contradiction was idealization versus reality; stepchildren felt that open expression was characteristic of their idealization of ‘real families’ contrasted against the perceived reality of their stepfamilies. In sum, then, expression and nonexpression are in dialectical tension at multiple levels. Doubtless, similar

complexity characterizes this contradiction in other relational contexts, as well.

(10-11)

The Said and the Unsaid

From a relational dialectics perspective, Baxter and Montgomery signify that the dialectics of “openness with” and “closedness with,” as well as “openness to” and “closedness to,” take on three forms, including “the said and the unsaid,” “free talk and constrained talk,” and “inner speech and outer speech” (145). The first aspect, “the said and the unsaid,” refers to the tension between deriving meaning from the spoken words, or written text, versus deriving meaning from the unspoken words, or context. Baxter and Montgomery clarify, “Speakers must always face the communicative tension between the said and the unsaid. If they are too open to context, too much is left unsaid or the wrong semantic elements are left unsaid, and an utterance is likely to become confusing. On the other hand, if too much is said (i.e. inappropriate closedness to context), the utterance is likely to be overly pedantic” (146).

Free Talk and Constrained Talk

The second component, “free talk and constrained talk,” refers to the tension between individual ownership of words, and the freedom to choose, use, and combine them in whatever way the speaker chooses to suit his or her needs, versus co-ownership of words between speaker and context in which a speaker is constrained, or confined, to a limited number of “speech genres” from which to choose when communicating (Baxter and Montgomery 147). Baxter and Montgomery explain,

Researchers have assumed that speakers ‘own’ their words and thus are free to choose them and combine them in idiosyncratic ways suitable to their individual needs. Bakhtin gives us an alternative model of ‘co-ownership’ in which speakers

and the contexts into which they act share ownership. Bakhtin (1986) argued that people speak by invoking standard templates of talk forms, or what he called 'speech genres,' that is, 'definite and relatively stable typical forms for construction of the whole'. (147)

Baxter and Montgomery continue,

Speech genres are normatively shared by members of a speech community; they are not created by the individual speaker but instead are available to him or her as resources to be invoked in situated talk. Speech genres are integrally linked with the social situation or context into which the parties act. Certain social situations are constituted in certain kinds of genred talk. Thus, context exerts its 'ownership rights' by establishing the normative domain of the kinds of speech genres that can be uttered by speakers. (147)

Finally, Baxter and Montgomery explicate,

Bakhtin (1986) argued that speakers are not totally constrained by the situationally-determined speech genres available to them. Although some genres are more 'flexible, plastic, and free' than others, Bakhtin thought that most of the genres of interpersonal life had room for creative license by speakers. Further, Bakhtin viewed the number of possible genres available to speakers as so diverse that much freedom existed in the choice of which particular genre form to invoke in a particular situation. Thus, speakers are simultaneously open to and closed to the genred nature of contexted talk; in playing constraint against freedom in the enactment of speech genres, speakers enact unique improvisations that echo basic genre forms. (147)

Inner Speech and Outer Speech

The third, and final, element, “inner speech and outer speech,” refers to the tension between the external conversations that one has with others versus the internal conversations that one has with him or herself. Baxter and Montgomery elucidate,

The words vocalized by each speaker constitute the ‘outer speech’ of their exchange, but ‘outer speech’ is heavily populated by the nonvocalized ‘inner speech’ of each speaker, that is, ‘dialogues in our head’ wherein speakers engage in language-based thinking. Every instance of uttered talk is a manifestation of the ongoing interplay between inner and outer speech. Inner speech is populated with voices from the past (the already-spoken) and anticipated voices from the future (the anticipated voices of the addressee and the superaddressee). (148)

However, not all inner voices were created equal, some are louder than others, and these voices are said to function as “authoritative discourse” (Baxter and Montgomery 149). Baxter and Montgomery explain,

Bakhtin did not regard all voices as equal in the inner speech of a person’s psyche. Some of the already-spoken voices function as ‘authoritative discourse,’ that is, voices whose words are accepted in the psyche as sources of authority or ‘law.’ For example, a child who recites mentally to himself or herself a parent’s verbatim warning “Never go with strangers,’ is regarding the already-spoken words of the parent as authoritative. (149)

In addition to “authoritative discourse,” one’s inner voices may also function as “internally persuasive discourse” (Baxter and Montgomery 149). Baxter and Montgomery describe,

Other already-spoken voices function as ‘internally persuasive discourse,’ that is, words that are paraphrased by a person in his or her inner speech, words that partly belong to oneself and partly to another. For example, if the child thinks, ‘I don’t know this person who’s acting friendly toward me, so I shouldn’t go with him,’ the child has partly assimilated the parent’s already-spoken words, voicing them internally with his or her own accent. The ‘memorable messages’ that people recall being told by others illustrate internally persuasive, if not authoritative, already-spoken voices from a person’s past interactions.

‘Memorable messages,’ in such forms as recalled advice or vivid recollections of another’s words uttered in specific prior conversation, function as authoritative or persuasive voices in our present inner dialogues as we contemplate what to do or say next. (149)

In long-term relationships, such as marriage, each party’s inner speech is influenced by the voices from their past interactions together (Baxter and Montgomery 149). For example, the reporters depict an exchange between a husband and wife about the purchase of a china cabinet that the husband found earlier that day.

In prior exchanges between the pair, the husband had apparently been criticized by his wife for failing to take interest in and responsibility for household affairs. The husband’s efforts to locate a china cabinet apparently evidenced, from his perspective, his greater involvement in household affairs, and thus the persuasive

force of his wife's prior criticisms. However, his wife did not perceive the event similarly. She did not listen to the inner speech of the couple's prior discussions about involvement in household affairs, instead recalling prior statements by the husband in which she felt stripped of power by his assertion of his role as the income earner in the family. In responding to the persuasive inner speech of his wife's prior criticisms, the husband felt that he was doing something positive in locating a china cabinet. In responding to the persuasive inner speech of her husband's prior assertions of power, the wife regarded the husband's efforts surrounding the china cabinet as a further display of power imbalance in the marriage. (150)

In addition to being influenced by past interactions, one's inner speech is also influenced by anticipated future interactions. For example, Baxter and Montgomery illuminate, Inner speech contains not only the voices of the already-spoken but in addition contains proximal and distal anticipated voices. In particular, a person anticipates the immediate response of the other (the addressee) and the more remote and abstract response of the generalized other (the superaddressee). How will one's relationship partner respond to a certain revelation? How will others regard a person's communicative actions? Is one engaging in an ethical and moral manner in the conduct of interpersonal life? In pondering questions such as these, a person is engaging in an inner dialogue with yet-to-be-spoken voices. Outer speech, the verbalized utterance, reflects, in part, how a person has evaluated these imaginary inner dialogues with the addressee and the superaddressee. (150)

Baxter and Montgomery summarize, “When a person engages in outer speech, that is, when he or she speaks aloud, the utterance thus reflects many potential voices. It is in this sense that Bakhtin claimed that individual speakers can never ‘own’ utterances. Instead, utterances are jointly ‘owned’ by the already-spoken voices of the past, the anticipated voices of the future, and the accented voice of the self-as-becoming” (150).

Conflict

Tension, or conflict, arises when relationship partners have discrepancies over the two openness-closedness dialectics. According to Baxter and Montgomery, “The potential for interpersonal conflict rests in the asynchrony of these two openness-closedness dialectics. Conflict between relationship parties is likely when one party wants to disclose and the other doesn’t want to listen, or when one party doesn’t want to disclose and the other wants to receive such disclosures” (141). In order to reduce the likelihood of experiencing interpersonal conflict, partners must learn to manage the internal dialectical tension of openness-closedness effectively. Couples generally manage this particular dialectical tension in three distinct ways, including spiraling inversion, segmentation, and privileging one polarity.

Spiraling Inversion

According to Baxter and Montgomery,

While existing research appears to suggest that the ‘openness/closedness with’ dialectic is present in relationships, we have much less insight into how relationship parties practically cope. Nonetheless, a back-and-forth spiraling inversion between openness and closedness was posited over a decade ago by Altman and his colleagues, and the majority of work to date appears to support this analysis. In their questionnaire study of long-term romantic and marital pairs,

Baxter and Simon (1993) found results consistent with spiraling inversion. Conville's (1991) case study analyses suggest a similar embedded within a teleological model of synthesis. In studying interaction behaviors of acquainted dyads over a one-month period, VanLear (1991) found evidence of short-term cycles of openness and closedness recurring within conversations superimposed over larger openness-closedness cycles across conversations. (141)

Segmentation and Privileging One Polarity

In addition, Baxter and Montgomery found, "Baxter's (1990) interview study of romantic partners suggested that segmentation is also a frequent praxis pattern, with partners moving from topics in which disclosure is privileged to topics characterized by closedness" (141). Finally, the examiners discovered, "By contrast, Hause and Pearson's (1994) questionnaire study of married partners suggested the prevalence of denial; married respondents reported that they typically opted for 'total openness' with their partner [privileging one polarity]" (141).

Predictability vs. Novelty

The third, and final, internal contradiction is predictability-novelty. Previous efforts have favored predictability over novelty, as evidenced by such theories as Uncertainty Reduction Theory. According to the theory, relationship parties seek to "make the behavior of others predictable and understandable" (Baxter and Montgomery 108). In order to make the behavior of others predictable and understandable relationship parties must attempt to reduce the amount uncertainty between them by disclosing information about themselves to one another. Consequently, it is the need to reduce uncertainty that leads relationship parties to reveal information about themselves to one another. By reducing the uncertainty between them through self-disclosure, relationship parties are able to get to know each other better, grow closer to one

another, and build intimacy between each other. Conversely, continued uncertainty between relationship parties will serve to inhibit self-disclosure and emotional expression, which, in turn, will prohibit relationship growth and intimacy (Baxter and Montgomery 108).

Therefore, Baxter and Montgomery state,

The search for predictability and order is the scientific enterprise as it has been commonly understood. Scholarship that displays a 'spirit of wonder' in examining the implications of disorder is regarded as suspect within the mainstream. Thus, it is hardly surprising that certainty occupies the monologic seat of privilege in the study of communication in personal relationships. Existing research and theory on personal relationships values closure and certainty, whereas unpredictability and uncertainty are regarded as barriers to closeness. (106)

While many scholars have projected unpredictability as a negative phenomenon, others have presented it as a positive phenomenon, particularly in the form of "pleasant surprises" (Baxter and Montgomery 112). According to Baxter and Montgomery,

Evidence has accumulated from a diverse array of studies to suggest that uncertainty is not always a negative phenomenon and that it can, in fact, function positively. Planalp and her colleagues, for example, found that an uncertainty-generating event maintained or increased the closeness of the relationships for about 40% of their respondents. Consistent with this finding is a study by Kelley and Burgoon (1991) in which the highest level of satisfaction in their sample of married couples was found for pairs who reported uncertainty in the form of positively valenced violations of their expectations, that is, pleasant surprises...In

light of the research evidence, Berger and Gudykunst (1991) have noted that certainty does not appear to be universally positive and that it can even prove negative for relationship parties under certain conditions. (112)

This privileged view of certainty in personal relationships represents an incorrect and incomplete image of relating (Baxter and Montgomery 111). As argued by Baxter and Montgomery, some degree of uncertainty is necessary for relationship functioning, as illustrated in the research on breakups (114).

A number of scholars have suggested that uncertainty is important in its own right to relational well-being. For example, the significance of uncertainty in relationships is indirectly supported in the breakup research, where researchers have repeatedly found boredom to be a frequently expressed relationship complaint or expressed reason for breakup. Boredom, the result of subjective monotony, underscores the value of uncertainty in the form of novelty, spontaneity, and excitement for relational health. (114-115)

Furthermore, Baxter and Montgomery uphold that some degree of novelty in relationships is necessary to prevent “relationship atrophy” (115). “Some scholars have advanced an arousal-based explanation of the positive value of uncertainty or novelty in relationships” (115). Baxter and Montgomery continue,

Building on Mandler’s interruption theory of emotion and Schachter’s work in physiological arousal, has argued that emotions are experienced in personal relationships to the extent that the parties encounter important but unexpected change in their immediate environment. Positive emotions are those that result from positively valenced change, whereas negative emotions are those that result

from negatively valenced interruptions. The sensations of romantic love and liking, for example, are contingent on arousal that comes from positively valenced 'interruptions' or novel experiences. By contrast, emotional deadening, similar to Kelvin's notion of relationship atrophy, results when the parties experience insufficient novelty and unpredictability. Thus, the emotional intensity that characterizes personal relationships necessitates positively valenced uncertainty. (116)

Finally, Baxter and Montgomery pose that different relationships require different amounts of certainty and predictability. Take, for example, the differences in the need for certainty and predictability in Traditional versus Independent marriages.

Some scholars have argued that relationships also vary systematically in their propensities for certainty and uncertainty. For example, Fitzpatrick's (1988) marital types are characterized by very different ideologies toward certainty and change. The 'Traditional' couple is one whose partners share a belief in stability over spontaneity; the partners endorse a lifestyle characterized by temporal regularities and conformity to traditional conventions of marriage. By contrast, the 'Independent' couple tends to endorse an ideology of change; the partners do not subscribe to a daily rhythm that is regularized, nor do they endorse conformity to traditional conventions of marriage. Thus, the 'Traditional' couple appears to manifest limited tolerance for uncertainty, in contrast to the 'Independent' couple whose marriage requires less certainty and predictability. (117)

Thus, one of the most common discussions between relationship parties, that represents the contradiction, predictability-novelty, in its most basic form, is about wanting the relationship,

and the activities within it, to be routine and predictable, versus wanting the relationship, and the activities within it, to be novel and unpredictable.

According to Baxter and Montgomery the tension between the routine and the exciting is necessary for relationships to thrive. “Communication in personal relationships is a dialogue between the centripetal ‘given,’ closed and finalizable, and the centrifugal ‘new,’ indeterminate and unfinalizable. From the interplay of certainty with uncertainty, order with disorder, predictability with novelty, relationships sustain a vibrant, alive, and dynamic ongoingness” (106).

The tension, predictability-novelty can be enacted in a variety of ways. Specifically, the tension, predictability-novelty, is played out in five common contexts. The first context in which the tension is represented is in the early stages of relationship development. As advocated by Uncertainty Reduction Theory, relationship parties desire certainty over uncertainty in their initial interactions. Baxter and Montgomery express, “The first radiant meaning of ‘certainty’ and ‘uncertainty’ revolves around the issue of cognitively predicting the other’s personality, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors” (121).

The second context in which the tension is acted out is in making plans for the future. Especially in budding relationships, relationship parties desire certainty in knowing when they will see each other again. Baxter and Montgomery describe, “A second meaning of ‘certainty’ and ‘uncertainty’ revolves around making plans for the scheduling of the next meeting. This radiant of meaning is focused on the short-term pragmatic task of crafting relational continuity out of encounter discontinuities” (122).

The third context in which the tension is performed is in keeping the relationship interesting. In long-term relationships, it is important to try new things to keep the relationship

invigorating so it will not stagnate. Baxter and Montgomery indicate, “This meaning revolves around the extent to which the interaction episodes of the pair are fun, exciting, and stimulating...On the one hand, parties want to establish a routine of predictable and pleasurable activities, yet these predictable activities begin to lose their excitement because they are no longer new” (122-123).

As evidenced by the act of renewing wedding vows, couples recognize the stability and predictability of their relationship by re-acknowledging their commitment to one another and to the relationship, while at the same time encouraging novelty and unpredictability in the embarking of a new chapter in the relationship. According to Baxter,

The dialogue of certainty and uncertainty is similarly constructed in multivocal ways. For example, it might be experienced as the interplay of the past with the present. In our study of long-term married couples who elected to renew their marriage vows, Dawn Braithwaite and I (1995) similarly found this theme of past-and-present featured prominently. Couples used the ceremony to construct a sense of their relationship as different from what it was originally; at the same time, however, they constructed a sense that their marriage was characterized by an underlying stability. (10)

The fourth context in which the tension is carried out is in keeping the romance in the relationship alive. In order to encourage romance in the relationship, partners must surprise each other with unexpected acts of kindness, such as sweet notes left on the mirror, flowers for no reason, spontaneous weekend getaways, and the like. Baxter and Montgomery evoke, “This emotion-based meaning revolves around the perceived emotional excitement of ‘romance’” (123).

The fifth, and final, context in which the tension is executed is in knowing where the relationship stands. Baxter and Montgomery elaborate,

The fifth meaning of ‘certainty’ and ‘uncertainty’ revolves around predictability with the state of the relationship. On the one hand, informants indicated their desire to know where the relationship stood and where it was headed. Yet, simultaneously, informants expressed the opposite desire for unpredictability. The desire for unpredictability is captured in people’s view of a relationship as a ‘journey of discovery’ or as a ‘living organism’. Unpredictability was a sign of relational health to these informants; it indicated that the relationship was alive, vital, and growing. On the other hand, they wanted certainty about where their relationship stood and felt discomfort with the notion of a relationship as ever changing. (123-124)

Thus, the internal dialectical contradiction, predictability-novelty, may take shape in a variety of ways, ways which are only limited by the contexts in which they are enacted. Baxter and Montgomery summarize,

We have examined the salience of the interplay between certainty and uncertainty in people’s relationship experiences. This interplay is rich in multivocality; ‘certainty’ and ‘uncertainty’ take on a variety of specific meanings that cannot be captured usefully in a single, stable binary pair. The dialogue between the ‘given’ and the ‘new’ is a polyphony of voices. The various meanings of ‘certainty’ and ‘uncertainty’ that we have discussed in this section are intended to illustrate, not exhaust, the multivocality of the certainty-uncertainty dialogue. Ultimately, ‘certainty’ and ‘uncertainty’ are enacted in the particular chronotopes of a

relationship's ongoing improvisation and such particularity is where multivocality emerges. (125)

Conflict

Tension, or conflict, surfaces when relationship partners have inconsistencies in their need for either predictability or novelty in the relationship. In order to reduce the probability of experiencing interpersonal conflict, partners must learn to manage the internal dialectical tension of predictability-novelty effectively. Couples ordinarily manage this particular dialectical tension in three noticeable ways, including privileging one polarity, segmentation, and spiraling inversion (Baxter and Montgomery 125).

Privileging One Polarity and Segmentation

With reference to the first strategy, privileging one polarity, Baxter and Montgomery articulate,

Baxter (1990) found that romantic relationship parties appeared to negotiate privileged status for either certainty or uncertainty, depending on the particular meaning of 'certainty' and 'uncertainty.' That is, segmentation emerged as a typical praxis pattern. More specifically, in the domains of knowledge about the partner and state-of-the-relationship knowledge, relationship parties appeared to privilege certainty over uncertainty; relationship parties wanted certainty with respect to one another and where their relationship stood. However, relationship parties privileged uncertainty over certainty in their 'romance' and in the immediate interaction episode; they wanted excitement, novelty, and stimulation at the moment. (125)

Spiraling Inversion

In relation to the second technique, spiraling inversion, Baxter and Montgomery exhibit, By contrast, Hause and Pearson's (1994) questionnaire study of married couples found that pairs oscillated between moments of certainty and uncertainty in an effort to fulfill both necessities over the course of time, which reflects a pattern of spiraling inversion. Their informants reported that they punctuated the routinized activities of their marriage with efforts to introduce novelty and excitement through such actions as giving surprise gifts or doing something fun together.

(126)

External Dialectical Tensions

Couples not only experience internal dialectical tensions within their relationships, but they also experience external dialectical tensions without their relationships as well. Three main external dialectical tensions that occur in personal relationships are inclusion-seclusion, revelation-concealment, and conventionality-uniqueness. These external dialectical tensions are similar to the internal dialectical tensions except for the fact that they focus on a pair's needs in relation to society, as opposed to a pair's needs in relation to one another (Baxter and Montgomery 184).

Inclusion vs. Seclusion

The first external contradiction is inclusion-seclusion. According to Baxter and Montgomery,

As Altman et al. (1992) have noted, cultures vary enormously in the extent to which a couple's contact with others is obligated. Cultures in which mate selection, courtship, weddings, consummation, and domestic life are enacted in

the presence of (if not controlled by) kin and friends seem strange to members of Western societies where couple separation from others is valued. Reciprocally, it is likely that members from more communally oriented cultures would find strange the claim that pair seclusion is the requisite act of crystallization that creates the couple as a social unit. Nevertheless, even societies that value couple independence cannot ignore the fundamental embeddedness of personal relationships in a web of sociality. Thus, the exigence is born for the dialectical tension between inclusion and seclusion, or what Altman and Gauvian (1981) refer to as the dialectic of openness and closedness to interaction with outsiders. Couples need privacy away from others to form their dyadic culture, yet they need the recognition of others afforded through such efforts as inclusion of the couple as a pair in social activities and verbal reinforcement of the pairs' coupleness.

(175-176)

Thus, one of the most frequent exchanges between relationship pairs, that exemplifies the contradiction, inclusion-seclusion, in its most basic form, is about wanting to spend time alone together as a couple versus wanting to spend time as a couple with other people.

Interestingly, Baxter and Montgomery recount that as couples become more committed to one another (i.e. moving from a dating relationship to marriage) their interaction with others outside of the relationship decreases. "Although noting the differences among relationships, Surra (1985) reported a general decrease in the proportion of leisure activities enacted jointly by a couple with others as the couple's relationship progressed from serious dating through marriage, whereas the proportion of leisure activities enacted with the partner alone increased"

(176).

However, Baxter and Montgomery alert, the lack of interaction with others outside of the relationship can pose a problem for relationship partners, especially for long-term married couples.

Such isolation from others may pose a problem for the couple as the relationship continues, in that excessive seclusion of a couple from others appears to be more likely as a complaint among married persons than among romantically involved persons. Apparently, the threshold of tolerance that relationship parties have for isolation from others wears in long-term relationships. A perception of excessive isolation from others makes sense in light of Baxter and Simon's (1993) finding that a complaint of excessive predictability and boredom was more likely among married persons as opposed to romantically involved persons. (176)

Therefore, Baxter and Montgomery imagine that married couples, more so than dating couples, desire more inclusion than seclusion in their relationships.

Thus, for married couples, inclusion with others may be needed as much for its stimulation value as for its social recognition value. The problem that seclusion can pose for married couples is supported in Stafford and Canary's (1991) finding that married couples more so than seriously dating couples reported inclusion with the joint network as maintenance work on behalf of the relationship's well-being. (176)

Nevertheless, Baxter and Montgomery warn that too much inclusion, just like too much seclusion, is not healthy for a relationship. Instead, a balance between the two is needed.

Although integration of the couple with others can benefit a personal relationship through social recognition and/or external stimulation, integration is a double-

edged phenomenon. Cissna et al. (1990) vividly illustrate this point with respect to the challenges that face remarried couples in their interactions with stepchildren. Stepfamily dynamics can feature a dialectical theme of ‘the marriage versus the kids’, with stepchildren seeking to reject the authority of the stepparent and win the natural parent’s loyalty against his or her spouse. The challenge to remarried couples, then, is to sustain their couple solidarity in the presence of stepfamily dynamics that work against the couple’s unity. This kind of response from stepchildren to a stepparent represents an extreme case of how outsiders can strain a couple’s unity, but even the most pleasant and benign of inclusion situations can focus the partner’s energies away from intimate exchange between the two of them. (176-177)

Conflict

Tension, or conflict, emerges when relationship parties favor one polarity over the other or have variations in their need for either inclusion or seclusion in the relationship. In order to reduce the prospect of experiencing interpersonal conflict, partners must learn to manage the external dialectical tension of inclusion-seclusion effectively. Couples typically manage this specific dialectical tension in two visible ways, including spiraling inversion and segmentation (Baxter and Montgomery 177).

Spiraling Inversion

With relevance to the first method, spiraling inversion, Baxter and Montgomery outline, Relationship parties are likely to cope with the dilemma of needing to be both inclusive and secluded in a variety of ways. In her study of married and romantic pairs, Baxter (1994) found that respondents who complained of excessive

inclusion reported that they sought to maintain their relationship through network-withdrawal strategies more than did respondents who complained of excessive seclusion. This finding is straight-forward; the most direct way to cope with a need for less inclusion is for the couple to reduce the time they spend with others. This coping mechanism points to a more general praxical pattern of spiraling inversion between inclusion-enhancing efforts and seclusion-enhancing efforts on an as-needed basis. (177)

Segmentation

Regarding the second approach, segmentation, Baxter and Montgomery state, “Other praxical patterns are also likely to be employed by relationship partners. Segmentation patterns are evident in that certain relational domains – like birthdays, weddings, and other celebrations – are more likely to be open to couple interaction with outsiders, while other relational domains – like expressing physical intimacy – are more likely to be restricted” (177).

Baxter and Montgomery encapsulate,

We have discussed inclusion and seclusion as if each pole were unitary. In fact, the interplay of inclusion and seclusion is as complicated as the interplay of autonomy and connection between dyadic partners. ‘Inclusion’ and ‘seclusion’ are each complex clusters of dynamic forces, which collectively result in a patterned web of oppositions and interdependencies. (177-178)

Revelation vs. Concealment

The second external contradiction is revelation-concealment. According to Baxter and Montgomery,

In the service of both maintaining cultural standards and encouraging innovative deviations, a community must have knowledge about how couples conduct their relationships. That is, community members need to know about relationship realities in order to respond to them. Countering this need to know, however, is a need to be uninformed about the complexities of particular relationships because such case-specific information inevitably challenges generalized relationship norms. Further, close community scrutiny discourages creativity and innovation in the evolution of community standards. (173)

Thus, one of the most regular discourses between relationship partners, that epitomizes the contradiction, revelation-concealment, in its most fundamental form, is about wanting to share information about the relationship with others outside of the relationship, such as with friends or family members, versus wanting to keep information about the relationship confidential, or private, between the relationship partners.

Some dialectical tensions occur by choice and others occur, not by the choice of the couple, but by what Pawlowski calls “forced entrance” by others (410). According to Pawlowski, Tensions occurred in relationships, either by choice or through ‘forced entrance’ by others. Several couples provided examples of other individuals asking about the relationship, telling the couples what to do, or appearing in their lives without being asked. This suggests that tensions are not only created by individuals within the relationship, but are forced upon them by others. Much of what happens to couples is brought about because of others. The link of social networks needs to address whether tensions are brought about voluntarily (i.e., by the couple) or involuntarily (i.e., by family members or friends). (410)

Conflict

Tension, or conflict, materializes when relationship parties favor one polarity over the other or have variations in their need for either revelation or concealment in the relationship. In order to reduce the potential for experiencing interpersonal conflict, partners must learn to manage the external dialectical tension of revelation-concealment effectively. Baxter and Montgomery admit that little is known about the way in which couples manage the tension between revelation and concealment in their relationships. However, there is partial support for the tactic, segmentation, but more research is necessary in order to form concrete conclusions about the techniques that couples use to manage this specific dialectical tension (Baxter and Montgomery 175).

Segmentation

As represented by Baxter and Montgomery, Couples manage these tensions by attending to their communicative behavior with others. They rely on verbal disclosure to reveal information and to conceal through acts of omission and deception. They also manipulate information available to others by regulating their joint presence at events; their actions as a couple, like jointly telling a story; their displays of affection; and their displays of relationship-defining artifacts, like rings or photographs of their homes. Goffman (1971) has referred to such behavior as 'tie-signs,' behavioral evidence as to the type, relevant conditions, and stage of a relationship. He gives the example of partners arriving at a party where they will be mingling separately. Just before they part, they may smile warmly at each other or touch hands, thereby reinforcing the intimacy they feel for each other and serving 'to provide the

gathering with initial evidence of the relationship and what it is that will have to be respected'. (174)

Baxter and Montgomery sum up,

Just as issues of openness and closedness are complicated in multivocal ways, so are issues of revelation and concealment at the boundaries between a couple and the communities with which the couple interacts. Contradictions of the said and the unsaid, freedom and constraint, inner speech and outer speech function at the gap between couple and collective(s), just as they do at the gap between self and other within a dyadic relationship. Interaction between the couple and outsiders takes place in specific contexts, and parties play the said against the unsaid in such contexts. Conventions that guide the 'public display' of coupleness serve as constraints on a couple's interaction, and at the same time, such constraints enable the partners to gain legitimation as a couple in that social world. Finally, just as a person's utterance is populated with voices of the past, the present, and the anticipated future, so a couple's utterance exists at the crossroads of multiple voices. (175)

Conventionality vs. Uniqueness

Finally, the third external contradiction is conventionality-uniqueness. According to Baxter and Montgomery,

The relationship between couples and cultures implicates the need for couples to conform to conventionalized norms of relating and also the need for couples to produce unique, nonconventional relationships...From the perspective of the couple, conforming to society's expectations legitimates their relationship and

gains rewards in the form of acceptance, protection, and security.

Conventionality brings with it a kind of insiders' understanding of how to act well in society because one is part of that society. It provides a touchstone for conducting a relationship, a general guideline for deciding what is appropriate and not appropriate, what is likely to work and not to work. At the same time, couples need to feel that their relationship is distinct, thereby meeting an important criterion for identity and intimacy. They need to feel that there has never been a relationship quite like theirs. They desire the creative freedom to determine their own relationship, to shape it to their unique desires and needs. (170)

Thus, one of the most recurrent conversations between relationship parties, that characterizes the contradiction, conventionality-uniqueness, in its plainest form, is about wanting to conform in conventional ways to the expectations of the general society, or of friends and family, about how the relationship should be verses wanting to be seen as a "unique" couple and wanting the relationship to be different from all other relationships.

Conflict

Tension, or conflict, turns up when relationship parties favor one polarity over the other or have variations in their need for either conventionality or uniqueness in the relationship. In order to reduce the prospective for experiencing interpersonal conflict, partners must learn to manage the external dialectical tension of conventionality-uniqueness effectively. Couples generally manage this specific dialectical tension in two detectable ways, including segmentation and spiraling inversion (Baxter and Montgomery 171-172).

Segmentation

Respecting the first tactic, segmentation, Baxter and Montgomery reflect,

One pattern that has been described fairly extensively is the segmentation of social life into public and private chronotopic spheres for behavior. The couple and society regularly collaborate to emphasize conventionality in public and uniqueness in private. Rawlins (1992) describes this as a challenge for relational partners 'to develop and share private definitions and practices while orchestrating desired social perceptions of their relationship'. That is, couples sometimes contrive their interaction so as to foster impressions about the kind of intimate relationship they would like others to think they have. In much the same vein as the conspiratorial team presentations described by Goffman (1959), an intimate couple can manipulate communicative cues to encourage certain kinds of attributions about their relationship and to discourage others. Research has described a number of examples like the quarreling couple who, upon arriving at a party, conceal their argument by holding hands and smiling at each other and the man and woman who, while close friends, publicly enact the less complex and better understood behavioral pattern of professional colleagues. (171-172)

However, Baxter and Montgomery point out that conventionality is not exclusively a public phenomenon; likewise, uniqueness is not exclusively a private phenomenon.

We do not wish to suggest, however, that the pull toward conventionality is operative only in the presence of others or that the pull toward uniqueness is salient only in times and places when partners are alone. Segmentation is not manifest exclusively through the public/private distinction, as evidenced by Altman and Gauvian's (1981) study of how the public, physical characteristics of the home (e.g., its size, elaborateness, siting, entranceway, interior arrangement

and decorations) can serve to express both the themes of conventionality and uniqueness. For example, the totem poles that mark the tent entrances of Tlingit Indians of Northwestern North America are carved with a variety of figures, some with communal meanings and some with meanings uniquely associated with the occupants of that tent. The segmentation of the dialectic is thus accomplished by associating some figures with the conventionality theme and some with the uniqueness theme. (172)

Spiraling Inversion

Concerning the second strategy, spiraling inversion, Baxter and Montgomery portray, Oxley, Haggard, Werner, and Altman's (1986) study of the holiday celebrations of the families on 'Christmas Street' illustrates another praxical pattern, that of spiraling inversion. Annually, during the holiday season, the families exhibit widespread allegiance to community conventions associated with neighborhood decorations and social get-togethers. This heightened expression of conventionalism subsides soon after the first of the year, defining a spiral that is repeated year after year. (172)

Additionally, some spirals repeat themselves more frequently; as in the example of individuals who conform to the cultural norms of the office during the work week, but who return to unique patterns of behaving on the weekends. Moreover, some spirals are extended across entire historical eras; as in the example of the shifting of wedding ceremonies from traditional to nontraditional (Baxter and Montgomery 172).

Baxter and Montgomery close with the following thoughts on conventionality and uniqueness,

We would underscore that there is not a single, unitary ‘couple’ nor a single, unitary ‘society.’ Relationships are multifaceted, as are the social collectives that we subsume under the covering term ‘society.’ This multivocal complexity underscores that relationships are both conventional and unique at once, depending on the particular social collective(s) and conventions used to calibrate sameness and difference. (173)

Previous Research

Dialectical Tensions in Marriage

Previous scholars have applied Baxter and Montgomery’s Relational Dialectics Theory to a variety of contexts in personal relationships. In a similar study, Pawlowski observed the role of dialectical tensions, both internal and external, in newlywed couples’ accounts of their relationships. Pawlowski sought to discover which, if any, of the six major dialectical tensions, both internal and external, exist in newlywed couples’ relationships. Furthermore, Pawlowski attempted to ascertain which, if any, of the six major dialectical tensions, both internal and external, the couples perceived as most important in their relationships at significant turning points in their relationships. Specifically, Pawlowski aimed to determine which, if any, of the six major dialectical tensions, both internal and external, were most salient during turning point events at the beginning, middle, and current points in time in the marital partners’ relationships (396).

Results of the study revealed that marital partners experienced the tension, autonomy-connection most frequently in their relationships, especially at the beginning of their relationships as they are negotiating when to see each other (404, 407). The second most experienced tension was predictability-novelty, and it was experienced most often during the

middle period of married couples' relationships (405, 407). Next, the third highest tension that newlywed couples experienced was the external tension, inclusion-seclusion, which they experienced most frequently at the beginning of their relationships (405, 407).

After that, the fourth most commonly experienced tension was openness-closedness, which couples experienced most regularly during the middle stage of their relationships (405, 407). Then, the fifth most recurrent tension that marital partners experienced was the external tension, conventionality-uniqueness, which the couples experienced during the middle phase of their relationships (406, 407). It is during the mid-point of partners' relationships that they have established themselves as a couple and are struggling to distinguish themselves as a unique pair while also conforming to the expectations of other couples and of society about how their relationship should be (410). Finally, the least frequently experienced tension was the external tension, revelation-concealment, which pairs experienced equally during the beginning, middle, and current junctures in their relationships (406, 407). According to Pawlowski, "These examples show that contradictions and dialectical moments do characterize relationships. Some contradictions were identified more frequently than others; however, the participants experienced all to some degree" (406).

Results of the study also revealed that openness-closedness was perceived by marital pairs as being the most significant tension experienced during the three relational turning points, followed by autonomy-connection, and inclusion-seclusion. According to Pawlowski, "This is interesting in light of the fact that the order of frequencies most identified were autonomy-connection, predictability-novelty, inclusion-seclusion, and then openness-closedness" (409).

Moreover, results of the study revealed that internal dialectical tensions, autonomy-connection, openness-closedness, predictability-novelty, were deemed by both husbands and

wives to be equally important across all three relational turning points; while external dialectical tensions, inclusion-seclusion, revelation-concealment, and conventionality-uniqueness, were considered by wives to be more important during the beginning and middle relational turning points. According to Pawlowski,

This finding suggests that social networks may play a greater role for women than men as the relationship is being formed. Wives may view others' relational advice and involvement as more profound to the relationship than husbands may. Wood (1999) argues that women are more relationally oriented than men and use relational issues as topics of discussion with others, which may also account for why women perceived tensions involving the social networks as more important than husbands. (409)

Pawlowski encapsulates,

The data from this study further suggest that different tensions characterized the three turning points...These conclusions have promise for the study of dialectics through turning points as a way to assess developmental processes of relationships. Turning points are the substances of change and may help to explain processes of growth and decay in relationships. Although turning points have been used as a stage progressive model in the past, this study demonstrates that turning points can help in the understanding the historical evolution of relationships by analyzing developmental changes. (411)

Furthermore, Pawlowski concludes,

Overall, the findings and conclusions of this investigation underscore the utility of the dialectical perspective and shed some light on new ways to understand marital

relationships. Dialectical tensions seem to be important elements in relational development, and different dialectical tensions are seemingly more pertinent at different developmental points than others. How couples manage these dialectical tensions at the different points may [help determine whether positive or negative conflict ensues in the relationship (410) and may] increase our understanding of appropriate communication strategies for dealing with tensions. (412)

Dialectical Tensions in Long-Distance Marriages

Similarly, Andrea Towers Scott (2002) examined the role of dialectical tensions in career-induced, long-distance marriages in her article entitled, *Communication Characterizing Successful Long Distance Marriages*. Towers considered eight variables, including relational dialectics, relationship satisfaction, communication satisfaction, feelings of misunderstanding, couple types, relationship sustenance, imagined interactions, and social support within the context of long distance relationships (viii).

Regarding the twelve hypothesis developed to explore the role of relational dialectics in long-distance marriages, none of the twelve hypotheses garnered support. With reference to the first hypothesis, that the internal dialectical tensions of openness-closedness, autonomy-connection, and predictability-novelty would be ranked as the most important dialectical concerns for long-distance couples respectively, Scott found that, in reality, the order of importance was ranked differently, with openness-closedness being most important, followed by predictability-novelty, and then autonomy-connection. Pertaining to the second hypothesis, that the external dialectical tensions of revelation-concealment, inclusion-seclusion, and conventionality-uniqueness would be ranked as the most important dialectical concerns for long-distance partners respectively, Scott found that the order of importance was also ranked

differently, with conventionality-uniqueness being most important, followed by revelation-concealment, and then inclusion-seclusion (105) With respect to the other 10 hypotheses, Scott found no significant positive correlation between the dialectical tensions and the variables (92-95)

Scott summarizes the contributions of the current study to the future study of relational dialectics,

The second major contribution of this study is the quantification of dialectics. Whereas primarily studied via interviews and conceptualized as a qualitative construct, there is support for quantifying dialectics. The current study was designed similar to Baxter and Simon's (1993), and found similar results: moderate to high reliabilities. The initial success of this instrument has definite implications for the future of interpersonal dialectic research. A quantitative scale designed to tap a traditionally qualitative construct makes such a measure that much more accessible to researchers. Whereas in terms of scale development the moderate reliabilities of the current study are a very small step toward a generally accepted (i.e., valid and reliable) instrument, the findings are a noteworthy contribution to the expansion of dialectical theory. The current study, given its acceptable reliability, strongly joins the burgeoning body of literature seeking to expand the operationalization of dialectics to include quantitative measures. This success was just one of the dominant contributions of the current work. (103)

Dialectical Tensions in Long-Distance Dating Relationships

Continuing the theme of long-distance relationships, Erin M. Sahlstein (2006) studied the contributions of the internal dialectical tension, certainty-uncertainty to long-distance dating relationships in her article entitled, *Making Plans: Praxis Strategies for Negotiating Uncertainty-*

Certainty in Long-Distance Relationships. Specifically, Sahlstein sought to determine what role planning plays in the management of the internal dialectical tension, certainty-uncertainty. In her article, Sahlstein proffers that physical distance between couples causes uncertainty in the relationship, but communication, particularly communication centered on making future plans together, helps couples to bridge the certainty-uncertainty gap by fostering feelings of certainty in the relationship (147). For the study, Sahlstein developed the following research question, “How does planning participate in the management of certainty-uncertainty in long-distance dating relationships?” (150).

Results of the study revealed at least three techniques that long-distance dating couples used to manage the internal dialectical tension, certainty-uncertainty, in reference to making plans, including planning as denial, planning as balance, and planning as segmentation (147). First, couples privileged the polarity of certainty while denying the polarity of uncertainty by planning their interactions together in detail. Respondents felt that planning future interactions provided security in the relationship and minimized the likelihood of having a negative face-to-face encounter, which would waste their limited time together (153).

Sahlstein summarizes this technique for managing dialectical tensions, Making plans as denial emerges in these data as instances when certainty is privileged over uncertainty. The consequences for using this praxis strategy were not always beneficial for LDDR partners. They reported feeling confined by their plans and that they over-planned for the time together, in particular for their sex lives. Based on these data, planning as denial should be used with awareness of such consequences. The denial of uncertainty pattern may set up a problematic situation during their separation given that the contradiction is being managed in a

stable way (e.g., a couple or partner starts to see the relationship as a burden and no longer spontaneous); moreover, LDDR partners who use denial in this manner may face significant adjustments if and when they live closer together. Moving from a pattern that denies forms of uncertainty to a space where ‘true’ spontaneity or time to ‘just hang out’ are possible may be a challenge for some couples or partners. (155)

Second, couples tried to balance both polarities of certainty and uncertainty in their relationships. For example, couples planned to have conversations (certainty) about difficult or serious topics, which may result in uncertain outcomes. Respondents felt that face-to-face was the best context in which to discuss difficult or serious topics because it is an immediate and honest context. Additionally, couples were confident that they would be able understand each other better face-to-face, rather than over the phone where they felt there was likely to be more uncertainty in the interaction (155).

Sahlstein summarizes this technique for managing dialectical tensions, “In this context, making plans as balance involved trying to gain some sense of certainty and predictability for when serious, unpredictable conversations would take place. Planning as a way to balance the contradiction between certainty and uncertainty can prove to be helpful, but when plans are not successfully enacted, the intended balance may spin into instability, uncertainty, and negativity” (157).

Finally, couples tried to segment the polarities of certainty and uncertainty in their relationships. For example, couples planned to work on their own, individual goals and spend time with others while they were apart, but designated the time that they have to spend together as “couple time”. Respondents felt that by segmenting, or compartmentalizing, their lives this

way that they would be able to maximize their quality time together. Since long-distance couples have limited quantity time together, they felt that by designating their time that they do have together as “couple time” that they would be able to focus solely on each other, and on their relationship, without any distractions (157).

Sahlstein summarizes this technique for managing dialectical tensions, The segmentation effect makes LDDR partners feel as though they are living separate lives. They feel distant from one another not only physically but relationally; ironically, their own plans to segment time together (relationship time) and time apart (personal lives) construct this divide, which they initially viewed as a positive way to manage uncertainty and promote positive interactions with each other. Segmentation patterns during separation may have negative implications for when partners reunite and live in the same location. Partners who use this strategy will need to renegotiate how they manage uncertainty and certainty while establishing ‘new’ individual and relational lives. (161)

Sahlstein encapsulates, “Participants discussed how they used plans to manage these competing needs and desires. Their plans functioned as praxis strategies of denial, balance, and segmentation, and facilitated both positive and negative consequences” (162). Sahlstein continues, “Planning was also used to manage other contradictions which were not the focus of this analysis...Given that this study was not conducted with the intent to study planning, future studies should focus on the multiple contradictions partners may be negotiating through their planning actions” (162).

Sahlstein concludes,

Overall, these results provide a springboard for interesting and valuable relational communication research. Through studies of planning, communication scholars may further their understanding of how distance, certainty, and interaction intersect in relationships in which relational comings and goings are less noticeable than in LDRRs. These data also initiate questions about how reducing uncertainty about future events, specifically through making plans, may both benefit and hinder relating. Most importantly, LDDR partners should reflect on how their plans may constrain time together and recognize ‘that sometimes uncertainty can be good’. (163)

Dialectical Tensions in Breakups

Keeping with the subject of dating relationships, Erin M. Sahlstein and Tim Dun (2008) analyzed the role of the internal dialectical tension, autonomy-connection in the termination of romantic relationships in their article entitled, “*I Wanted Time to Myself and He Wanted to Be Together All the Time*”: *Constructing Breakups as Managing Autonomy-Connection*. For the study, the investigators developed two research questions. First, the researchers asked, “How do couples talk about their management of autonomy-connection prior to breakup?” (39). Second, the examiners questioned, “How do relational partners describe their breakup as a matter of autonomy-connection struggles?” (39).

Results of the study revealed two obvious patterns of struggle prior to relationship dissolution, including antagonistic struggle and non-antagonistic struggle. According to the assessors, antagonistic struggles arise “when one person aligns herself with one pole of the contradiction and another person aligns himself with the other” (40). To the contrary, the

surveyors submit that non-antagonistic struggles arise “when relational partners jointly struggle with how to manage dialectics” (40).

Four out of the eight cases showed antagonistic struggles over autonomy-connection prior to the termination of the relationship. These four couples used the techniques of balance, selection, spiraling inversion, and segmentation to manage the dialectical tension, autonomy-connection, in their relationships. Two out of the four couples employed the balance strategy for managing the tension in their relationships (40). Of those two couples, one exercised a combination of balance and selection in managing the dialectical tension of autonomy-connection in their relationship. Another couple enacted a combination of the selection and spiraling inversion methods for managing the tension in their relationship. The final couple practiced the segmentation approach to managing the dialectical tension in their relationship (41).

On the other hand, four out of the eight cases demonstrated non-antagonistic struggles over autonomy-connection prior to the dissolution of the relationship. Of the four couples, one couple attempted to reframe the contradiction, which is also referred to as integration. In addition to integration, the first couple also utilized the tactics of selection and spiraling inversion for managing the internal dialectical tension of autonomy-connection in their relationship (42). Another couple endorsed selection as a way of managing the tension in their relationship. Finally, in two additional cases, couples represented spiraling inversion as a procedure for managing the dialectical tension in their relationships. According to Sahlstein and Dun, “In contrast to those who saw themselves in conflict with their partner over how to manage autonomy-connection, participants who viewed their breakup as a non-antagonistic struggle between these oppositions reported that they both wanted different things for their relationship, for their independent lives, or for both” (43).

Sahlstein and Dun conclude, Participants were constrained in their ability to have both separation and integration—a challenge to healthy relating...Multiple responses to contradictions suggest that relational partners recognize the fluidity and multiple dimensions of relational life, qualities that Baxter and Montgomery laud. Finally, the antagonistic struggles evident in their retrospective accounts of breakups support our conclusion that these couples were limited in their ability to respond creatively and competently to this tension. These participants experienced integration and separation as ‘what I want vs. what you want.’ A zero-sum approach to this inherent relational dialectic means that the study participants likely experienced the contradiction as conflict, which may have exacerbated what we see as an inability to celebrate contradictions and embrace multivocality. These results point to the importance of multiple and productive communicative responses to autonomy-connection. Future work should assess how particular praxis responses to contradictions relate to relational dissolution. (44)

Dialectical Tensions Among In-Laws

In examining relational dialectics from a different perspective, Carolyn Prentice (2009) analyzed dialectical tensions between marital partners and their in-laws in her article entitled, *Relational Dialectics Among In-Laws*. Specifically, Prentice investigated how families reacted to “newcomers,” and especially what tensions were caused by the inclusion of “newcomers” into the family dynamics. Furthermore, Prentice considered how families responded to, or managed, the tensions created by “newcomers” as the “newcomers” were socialized into the family (67).

Results of the analysis revealed that couples experience all three external dialectical tensions in their relationships with their in-laws, including inclusion-seclusion as the most prevalent tension experienced, followed by conventionality-uniqueness, and then revelation-concealment (75). In addition, Prentice discovered three new indigenous tensions, including expressing approval/withholding judgment, mediating communication between in-laws, and establishing new relationships with adult siblings (67). As depicted by Prentice, indigenous tensions are “[tensions] that are specific to the relationship and not experienced in other relationships” (70). As put forward by Prentice, “The tensions manifested in unique ways and were managed with a variety of strategies, some of them unique to the in-law relationship” (67).

The first tension, inclusion-seclusion, was manifested in the form of family loyalty (i.e. loyalty to one’s family of origin vs. loyalty to one’s in-laws) (Prentice 70). According to Prentice,

The concern in the tension of inclusion/seclusion is how much the married pair is allowed to be a separate entity by itself and how much it is expected to be included in and have responsibilities to their families-of-origin. This was a significant tension mentioned by most of the participants, although in a somewhat unique configuration. As it was experienced by the participants in this study, this tension is somewhat different from inclusion/seclusion in that the newcomers wanted to be included in their spouses’ families, but also wanted to spend time with their own families-of-origin, while at the same time they wanted to seclude themselves as an independent married couple. Thus this tension, as it manifests among in-laws might be expressed as a three-way tension: my family/your family/just the two of us. (75)

Couples and families expressed that they responded to, or managed, the tension, inclusion-seclusion, in a variety of ways, including denial, spiraling inversion, segmentation, and integration. Prentice represents, “At first newlywed people may not even recognize that they may need to balance time. This is an application of the management strategy of *denial*—a dysfunctional strategy for managing dialectical tensions” (76). Concerning the technique of spiraling inversion, Prentice illustrates, “In spiraling inversion, the married couples balanced the tension through honoring each pole at different times. For example, during the holidays and on visits, they accepted that they were expected to take part in the routines of their families-of-origin, and that they would have to balance the time between the two families in a way that satisfied each family” (76).

Pertaining to the tactic of segmentation, Prentice illuminates, Couples also used segmentation to manage this dialectical tension, which involved choosing which activities they would be included with each of their families, and which activities they would do by themselves as a couple. For example, Lindsay and Tyler celebrated Thanksgiving with Lindsay’s family and Christmas with Tyler’s family. Outside of the holiday season, they limited their contact with either family in an effort to enjoy just being newlyweds. (76)

Finally, with reference to the integration approach, Prentice explicates, On the other hand, some families had instituted integration as a management strategy for this tension. Integration is the simultaneous recognition of both poles, which in this case manifested as bringing together both in-law families as a means of reducing the tension for the married pair concerning which family to spend time with. In this way, the couple did not have to address loyalty issues because

they could share a holiday or celebration with both families at the same time. This strategy was a particularly powerful way to manage this three-way tension when the couple began to host these joint celebrations in their own homes, which established them also as a couple in their own right, a characteristic of the maintenance stage of socialization. Many couples mentioned this as a goal for the future. By having a joint celebration with both families, they also achieved more private time as a couple. (77)

The second tension, conventionality-uniqueness, was manifested in the form of wanting to meet the expectations of the family-of-origin and in-laws about how the couple's relationship should be versus wanting to establish a unique relationship apart from the expectations of the family-of-origin and in-laws. For example, Prentice puts forth,

In the tension of conventionality/uniqueness, the married pair experienced the pull of having to maintain and fit into their families' routines, on one hand, and wanting to create their own routines on the other. The married couples found that they were expected to find their own solutions for the problems of living, as long as they also fit into acceptable social conventions from the family. One of the principal ways this tension manifested was in the practice of religion. (77)

Couples and families revealed that they responded to, or managed, the tension, conventionality-uniqueness, in several ways, including segmentation, disorientation, and denial. Regarding the first method, segmentation, Prentice elucidates, "In some cases, this meant personally choosing not to practice the religion of their families-of-origin in their own lives, even though they often got married in a church and also continued to attend religious services with

their families-of-origin during special holidays. This practice reflects the management strategy of segmentation, in which one pole is more salient than the other during certain activities” (78).

Relating to the second tactic, disorientation, Prentice explains, “Babette, who had never attended church before, was very uncomfortable with this practice, but realized that it made her future in-laws happy, and therefore, she complied. Thus, Babette used disorientation to manage the tension—a management strategy that did not in reality ease the tension between them” (78).

Finally, concerning the third style, denial, Prentice enlightens,

Evident in this quote is that Roger experienced a tension between disappointment that his daughter and her husband did not continue in his church and the desire to accept their decision as the couples moves into the maintenance stage. Roger managed this tension by stating that he believed ultimately that his daughter and her husband were spiritual people and that his daughter would ‘score Okay.’ This response represents the strategy of denial, in which people deny the tensions that they actually feel, but this strategy does not reduce the tension experienced. (78)

The third tension, revelation-concealment, was manifested in the form of closeness versus autonomy, which resulted in jealousy among some in-laws (Prentice 70). According to Prentice,

In the tension of revelation/concealment, couples experienced the pull of being expected to share their married life with their families, while also feeling the desire to keep private some of the details of their life. As a newlywed, Ginny reported that after marriage she had found it difficult to talk with her mother because Ginny felt her mother did not really like her husband. Thus, she

struggled with wanting to continue her close relationship with her mother yet at the same time wanting to keep details of her marriage private. (79)

Couples and families revealed that they responded to, or managed, the tension, revelation-concealment, through disorientation. Prentice exhibits, “For Ann the in-law relationship restrained her from being too close to her son-in-law because she realized her daughter needed some privacy in her marriage. Nevertheless, she mourned the loss of this friendship. All of the participants mentioned above managed the tension through disorientation at various stages of the socialization process” (79).

In addition to the three external tensions, Prentice found that three new indigenous tensions, including expressing approval/withholding judgment, mediating communication between in-laws, and establishing new relationships with adult siblings, were manifested in couples’ and in-laws’ relationships. Prentice elaborates,

In this study, a dialectical tension emerged that appears to be indigenous to the relationship of in-laws, particularly in the stage of investigation, a tension that I term ‘expressing approval/withholding judgment.’ The process of socializing a new family member begins as soon as the couple starts (the stage of investigation). But until the couple themselves commit to one another (the stage of socialization), the family is uncertain about how to relate to the newcomer. The family feels it is best to hold back on fully socializing the newcomer because the decision belongs to their child/sibling to offer the invitation to join the group (i.e., the engagement), and they don’t want to put too much pressure on the child/sibling to marry....Parents and siblings experienced this tension as a recognition that although the decision would impact the whole family, the couple had to make this

decision on its own; therefore, although family members could communicate approval or disapproval of the newcomer, they were reluctant to be too approving or disapproving to the newcomer lest the couple make a different decision. The motive behind this reluctance was twofold: (a) to save face and limit disappointment for themselves and the couple if the marriage did not ensue (or in the case of disapproval, if the marriage nevertheless took place), and (b) to allow the couple to make their own decisions at their own pace” (80).

According to Prentice, couples and families managed this particular tension through disorientation. “For the most part, families managed this tension by using disorientation, viewing the situation as just a necessary unpleasantness and therefore sending mixed messages that both included and excluded the newcomer as a full family member until after the commitment had been solidified” (81).

Additionally, Prentice indicates that couples and families managed the tensions brought on by socializing a new member into the family through mediation or establishing new relationships with adult siblings. “The unique context of in-law relationships revealed some new strategies for managing the dialectical tensions of socializing the newcomer. Specifically participants indicated that they managed some of the tensions, particularly as they co-occurred with other tensions, by communicating with the new in-law through the mediation of another family member or by forging new relationships with siblings” (82).

Pertaining to the procedure of mediation, Prentice portrays,

In this study the participants revealed that the practice of maintaining a mediated relationship between the parents-in-law and the child-in-law was both widespread and widely accepted, for addressing potentially problematic situations created by

any of the tensions discussed previously. This mediation was enacted by each member of the married couple interacting more with his/her own parents than with those of the spouse. (82)

Couples and families also used venting as a way to mediate their relationships and manage their tensions. As asserted by Prentice,

Another component of this mediated relationship was that of providing a safe avenue for venting—a tactic for managing dialectical tensions previously identified by Kramer (2004) among members of a community theater group. Many participants indicated that they expressed their frustrations with their in-laws to other members of the family, in an effort to manage the tensions of the needs of the extended family and the needs of the couple. This tactic often appeared to be one of the purposes of the mediated relationship. The frustrated person could safely vent to the spouse about the parents. (82-83)

On the other hand, couples and families managed the tensions brought on by socializing a new member into the family through establishing new relationships with adult siblings. Prentice supplies,

In contrast to the mediated relationships between children-in-law and parents-in-law, another strategy for managing in-law tensions was that the newcomer formed close relationships with her/his new siblings-in-law. As Keyton (1999) has suggested, relationships within a group are not uniform; members have different relationships and communication patterns with different group members. In part this behavior was a way of managing the revelation/concealment tension particularly as it might co-occur with the uniqueness/conventionality tension.

Newly married couples tended to conceal more from their parents and were more open with their siblings, a form of segmentation. (83)

Prentice summarizes,

This qualitative interview study of 42 participants demonstrated how external tensions operate as a family socializes and accommodates a new in-law.

Participants revealed that the inclusion/seclusion tension was a prominent tension among new in-laws, which manifested as balancing time and which was managed in several ways. The external tensions of conventionality/uniqueness and revelation/concealment also appeared, as well as the tension indigenous to the in-law relationship, that of expressing approval/withholding judgment. Two new, somewhat contradictory, strategies for managing these tensions emerged: mediating relationships and establishing closer relationships with adult siblings.

(84)

Finally, Prentice concludes,

This study clearly demonstrates how families and the individuals within them experience and manage dialectical tensions as they attempt to socialize newcomers. In-law relationships have been portrayed in our popular culture as problematic because of personality characteristics of various family members, exemplified by the 'meddling mother-in-law'. Limary (2002) has reported that these stereotypes influence people's expectations of their in-law relationships, a finding that was also corroborated by some of the participants. A contribution of the present study is that it explored the forms tensions take and the unique ways that people manage the knot of dialectical tensions between the married couple

and their families-of-origin. This knowledge may be helpful to couples, parents-in-law, and family counselors to recognize the tensions of the in-law relationship, as well as to promote strategies for managing the tensions. (86)

Dialectical Tensions in Nonresidential Stepfamilies

Keeping in line with the topic of “newcomers” or “outsiders,” Becky L. DeGreeff and Ann Burnett (2009) in their article entitled, *Weekend Warriors: Autonomy-Connection, Openness-Closedness, and Coping Strategies of Marital Partners in Nonresidential Stepfamilies*, evaluated the function of the internal dialectical tensions, autonomy-connection and openness-closedness, in the relationships between husbands and wives and stepparents and stepchildren in nonresidential stepfamilies. Specifically, DeGreeff and Burnett attempted to uncover if the internal dialectical tensions, autonomy-connection and openness-closedness, exist in the relationships between marital partners and between stepparents and stepchildren in nonresidential stepfamilies, and if so, how those tensions are managed (604).

Results of analysis revealed that the internal dialectical tensions, autonomy-connection and openness-closedness, do, in fact, exist between husbands and wives and stepparents and stepchildren in nonresidential stepfamilies (606). Regarding the internal dialectical tension, autonomy-connection, DeGreeff and Burnett report, “In every interview, when asked about issues of autonomy-connection, each participant reported experiencing this tension. Participants not only experienced the tension in their dyadic relationship as husband and wife, but also felt torn between their loyalties to their children and to their spouse, and experienced tensions in the ex-spouse relationship” (613).

Analysis also showed that participants responded to, or managed, this particular dialectical tension in a variety of ways, including cyclic alternation, reframing, moderation, and

selection (622). For example, one couple responded to the dialectical tension, autonomy-connection through cyclic alternation and reframing. As exhibited by DeGreeff and Burnett,

Alex and Abby had an agreement of autonomy when they started dating, but soon realized that strong feelings of connection were present. In order to cope with the contradiction in feelings, Alex and Abby utilized the coping strategies of cyclic alternation and reframing. Cyclic alternation refers to couples responding to contradictory relationship demands by seeking to fulfill each separately.

Reframing involves transforming the tension so it no longer contains an opposition. They alternated between autonomy and connection as their relationship moved from casual to romantic. (613)

Another couple responded to the dialectical tension, autonomy-connection through moderation and selection. As exemplified by DeGreeff and Burnett,

Emily was frustrated trying to contend with Eric, who was fearful of commitment. She utilized the coping strategies of moderation and reframing. Moderation involves responding to competing dialectical demands simultaneously. Emily chose to compromise her feelings while waiting for Eric to change. She also transformed the tensions to believe his actions were a part of a normal grieving process. Emily ultimately utilized selection and demanded Eric chose autonomy or connection. She admitted she was getting to the point where she was 'ready to throw in the towel...one night I just kinda blew up and him and then shortly after that he asked me to marry him'. (614)

DeGreeff and Burnett recapitulate,

To summarize, all five of the nonresidential stepfamily couple participants experienced the tension of autonomy-connection. They experienced the tension in their relationship as marital partners and in their relationship with the nonresidential children. Over time, the marital partners experienced evolving autonomy-connection tensions with regard to their marriage and also with regard to their relationship with the children. In response to the second research question, all of the couples in this study used a variety of coping strategies to respond to the autonomy-connection tension. (618)

Referencing the internal dialectical tension, openness-closedness, DeGreeff and Burnett comment, “Openness-closedness, the second major tension investigated in this study, is related to the struggle between being forthright and practicing discretion. Evidence of openness-closedness tensions was found among all participants. As with autonomy-connection, the tension occurred within the couple, between stepparents, and between the children and stepparents” (618).

Participants expressed that they responded to, or managed, this particular dialectical tension in a variety of ways as well, including selection, disqualification, cyclic alternation, and in some cases, moderation (621). For example, one couple responded to the dialectical tension, openness-closedness through selection. As illustrated by DeGreeff and Burnett,

Some of the stepparents disclosed that they experienced negative feelings related to their stepchildren. They struggled with the notion of sharing these feelings with their spouse, the child’s parent, who may not want to hear negative things about the children. Alex (Couple # 1) disclosed in front of Abby, ‘I think she is going to get mad at me for saying this, but I think the kids got it too good’. Alex

understood that he would upset Abby with his comment; however, he still utilized selection and experienced openness letting Abby know his true feelings. (618)

Yet, another couple responded to the dialectical tension, openness-closedness through disqualification. As illuminated by DeGreeff and Burnett,

Alex and Betty chose to be open with their feelings regarding their stepchildren.

Emily (Couple # 5), on the other hand, was more indirect in expressing her feelings to Eric. Emily disclosed feelings of frustration regarding the child support Eric pays because money is tight in their household. She admits sometimes she feels resentful about the child support because she feels her children have to do without because of his ex-wife. Rather than tell Eric her true feelings, Emily illustrated how she coped with the tensions....Emily utilized selection and disqualification by not saying anything to Eric, but letting him know indirectly some of her feelings. (618-619)

Still, another couple responded to the dialectical tension, openness-closedness through cyclical alternation. As represented by DeGreeff and Burnett,

Stepparents experience a unique set of circumstances regarding the stepchildren.

The participants of this study all expressed feelings of deep caring, and even love, for their stepchildren. However, they also were forced to acknowledge that as a stepparent, they were secondary to the biological parents. Because of this delicate relationship, the stepparent participants were sometimes hurt, either intentionally or non-intentionally, by the actions of their stepchildren. Participants described situations that illustrated how circumstances within the stepfamily evolved, and how they ended up with feelings of hurt and betrayal caused by their

stepchildren...All three stepparents coped with the tensions utilizing cyclical alternation and alternating between openness and closedness throughout the relationship. (619-620)

DeGreeff and Burnett reiterate,

To summarize, the nonresidential stepfamily participants experienced the tension of openness-closedness expressing (or not expressing) their true feelings about parenting issues, the children, and the ex-spouse. All of the participants utilized the selection coping strategy to deal with the openness-closedness tension. They also utilized cyclic alternation, alternating between openness and closedness at different times throughout the relationship, and moderation to compromise with some openness and some closedness. Therefore, to answer the second research question, the coping strategies of selection, cyclic alternation, and moderation were utilized by the participants to manage the dialectical tension of openness-closedness. (621)

Overall, DeGreeff and Burnett encapsulate,

The results of this study revealed that dialectical tensions are prevalent among marital partners of nonresidential stepfamilies and are directly related to the unique feelings that arise due to the many intricacies involved with the nonresidential stepfamily situation. Past research has examined dialectical tensions between romantic partners, marital partners, stepparents, and stepchildren. This study adds to previous research with the examination of dialectical tensions experienced by nonresidential stepfamily marital partners. This type of research is necessary because the nature of the communication and

the coping strategies utilized by marital partners play an important role in the success of the marital relationship. (621)

Dialectical Tensions between Bereaved Parents

Finally, in their article entitled, *Grieving Together and Apart: Bereaved Parents' Contradictions of Marital Interaction*, Paige W. Toller and Dawn O. Braithwaite (2009) pondered what dialectical tensions arise between bereaved parents as they attempt to communicate their grief to one another over the loss of a child, and how bereaved parents handle the tensions that arise between them as they try to cope with a child's death.

Results of the analysis revealed that bereaved parents experienced at least two internal dialectical tensions when communicating with each other about the death of a child, including autonomy-connection and openness-closedness. The two tensions were expressed in the form of wanting to grieve together versus wanting to grieve privately, and wanting to talk about the grief versus wanting to move on from the grief by not talking about it (Toller and Braithwaite 263). In addition, results of the analysis revealed that bereaved parents managed the dialectical tensions, autonomy-connection and openness-closedness, in several ways, including reaffirmation, balance, spiraling inversion, segmentation, and recalibration (Toller and Braithwaite 266-270).

The first dialectical tension, autonomy-connection, was manifested in two ways, including dissimilar approaches to grief and dissimilar expressions of grief (Toller and Braithwaite 264-265). Second, the tension was negotiated in three ways, including accepting each others' differences in grieving styles, compromising, and seeking outside help (Toller and Braithwaite 266-267). According to Toller and Braithwaite, "For parents in the present study, being able to grieve and share the pain of their child's death with their spouse was of utmost importance. At the same time, parents recognized that their own unique and individual responses

to their child's death meant working through the grieving process on their own" (264). Thus, the tension between wanting to grieve together and needing to grieve separately created difficulties for couples. As laid out by Toller and Braithwaite, "Although parents wanted to grieve together and also honor their own individual needs, parents reported that grieving together was difficult due to the differing ways in which they and their partners approached and even expressed their grief" (264).

With reference to parents' dissimilar approaches to grieving, Toller and Braithwaite exhibit,

For parents in the present study, being able to grieve and share the pain of their child's death with their spouse was of utmost importance. At the same time, parents recognized that their own unique and individual responses to their child's death meant working through the grieving process on their own. A number of parents indicated that their spouse urged them to quickly work through their grief and move forward with their lives. This was problematic as many parents did not want to work through their grief in this manner. (264)

In relation to partners' dissimilar expressions of grief, Toller and Braithwaite construe, In addition to differing approaches to grief, parents reported that they and their partners also expressed their grief in disparate ways, which influenced their ability to grieve together with their spouse and increased their perception that they were grieving more apart. In the present study, bereaved mothers reported that they primarily expressed their grief through crying and talking about the loss. On the other hand, bereaved fathers claimed to express their grief more through activities, such as building things. Not all of the bereaved mothers and fathers in the present

study strictly adhered to these gendered expressions of grief, but the majority of parents did. Thus, parents in the present study who grieved along gendered lines found it difficult to connect and grieve together as each grieved differently from each other. (265)

Furthermore, the Toller and Braithwaite surmise,

For many bereaved parents, how they expressed grief differed greatly from that of their spouse. This created conflict for many couples and left them believing they were alone in their experience of grief. In particular, spouses who openly expressed their grief believed their partner needed to do the same. If their partner was not open with his or her grief, then their partner was perceived to be grieving incorrectly....When their spouse did not ascribe to this style of grieving, couples experienced a great deal of tension and conflict. Even so, the majority of parents in the present study indicated that they were eventually able to recognize, understand, and in some cases, accept their spouse's different way of grieving. (265-266)

Couples coped with the tension, autonomy-connection by eventually learning to accept each others' differences, by compromising with one another, and, in some cases, by seeking outside help (Toller and Braithwaite 266-267). First, pairs attempted to manage the tension, autonomy-connection, by accepting each others' differences through reaffirmation. Toller and Braithwaite explicate, "Parents' acceptance of each other's grieving style in order to grieve together and apart demonstrates Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) praxical pattern of reaffirmation. Relational partners demonstrate reaffirmation when they accept and even embrace contradiction as inherent to interaction and overall social life" (266).

Second, parents tried to handle the tension, autonomy-connection, by compromising with one another; thus exercising the balance technique. As pointed out by Toller and Braithwaite, “A second way bereaved parents managed the tension of grieving together-grieving apart was to partially honor their own grieving needs and the needs of their partner, which parallels Baxter and Montgomery’s (1996) praxical pattern of balance. According to Baxter and Montgomery, relational partners engage in a praxical pattern of balance when they partly meet the ends of each pole of the tension (267).

Third, and finally, partners strived to negotiate the tension, autonomy-connection, by seeking outside help; thus employing the spiraling inversion strategy. As conveyed by Toller and Braithwaite,

The final way bereaved parents managed the tension of grieving together-grieving apart was to seek outside help in order to cope with and understand their dissimilar grieving. By seeking outside help, parents were able to accept one another’s grieving needs and eventually grieve together as a couple. Parents’ actions emulated the praxical pattern of spiraling inversion as they alternated back and forth between the poles of a contradiction, privileging each pole at a different point in time. (267)

The second dialectical tension, openness-closedness, was manifested in two ways, including both parents being open and closed, and one parent being open and the other being closed (Toller and Braithwaite 268). According to Toller and Braithwaite,

Interconnected with the tension of grieving together-grieving apart, the tension of openness-closedness was animated by bereaved parents’ concurrent needs to both talk and not talk with each other about their child’s death. For parents, competing

needs to be open and yet be closed about their child's death influenced parents' ability to grieve together and apart. Parents experienced the contradiction of openness-closedness in two ways: (a) Both partners needed to be open and closed; and (b) one parent wanted to be open about the child's death and the other parent wanted to be closed. (267-268)

With respect to both parents being open and closed, and one parent wanting to be open and the other wanting to be closed, Toller and Braithwaite illustrate,

Given that the death of a child is profoundly painful, parents indicated that they and their spouse needed to communicate about their child's death in order to vent and share emotion. At the same time, the pain was often so great that parents needed to be closed with each other in order to give each other space....The majority of parents in the present study claimed to be comfortable with both talking and not talking about their child's death. However, a few parents reported they wanted to be open with their spouse about their child's death but their spouse did not. For these parents, the presence of the openness-closedness dialectic was antagonistic, making it very difficult for parents to grieve together as a couple. Contradictions are considered antagonistic when relational partners adhere to disparate poles of the tension. Not surprisingly, antagonistic contradictions create a great deal of conflict within the relationship. (268)

Couples managed the tension, openness-closedness, by being open to someone else, such as another family member, a friend, or even a counselor, while respecting their spouses' needs to be closed, by being open to each other nonverbally rather than verbally, thus simultaneously meeting the need of one spouse to be open and the other to be closed, and eventually by trying to

accept each others' needs to be open and closed (Toller and Braithwaite 269). First, partners aimed to negotiate the tension, openness-closedness, by being open to someone else and closed to one's spouse through segmentation. As depicted by Toller and Braithwaite,

Since it was sometimes painful to talk with one another about their child's death, parents chose to talk to friends or family instead. By being open with others, parents met their own needs to talk about the death and at the same time honored their partner's need to be closed about the death. Parents' actions parallel Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) praxical pattern of segmentation. Segmentation, a diachronic pattern, occurs when relational partners' privilege one pole of the tension based upon the topic or subject matter. (269)

Second, pairs sought to control the tension, openness-closedness, by being open to one another nonverbally, while being closed to each other verbally through recalibration. As represented by Toller and Braithwaite,

As we discussed earlier, a number of parents found it difficult to be verbally open with each other about their child's death. As a result, parents were closed with each other verbally, but shared thoughts and feelings nonverbally. In essence, parents' nonverbal communication allowed them to be open to and yet closed with one another. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) make a clear distinction between openness with and openness to, claiming that openness 'with' involves partners self-disclosing information, whereas openness 'to' involves partners being responsive and receptive to each other's disclosures. Even though some bereaved parents did not verbally disclose information they were receptive to their spouse's nonverbal communication. Parents' method of negotiation resembles

Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) praxical pattern of recalibration. Recalibration is characterized by relational partners minimizing tensions through the creation of an integrated and temporary solution. (270)

Third, and finally, partners endeavored to cope with the tension, openness-closedness, by accepting each others' differing needs for both openness and closedness through reaffirmation.

As put across by Toller and Braithwaite,

The final way parents managed the tension of openness-closedness was similar to how they managed the tension of grieving together-grieving apart in that parents accepted how their partner communicated about their child's death. Parents did so by framing each other's need to be either open or closed as part of their spouse's grieving style. Parents' method of managing the tension this way is similar to Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) praxical pattern of reaffirmation. Accepting each other's communication about their child's death was not easy for parents but many believed they were able to do so with the passage of time. (271)

Toller and Braithwaite conclude,

In summary, the death of a child is devastating and earth shattering for parents. At a time when they need each other most, parents are stripped of their strength and resources. As our study reveals, it is possible for bereaved parents to interact, support, and help one another through this most difficult of times. By understanding and accepting one another's grieving style and giving each other the space they need to grieve, parents will be able to better share their loss together. (275)

While previous scholars have applied Baxter and Montgomery's Relational Dialectics Theory to a variety of contexts in personal relationships, including marriages, long-distance marriages, long-distance dating relationships, breakups, in-law relationships, nonresidential stepfamily relationships, and the relationships between grieving parents, Baxter urges scholars to continue to apply the theory to even more contexts in order to assist in the continual development of the theory. "If you study my tale, you will see that others have been instrumental in helping me think through various theoretical issues. Certainly, a theory's impact depends on whether other scholars find it heuristic in rendering intelligible their own research questions. In Bakhtin's terms, theory growing takes place in the utterances between scholars, not in the actions of autonomous scholars" (190).

A major limitation of previous work on relational dialectics is the focus on dialectical tensions individually rather than as a whole. As previously asserted by Baxter and Montgomery, dialectical tensions do not function independently of one another, and thus cannot be examined that way. Instead, the theorists believe that dialectical tensions must be studied in conjunction with one another to complete the picture of a relational dialectics perspective (Baxter and Montgomery 14). According to Baxter and Montgomery, "A system usually contains not one but many contradictions; Cornforth (1968) describes this as the 'knot of contradictions' that coexist and that change in relation to one another over time" (16). Therefore, scholars must examine the "knot" of contradictions, rather than each individual strand.

While Pawlowski attempted to study all six dialectical tensions in her study of dialectical tensions in marriage, she calls for more similar scholarly endeavors. As laid out by Pawlowski, "Although studies to date have examined particular tensions, no study has investigated how all six tensions simultaneously operate throughout relational development" (397). Most studies on

relational dialectics have focused only on internal dialectical tensions, while excluding external dialectical tensions. However, Pawlowski advocates for the inclusion of both internal and external dialectical tensions in future studies.

Dialectical research in marital relationships has focused mainly on internal tensions. In addition, a majority of research has focused on one partner of a relationship... While it is important to learn about internal tensions within relationships, it is equally important to understand how internal and external tensions operate simultaneously. Because contradictions are interdependent and cannot be considered in isolation from other contradictions, research needs to look at the interdependency of external contradictions within relationships. (399)

Thus, the current study will focus on an examination of all six dialectical tensions, both internal and external.

Furthermore, Pawlowski claims that a majority of the inquiries related to relational dialectics have taken a monadic rather than a dyadic approach, but that a dyadic approach is preferred. "Second, a dyadic, rather than a monadic approach should be taken in order to compare partners' perceptions with couple perceptions. If one is trying to examine how both partners feel about incidents within their relationship, interviewing the partners together, or matching one partner's perception with the other partner from the same relationship may provide additional insights to relational development" (412). Therefore, the current study will take a dyadic approach to studying dialectical tensions in personal relationships.

One unique relationship which has been understudied in communication scholarship, and especially in the context of relational dialectics, is religious couples. Marks offers that, "While it is true that religion is not an important factor in many American marriages, religion is 'the single

most important influence in [life]' for 'a substantial minority' of Americans" (108). Furthermore, Lambert and Dollahite indicate that religion is an important and positive resource for marital conflict prevention and resolution. "Religious beliefs, commitments, practices, and communities are important resources for conflict prevention and resolution for couples and for practitioners working with them" (447-448).

Although religion is not a factor that influences a majority of individuals, for those who it does impact, its effect can be profound. Therefore, religion is a worthy variable of study within the context of relational dialectics because of the influence it may have on both the dialectical tensions experienced and the way in which dialectical tensions are managed by religious couples. Thus, the current study focused on the unique communication and coping strategies of religious couples; specifically the current study concentrated on the dialectical tensions experienced by religious couples and the various techniques used to managed them.

Summary of the Literature

Previous research reveals that the nature of marriage is, and has been over the past 50 years, changing. Today, people are waiting later to get married, if they decide to marry at all, and if they do marry, they are sometimes getting divorced. At the same time, society has shifted its attitudes on marriage. Instead of being viewed as a permanent relationship, marriage is now considered to be a temporary contract. Therefore, it has become more acceptable for individuals to remain single or to get divorced. Meanwhile, both men and women have become more liberal in their thinking and more egalitarian in their marriages. Couples are moving away from traditional, husband "breadwinner," wife "homemaker," marriages and are embracing nontraditional marriages. Likewise, couples are assuming reversed gender roles, with men taking

on roles that are traditionally female, such as housework and childcare, and females taking on roles that are traditionally male, such as pursuing education and careers.

Because marriage roles are not as cut and dry as they once were, couples today must negotiate their marriage roles more than ever, and it is creating confusion and increased conflict among couples, which, in turn, is decreasing marital quality. According to the literature, the number one issue that is causing couples trouble is the balance between work and family. Since women have increased their participation in the labor force, they have decreased the time they are spending at home caring for children and taking care of household responsibilities. Thus, women need more help from their husbands in performing these duties, but their husbands are resisting, which is causing increased conflict between couples.

How couples manage disputes in their relationships, particularly over marriage and gender roles, can either exacerbate or alleviate conflict in their relationships, which, in turn, can serve to increase or decrease their marital satisfaction. Studies show that couples that use constructive approaches to conflict, such as compromise and collaboration, are likely to be successful at resolving conflict and are likely to increase marital quality, whereas couples that use destructive approaches to conflict, such as avoidance and competition, are likely to be unsuccessful at resolving conflict and are likely to decrease marital quality. Research illustrates that couples that use collaborative approaches to conflict management are most successful at resolving conflict and maintaining marital quality.

Moreover, previous efforts have elucidated that individuals with religious commitment are better able to manage and resolve conflict, and have higher marital quality, than those without religious commitment. Because their faith encourages them to be positive, to treat each other with respect, and to forgive one another, and because it gives them a common goal to work

toward, couples with religious commitment are more likely to engage in constructive rather than destructive conflict management, which, in turn, leads to increased marital quality, and consequently, longevity.

Relational Dialectics Theory is a useful framework for explaining the tensions that are occurring between couples, which may also be causing conflict, as a result of changing marriage and gender roles; namely traditional and nontraditional marriage roles and between balancing work and family. Because Relational Dialectics Theory focuses on tensions between autonomy and connectedness, and conventionality and uniqueness, two tensions which seem to be at the heart of marital conflict, it will be helpful in illuminating why modern marriages are under more strain than marriages in the past. According to Pawlowski,

Meeting the needs of the marital relationship, meeting the needs of each other, and validating each other's identities can create competitive or contradictory demands for a newly married couple. Thus, a great deal of change occurs during the first few years of a marital relationship, which may be explained by tensions experienced within the relationships. (398)

Many women today desire autonomy in their relationships; they prefer to pursue their own interests, such as working outside of the home and earning advanced degrees in a variety of areas. Yet, women today also desire connectedness in their relationships; they want to raise children and spend time with their families. However, these opposing desires are pushing and pulling women in two different directions, which is causing tension within themselves and within their relationships, which may also be causing conflict in their relationships.

In addition, many women today desire uniqueness in their relationships; they do not want a traditional, husband “breadwinner,” wife “homemaker,” relationship like marriages of the past.

Instead, many women today are opting for nontraditional marriages, with dual-earner spouses and shared household responsibilities. However, many men today still desire conventionality in marriage; they expect their wives to stay at home, or if their wives do work, then they expect them to at least take on the vast majority of the responsibility of raising the children and taking care of the home. When men and women hold polar opposite views about marriage and gender roles it can create confusion and tension between them, which may eventually lead to conflict. While prior exploration has focused on topics such as marriage and gender roles, marital conflict and resolution, the role of faith in conflict, and dialectical tensions in marriage, none have focused on a combination of all of these variables. Previous research has attempted to answer the question of what causes conflict in marriage, but this study will go beyond that and attempt to answer the question of why these issues are causing conflict in marriage. With the divorce rate holding steady at about fifty percent it is imperative that researchers and clinicians not only come to conclusions about what causes conflict in marriage, but also why certain issues cause conflict in marriage. If researchers and clinicians can get to the heart of the matter of why certain issues are causing conflict in marriage, then researchers and clinicians can begin developing strategies for couples to effectively deal with and resolve these issues in order to prevent couples' relationships from dissolving. The following methodology will describe the sample characteristics and sampling techniques for the current study, will discuss the data collection and analysis methods used, and will provide an overview of the research questions for the current study .

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Participants for the study included 10 heterosexual, Christian married couples, resulting in 20 marital partners for analysis. After reviewing similar studies on relational dialectics, the investigator concluded that the sample size and measures chosen for the current study closely reflect the sample sizes and measures selected for comparable studies. Moreover, the goal of the study was not to achieve saturation, but rather to explore the presence of dialectical tensions, both internal and external, in marriage, and to assess the coping strategies exercised by marital partners in an attempt to manage dialectical tensions in marriage. Therefore, the sample size designated is proportionate to the scope of the study and the information gathered should be adequate for the purposes of the study to draw a meaningful conclusion.

Participants for the study were recruited via a combination of convenience sampling, volunteer network sampling, and snowball sampling methods. According to Joann Keyton (2006) in her book entitled, *Communication Research: Asking Questions, Finding Answers* 2nd ed., “The easiest way to obtain a sample is to choose those individuals who are convenient to use. In convenience sampling, the researcher simply selects those people who are convenient to him or her as respondents. [This] sampling technique is not based on random selection or probability; the researcher simply selects those who are convenient as respondents” (126). In addition, Keyton describes the network sampling method as a “form of nonprobability sampling in which [the] researcher actively solicits individuals who fit a specific profile and asks them to participate in the research study” (129). Moreover, Keyton explains that the snowball sampling method is a “nonprobability sampling technique in which participants help the researcher identify other

similar participants; used when the research topic is controversial or a specific population of participants is difficult to find” (128).

Initially, a couple that is an acquaintance of the researcher was contacted via Facebook message to field willingness and eligibility in participating in a study about communication behaviors in marriage. The potential participants were informed that participation in the study would aid the investigator in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts. In addition, potential subjects were notified that participation in the study was completely voluntary and would involve completing a short, anonymous and confidential interview together as a couple about their communication behaviors in marriage. Potential respondents were asked to respond to the Facebook message if they were willing and qualified to participate in the study and if they would like to obtain more information. Finally, potential subjects were also requested to refer (names, Facebook links, e-mail addresses, or phone numbers) other couples who fit the criteria and who also might be willing to participate in the study, resulting in an accrual of couples for the study.

Participants were required to meet two criteria in order to take part in the study. First, couples were required to be married. Second, spouses were required to be evangelical Christians. Ages of participants ranged from 25–64 years, with an average age of 42 years. Length of marriage of participants ranged from 10 months–36 years, with an average length of 15.2 years. For all but one couple this was their first marriage. All had accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour and had been saved between 1–47 years, with an average of 27.2 years. All of the participants were Caucasian and were from a mid-sized city in Central Virginia.

Procedures

In-depth, semi-structured, qualitative interviews were conducted in order to collect information and opinions about dialectical tensions, both internal and external, that couples experience in marriage, and about the techniques used by marital partners to manage dialectical tensions in their relationships. Baxter and Montgomery maintain that dialectical tensions must be studied *in situ* because their meanings may vary depending on the contexts in which they are enacted; therefore, a qualitative approach to studying dialectical tensions is most appropriate. As asserted by Baxter and Montgomery,

Contradiction is universal but the particulars of the contradicting process vary from one context to another. Dialectical scholars are thus obliged to study contradictions *in situ* at both universal and particular levels, in contrast to efforts that might seek to reduce contradictions to abstractions stripped of their localized particularities. Social phenomena encompass concrete, environmental, situational, and interpersonal factors that are integrally related with issues of praxis and dialectical change. (17)

Accordingly, Keyton emphasizes,

Communication researchers recognize that human interaction is more complex and intricate than can be captured in the lab or quantified with measuring devices. Qualitative research methods, therefore, are more effective in capturing the complexity of communication phenomena, especially communication processes that unfold over time...Moreover, qualitative methods are sensitive to the social construction of meaning. In qualitative methods, researchers emphasize the communication environment of interactants, allowing researchers to explore every

day social phenomena in a way quantitative methods do not allow...Qualitative research preserves the form and content of human interaction. (59)

Furthermore, Keyton conveys that qualitative analysis “rejects the objectivity and absolute truth that is sought in quantitative methods and accepts that multiple interpretations are possible” (59). Additionally, Keyton proposes, “Subjectivity is favored over objectivity in qualitative research because researchers using qualitative methods have a strong concern for the context in which the interaction occurs” (59). Moreover, Keyton offers that qualitative methods allow the researcher to focus on intersubjectivity, or, “how people co-construct and co-experience the interaction of social life and their rules for doing so” (59). Finally, Keyton observes that qualitative techniques are “strong for understanding meanings people use and attach to behavior” (62).

Thus, the field interviewing approach was utilized for the current study. According to Keyton, “Interviews are a practical qualitative method for discovering how people think and feel about their communication practices...Field interviewing as a qualitative research method is a semi-directed form of discourse or conversation with the goal of uncovering the participant’s point of view” (269). The interview outline for the study included questions designed to gather information about partners’ interpretations and evaluations about dialectical tensions, both internal and external, in their relationships, and methods used to negotiate the tensions in their relationships. The questions followed a funnel format, commencing with general topics and progressing to more specific topics. Questions included in the interview outline consisted of a combination of open-ended and closed-ended questions. According to Keyton, “Open questions are better than closed questions for initiating dialogue and obtaining fuller descriptions and answers. An open question does not suggest or imply any particular answer. Alternately, a

closed question suggests a certain type of answer based on how the question is constructed” (274). Additionally, Keyton suggests that open-ended questions are useful because they “allow the respondent to tell his or her own story” (274).

Data collection was comprised of three steps. First, preceding the interviews, pairs were provided with a brief description of the purpose of the study and were given the opportunity to ask questions or voice concerns before beginning the interview. In addition, prior to participating in the interview, respondents were requested to review and sign an informed consent form, which included giving the researcher permission to audio-tape participants’ responses for research purposes only. Participants were assured complete confidentiality.

Second, partners participated in face-to-face, audio-taped interviews, in which spouses were interviewed together. Interviews lasted between 31–74 minutes, with an average length of 44 minutes. Times and locations for the interviews were chosen by the participants for convenience and confidentiality. Of the ten interviews conducted, six took place in the lobby of, or in a Sunday school classroom at, a large church in Central Virginia, while the remaining four interviews took place at the participants’ homes. In order to build rapport with the couples, the interviews began with open-ended questions about how the couples met, about how they became a couple, about the proposal, about how their relationship has changed since they were married, and about how they think they are doing in the communication department of their marriages.

Next, pairs were presented with a total of 12 statements, two for each of the three internal dialectical tensions (autonomy-connection, openness-closedness, predictability-novelty) and the three external dialectical tensions (inclusion-seclusion, revelation-concealment, conventionality-uniqueness). Each of the statements included a hypothetical scenario related to one of the dialectical tensions. Partners were asked to respond to each scenario by indicating their

agreement or disagreement with each statement. Then, couples were requested to provide an example from their own lives of when they experienced a similar situation as the one outlined in the statement. Afterwards, spouses were asked a series of follow-up questions about each of the statements as they related to their own lives. Couples were asked if any of the situations has ever caused tension in their marriage, and if so, how they managed the tension. Finally, couples were asked to reflect on the role that their faith played in resolving the tension.

The third, and final, step included collecting demographic information about each participant. Respondents were also debriefed and were given a second opportunity to ask questions and express concerns. Participants were notified that they could obtain a copy of the results and analysis of the study and were reminded that their participation is voluntary and that all information provided in the interviews would be kept anonymous and confidential. To further insure voluntary consent of the use of the tape recorded interviews, respondents were informed that they could review the tape of their recorded interview and that should they choose, they may withdraw the use of their tape recorded interview from the research. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained from Liberty University prior to collecting any data and all rules and regulations of the human subjects review committee were followed for this research study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for the current study also occurred in three stages. According to Keyton, “The analytic process often begins just after the first data collection session” (290). Thus, during the first stage of analysis, the researcher made notes during and after each interview, recording initial impressions about possible themes that were emerging from the data. After all interviews were complete, the researcher reread all field notes taken during and after the interviews and

listened to the audiotapes to get a sense of the overall data. While listening to the audiotapes, the researcher continued to identify patterns recognized in the data and documented concepts that materialized via analytic memos. According to Keyton, analytic memos are used to “capture first impressions and reflections about the setting, people, and interactions” (291).

Next, during the second stage of analysis, the researcher listened to the audiotapes a second time, examining the raw data through a relational dialectics lens with the purpose of determining whether the six dialectical tensions, both internal and external, under investigation existed in the data, and if they existed, identifying strategies used to manage them. The researcher flagged segments of the interviews that reflected the dialectical tensions and methods used to cope with them and then transcribed those portions of the data for further analysis. Thus, open coding was used to subdivide sections of the interviews into categories, reducing the data to a more manageable size. Each of the sections of the reduced data was labeled according to the dialectical tension evidenced within it, and sections containing the same dialectical tension were grouped together for examination.

Finally, once the researcher determined that all statements associated with the dialectical tensions, both internal and external, had been identified, and that all techniques used to negotiate the dialectical tensions, both internal and external, had been recognized, then thematic analysis was used to interpret the data. According to Keyton, thematic analysis is “a method of qualitative analysis based on participants’ conceptions of actual communication episodes; a theme is identified based on recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness” (295-296). Thus, thematic analysis was used to compare and contrast reduced categories within themselves and between each other and to search for similarities and differences in the data. Representative respondent quotations are shown below in the results.

Research Questions

The aim of the current study is to determine whether dialectical tensions, both internal and external, exist in Christian married couples' relationships, and to discover if dialectical tensions, both internal and external, cause conflict in Christian married couples' relationships. An additional purpose of the study is to understand how Christian married couples manage dialectical tensions, both internal and external, in their relationships. Finally, a further goal of the study is to ascertain what role, if any, biblical values play in the management of dialectical tensions in Christian married couples' relationships. In light of this information, the investigator developed four research questions for the current study.

- RQ1: What dialectical tensions do Christian married couples experience when communicating with their marital partner?
- RQ2: Do dialectical tensions cause conflict in Christian married couples' relationships?
- RQ3: How do Christian married couples manage dialectical tensions in their marital relationships?
- RQ4: What role do biblical values play in the management of dialectical tensions, and in the resolution of conflict, in Christian married couples' relationships?

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Research Question 1

All six of the dialectical tensions, both internal and external, were identified in the interview transcripts as tensions that Christian married couples experience when communicating with their marital partners. While some of the dialectical tensions were experienced more frequently than others, all of the dialectical tensions, both internal and external, were experienced by Christian married couples to some degree. Thus, dialectical tensions, both internal and external, do characterize Christian married couples' relationships.

The internal dialectical tension, autonomy-connection, and the external dialectical tension, conventionality-uniqueness, were tied as the most frequently experienced dialectical tensions, with ten out of ten couples reporting having experienced these tensions while communicating with their spouses. Next, the internal dialectical tension, predictability-novelty, and the external dialectical tension, inclusion-seclusion were tied as the second highest tensions, with nine of out ten couples expressing having experienced these tensions when communicating with their partners. Closely following was the internal contradiction, openness-closedness as the third most experienced dialectical tension, with eight out of ten couples indicating that they have experienced this tension while communicating with one another. Finally, the external dialectical tension, revelation-concealment was the least reported dialectical tension, with only six out of ten couples describing having experienced this tension when communicating with each other.

Overall, results of the analysis revealed that Christian married couples experienced internal dialectical tensions more frequently than external dialectical tensions. The most frequently occurring internal dialectical tension was autonomy connection, followed by

predictability novelty, and finally, openness-closedness. On the other hand, the most frequently occurring external dialectical tension was conventionality-uniqueness, followed by inclusion-seclusion, and finally, revelation-concealment.

In addition, the dialectical tensions, both internal and external, were manifested in a variety of themes. The following findings have been arranged to illustrate the dialectical tensions, both internal and external, experienced by Christian married couples, and to highlight the themes represented by each.

Internal Dialectical Tensions

Autonomy-Connection

The first internal dialectical tension, autonomy-connection, was manifested in at least five themes, including wanting guy/girl time (spending time socializing with other men or women respectively), needing personal time to unwind, having different interests, togetherness with versus togetherness to (being together physically vs. being together emotionally), and work can create too much autonomy. The first theme, wanting guy/girl time, is described below by a woman explaining her desire to spend time away from her husband with her girlfriends every once in a while, and acknowledging her husband's need to do the same with his guy friends.

“Like, for instance, in my situation, you know, I might want some girl time. Like, I might want some time with just my sister, or my mom, or just with my, my close girlfriends or whatever, you know. And [he] needs his time to play basketball with the guys, or, you know, do guy things that I don't really get or enjoy, you know, so those types of things, you know, are times when I definitely, you know, want time away.” (Couple 2, Female)

Likewise, in another example, a woman recognizes her need to spend time away from her husband with her girlfriends when she realizes that she has been missing her girlfriends because she has been spending a lot of time alone with her husband.

“I think, um, like a couple months ago I was like I wanna have some girl time. I hadn’t had, you know, much time with girls, and I wanted to have some girl time.” (Couple 1, Female)

In yet another example, a woman addresses the differences between men and women and their needs for guy/girl time.

“But, um, I mean, I, I like hanging out with my girlfriends. I think that, um, I think for girls it’s different for, than for guys. I think girls need ta have that time ta be with other females, you know.” (Couple 4, Female)

Finally, a mom talks about wanting time away from her spouse to bond with her daughters.

“I have two girls and sometimes it’s just fun for the three of us ta go out at night, go to [the mall] and look at clothes and, and just, that’s just fun for the, the three of us, as females, ta do.” (Couple 6, Female)

The second theme, needing personal time to unwind, is depicted below by a man explaining the differences between him and his wife in the way that they unwind after a long day.

“Even just, ya know, just unwinding from the day, ya know. She tends ta unwind a little bit earlier than I do, and, you know, goes to bed before I do, so, you know. And, I, I still, I’ve, you know, I’m still a little wound up so I just usually have about an hour or so, um, before I finally, it starts to hit me that I need ta, ya know, get to bed. So, so, it’s, it’s good ta, so, ya know, sort of be, be quiet and be still and not have anything really ta do, ya know, um, that, kind, like, just of thing so.” (Couple 2, Male)

In another example a man talks about needing personal time to unwind in order to be the best husband that he can be to his wife.

“I know that I need that in order to kinda recharge, you know. I need that, those moments of solitude to just, just decompress, or recharge, and then I’m, I can be myself, and so if I don’t have that I’m not offering the best of me to her, or to anyone.” (Couple 5, Male)

Similarly, a woman discusses her need for solitude.

“He is somebody who, um, his love language is being together. I think that for a very long time I felt like I always had to be with him...so I think for a really long time I really tried hard to spend all my time with him, and I think that I’ve learned, a lot like, I guess, moms do, you know, you gotta take time that’s just for yourself. And so that’s why, like, I’ve started to read a lot more just because I’m able to go

to my own place and, you know, let my mind work that way it does and everything. So I would agree, I mean, I hands down prefer ta spend all my time with him, but there's definitely a need for alone time." (Couple 4, Female)

Yet, another man describes his need for personal time and personal space.

"The time that I have away from her is every night after she goes to bed. It's just my time, I guess. And I can watch TV, and go on the computer, or whatever, and don't have to worry about what she thinks about it." (Couple 7, Male)

Finally, a husband describes his frustration with the differences between him and his wife and their personal time clocks.

"One other challenge we had is, um, [she] would work all day and then, you know, then we'd have dinner, and then she would just, like, zone out, 'cause she wanted, she wanted her per, her personal time and personal space. And I's the person, I came home, and after I ate and sat down for thirty minutes I got a second wind. And I would, I'm the type a, I would stay up ta, like, midnight, you know. And so that was a conflict in that, in that later on in the night the wanting to talk or, and communicate and things like that. We had, we had problems with, with that...that was one of our biggest struggles is that, yeah, is the difference in, in, uh, in our, um, personal time clocks of, of stayin' up, and when we needed personal space. And, and that, it was, I mean, it was, a, it, it's the only time a day you really have ta communicate. But, but it was hard for her, and, and so we can, we did more on the weekends, and we were, went, started goin' on trips." (Couple 8, Male)

The third theme, having different interests, is represented below by a woman who has different tastes than her husband in television programs.

"We like different things on television...I like old black and white movies and things like that that you know's just totally boring to him. So, um, you know, I have the living room and that TV, and he has a den and his TV." (Couple 7, Female)

Correspondingly, another woman explains her need to separate from her husband to watch something different on TV.

"Well, even within the house, like when, sometimes I just don't wanna watch FOX at night, 'cause I've already heard all day...but he's just gettin' the opportunity ta [hear it] for the first time. So I'll go upstairs, and we've really had to learn just recently how ta communicate that, like, I'm not goin' upstairs 'cause I'm mad I just wanna watch "Covert Affairs" or, or "The Closer," or "The Closer." I don't need any more news." (Couple 10, Female)

Accordingly, a man describes how having two TV's saved his marriage, because he and his wife had such different tastes in TV programs.

“When I've, a, been on business trips sometimes it's relaxing because I can do, eat whatever, where I wanna eat, and, you know, watch the TV show I wanna watch, or whatever. We always said earlier on it saved our marriage having two TVs because our tastes were different.” (Couple 6, Male)

In addition, couples discuss their need to separate in order to pursue their various hobbies. For example, one woman talks about her knack for running.

“I go running in the morning a lot so that's kinda my alone time.” (Couple 1, Female)

Furthermore, a man portrays his involvement with his favorite past-time, playing golf.

“Like, if I wanted to go play golf with my Dad, or somethin' like that, I know that she's not gonna buy a, a set of golf clubs and play with me, um, so, you know.” (Couple 2, Male)

Yet, another woman describes her enthusiasm for shopping.

“It's just little things, like shopping. Like, I like ta go to the mall by myself and look at stuff, which he wouldn't wanna do.” (Couple 6, Female)

Still, another man expresses his interests in camping and skiing.

“Well, no, it, it, it, I mean, it's, we, we having diff-different interests. Like, you know, I mean, I go camping with the boys, [my son] and I, the Boy Scouts, go camping with, [my son] and I go camping, you know. That's, that's, that's a way that's time away. She's, she, she's not interested. And then I, um, a couple times a year I take a ski trip with, with, uh, with...guys in church that we have enjoyed skiing with, so. And then she has, in the past, she doesn't do it as a regular basis like the, the ski trips have been, like, a yearly thing, but, you, you went ta...that wedding, and if you could plan it, you would probably do a few more.” (Couple 8, Male)

The fourth theme, togetherness with versus togetherness to, is exemplified below by a man who recognizes that there is a difference between physically being together in the same

room with someone (togetherness with) and really connecting with that someone mentally and emotionally (togetherness to).

“That’s, that’s where the, our definitions differ. Time together means something, some, something different to her than it does to me. Um, you know, time together to me, it’s sufficient for, you know, us to sit in front of the TV and watch one of our shows. That’s not what she has in, in mind when it’s supposed to be alone time.” (Couple 3, Male)

Likewise, another man acknowledges his contentment with togetherness with his wife, as opposed to togetherness to his wife.

“I mean, more than, more than, more so than ever, like, you know, if, if, even if, even if, I, if I, if there’s somethin’ that I wanna watch, you know, that she might not wa-wanna watch, usually we’re pretty content with it, uh, as long as we’re in the same house, you know, the same place, then we’re OK, um, I mean...but, you know, it, we might not, we’d be sittin’ there forever if we found, if we were tryin’ to find one thing to agree on to watch on TV, or, or a movie, or whatever, so, you know, I, I, I, I think most of the time we’ve been pretty content to just stay under the same roof and do our own thing, you know, ‘cause at least we’re there.” (Couple 2, Male)

Similarly, a woman addresses her satisfaction with being together with her husband, as opposed to being together to her husband.

“Even if we’re in the same room just watching TV, I mean, I’d rather do it together as opposed ta, so.” (Couple 4, Female)

Lastly, a woman describes a time when, even though her husband was there for her physically (togetherness with), her husband was not there for her emotionally (togetherness to).

“There was, there was one time that was really damaging for me that, that took some time ta work through and that was when, when I, um...I went ta the doctor for my six week check up after [our son] was born [and] the doctors found a mass in my breast...so, it was six weeks of not knowing, and during that time, I really don’t think [he] was there for me emotionally...when I came home from the doctor the first day when I, when, you know, they found it, and that night he had a Promise Keepers, uh, meeting...and he left and went on to his meeting. I mean, I was crying, and weeping, and wailing...and that whole time I did not feel that he was there for me at all.” (Couple 8, Female)

Finally, the fifth theme, work can create too much autonomy, is depicted below by a woman who remembers the struggle that the dialectical tension, autonomy-connection, created for her and her husband in the early years marriage of their marriage because her work required her to be away from her husband a great deal of the time.

“So I was, you know, still workin’ a lot after we had gotten married, and, and it was just, um, I t-think it jus, it just was a rough beginning ‘cause there was just so busy and I didn’t really have much time to spend with him, so that’s my perspective.”

Along the same lines, another woman recalls the strain that being in a career-induced long-distance marriage for the first year of her marriage caused on her relationship with her husband.

“Our first year of marriage, um, we lived apart because he was here working at [a position in another city] and I still was [working at a position in another city]...So, you know, that first year you’re getting ta know each other, and, so, it was even harder, though, ta get to know each other because we’re apart.” (Couple 9, Female)

Predictability-Novelty

The second internal dialectical tension, predictability-novelty, was exhibited in at least two themes, including wanting to break out of the routine and get one’s partner out of his or her comfort zone, and wanting one’s partner, or family and friends, to be predictable. The first theme, wanting to break out of the routine and get one’s partner out of his or her comfort zone, is represented below by a woman expressing her desire to be adventurous while her husband would prefer to play it safe.

“I wanna try pretty much everything in my life before I die. I mean, case in point, I want to visit every country before I die, like, I just wanna do a lot of stuff. And so, I’ve tried many times to get us involved in different things, um, rock climbing being an example, um, goin’ ta, you know, play Putt-Putt at, like, a haunted house type thing, um. I mean, just like food, food. I love ta cook and I love exotic food so, like, getting him ta eat sushi, getting him to eat Indian, you know, all that kinda stuff. So, for me, I...um, wherever I go, or we go, somewhere I want it ta be fun and exciting and new. Um, but even doing things in ho..., at home that are exciting and new like cooking or watching, like, Indie films, or, you know,

something like that that's just different. [He] is much more of a routine person, um, he has his very, very, very set routine." (Couple 4, Female)

Similarly, a man addresses the fact that his wife, and her sister, are always trying to get him to break out of the routine and try something new and get him out of his comfort zone, which he has been reluctant to do.

"Her and her sister are tigers, and so, they, uh, they just have planned some trips that, you know, maybe I wouldn't have planned, but they've been, they've been great." (Couple 10, Male)

In another example, a woman realizes that, even though she craves spontaneity and change in her relationship, when the activity is outside of her personal comfort zone, it creates tension for her.

"I probably like change or un, non-predictability more than he does, you know...[but an] example where that's opposite in some certain s-like, some situations. I am not a people person, um, and he is. And so, like, if we have to go places for his work, and I, while it's completely different than what we would normally be doing, you know, on a Wednesday night, or whatever, I am freaking out because I, I don't like making conversation with random people. And, you know, so I end up standing in a corner and then, you know, it's like. But he, like, blossoms in those type of situations, and so, I guess there's just depend on the type of situation on being, you know, routine or not routine." (Couple 4, Female)

Likewise, a couple talks about how the husband gets anxious whenever he is forced outside of his comfort zone.

"So, here's another example. He would, he would rather stay at, like, a resort with a spa and dinners and all that kinda stuff, and I would rather have a back pack and go hiking and eating at the hole in the wall places and, you know...but, like, on the honeymoon he did something which I never thought he ever would. We went on, um, a tour with this random guy that we thought was dealing drugs. But, but, I mean, like, he would never have tried something like that, you know, like, going to this random waterfall with all these people that we have no idea who they are, you know, that's out of his comfort zone. Eating homemade food from this little old lady in her kitchen, you know. I'm like, that's not kind of the stuff that he would ever want to try, so, I mean, he's really good. Now, you can't do that for very long, he'll go crazy, but he's really good about trying new things, you know." (Couple 4, Female)

"Now, it can't be, like, a polar opposite...I can handle small changes, I can't handle something totally, like...I'm OK with varying degrees...it cannot be the

polar opposite... 'cause I, I get in a mood... I get in a little mood. I get in a little, not upset, but I get kind of like..." (Couple 4, Male)

"You're nervous, you're anxious." (Couple 4, Female)

"Yeah, I, I get a little anxious, frustrated, and it, it, that, that'll dissipate after 5, 10, 15 minutes, but I don't like change." (Couple 4, Male)

"If I can get him through that initial, like, anxious period he's fine, but..." (Couple 4, Female)

Another woman explains her aggravation with wanting to break out of the routine and try something new, not being able to come up with any new ideas, so she ends up doing the same old thing.

"Lately, it seems like we, when we're together, we sit and we watch a TV show, or a movie, or somethin' and like, well, can we just do somethin' different but then, but then if I can't come up with somethin' else to do." (Couple 3, Female)

Correspondingly, a man describes how he would like to break out of the routine and try something new, but he is either constrained by finances, or he and his wife cannot agree on what to do.

"Well, I, I've, I've always, I always want to try s-new stuff and, you know, A) the, the finances get in the way, or B) you, it's, it's not what she wants to experience." (Couple 3, Male)

Furthermore, a woman expresses her interest in trying new things, but is unsure if what she wants to do is something that her husband also wants to experience.

"I would, I would, I would agree that do somethin' different for a change once in a while, but, I guess, sometimes I wouldn't mind goin' somewhere different to look around and shop, or maybe trying a different vacation, and I don't know if he really wants to or not, but. I do think it's good ta change things up a little bit, or try a different restaurant, or, you know, like, next year let's go to Chicago. He may not wanna do that, but, but we still like ta do the same things, too. We like to go to the same [beach], like, every year, but the same, but, you know, but I dunno, that's, so, I think it is good ta change up things a bit, sure." (Couple 6, Female)

Finally, a man discusses his disappointment with not being able to eat unique foods because his wife does not want to step outside of her comfort zone and try different cuisine.

“I like ta try new things, um, for lunch and dinner sometimes, but they never work out.” (Couple 7, Male)

The second theme, wanting one’s partner, or family and friends, to be predictable, is depicted below by a husband who wants his wife all figured out and who gets frustrated when his wife reacts one way in a situation and when the same situation, or what he perceives to be the same situation, comes up again she reacts in a completely different way.

“You like ta know, like, you don’t like it when I react differently to the same thing, and, and you get confused not knowing what...Do you know what I’m sayin’? Like, you wanna know how ta respond in a certain situation and it changes all the time, and, so, in a way, you would like certain things to be predictable.” (Couple 3, Female)

“Yeah, so I’ll go through one situation and I’ll do the wrong thing, or say the wrong thing. Well, you shouldn’t a said that, you should’ve said this. And so the next time that situation comes up, or what I think is the same situation, I do that and it end up being the wrong thing.” (Couple 3, Male)

Moreover, a woman echoes the desire for her partner, and her relationship, to be predictable.

“I love routine...as far as between us, I really like it when, you know, I know what to expect. I know what this means and I know, you know, this is gonna happen after this, and you know, I like the routine.” (Couple 5, Female)

Furthermore, another man expresses his wish for his relationship, and his partner, to be predictable.

“I like spontaneity on occasion, but, for the most part, I, I think we like to know what to expect, and I think we appreciate the fact that there are certain routines and certain things in our marriage that we know what to expect and w..., and, and we embrace them.” (Couple 9, Male)

Another woman describes her irritation with her family when they decide to break tradition on a holiday.

“I like things to be the way that I want them to be. Like, we were just talking today about the 4th of July and I’m sad because several of my fan-family members are going out of town. And I’m like, you’re supposed to be here, we’re always together, this is a family thing, why are they going out of town without us, ya know? And it just bothers me and I have to adjust to, OK, not everybody values the same traditions that I do, so anyway.” (Couple 2, Female)

In addition, a couple discusses the struggle between wanting to know what to expect and not wanting to be tied down with plans.

“I enjoy spontaneity, but, but I also like, like, I would rather plan the weekend on Monday, then plan it on Friday, but I don’t mind doin’ somethin’ new on Friday.” (Couple 8, Male)

“But if you’ve already said, on Monday, that you were gonna do, whatever, he has a hard time changing...I didn’t really want ta plan on Monday what you were gonna do on Friday, you know. I just, I wanted to collapse on Friday. So, I, by nature...I, I chafe, I chafe at that, I really do, you know. Uh, it just, it just is, it’s this little grinding thing inside me that I don’t like. So, it really is my biggest, um, that’s one of my biggest struggles. Um, he’s much more the, he likes the plan, stick ta the, make the plan, stick to it, you know. I don’t feel like we have a balance. I’m strugglin’ on that...It’s to the degree that during the week you don’t even wanna plan anything on Friday because it’s, like, sacred, you know. If I can just get ta Friday you just, well, what are you gonna do on Friday? I don’t know, but I’m just gonna get there, you know, that kinda thing.” (Couple 8, Female)

“Yeah, Yeah, I like, I get into a routine, and I, I mean it, it evolves, but I’m definitely more of a routine type person...I guess my persistent nature comes through in, in lot a things, and I, I end up, uh, being per-persistent in my, in my wants, and so, if things don’t change, I mean.” (Couple 8, Male)

“He, he is pretty persistent. If he’s planned something, and this is the way it’s gonna be, he, he struggles with that. I mean, he’s, he’s becoming better about it, but, I mean, certainly better than in the first five years we were married, um, when it was just this rigidity, you know. He’s definitely, um, not that way anymore. I mean, he’ll listen and, and adapt, but, um, he definitely really likes the routine.” (Couple 8, Female)

Openness-Closedness

The third, and final, internal dialectical tension, openness-closedness, was demonstrated in at least two themes, including wanting to know everything about one’s partner and wanting to protect one’s partner and keep the peace. The first theme, wanting to know everything about

one's partner, is illustrated below by a woman expressing her desire to know her husband's every thought, while her husband explains the impracticality of sharing every thought.

“A lotta times I can tell he's thinkin' and I'm like, what are you thinkin'?...I feel like I remember a incident in the car and I was like, what are you thinking, and I don't remember what...Oh, yeah, you didn't wanna tell me, right? And then we were, and that's when we had the conversation about, I think, the nothing box.”
(Couple 1, Female)

“Yeah, she does ask me that a lot, and, um, there's this really funny video...it's a, it's a kind of a marriage, um, psychologist/comedian, and he's talkin' about the differences between men and women...but he, he, he talks about that, ya know, when wives see that somethin's, ya know, goin', turnin', ya know, and that they wanna know what are you thinkin'...it's so funny, he says that a man has, their brain is structured according to boxes. You know, you've got your work box, and you've got your car box, and, you know, your sports box, which may even have other boxes in it, but a man has a nothing box, too, from which they often may dwell in, and, you know, it's a, uh...yeah, it's a pretty unique quality to a man. I mean, I may not, not do that necessarily as much, you know, and there may be some times when she'd askin' what am I thinking that I'm just thinking about something silly, or I'm prayin', or I'm, uh, you know, just replaying, um, a something that happened earlier that day, um, but it's, it's not substantial, ya know? I'll just be, I mean it's really not even, you know, so I'll tell her like, uhhhh, you know it isn't really, it's nothing, it's nothing substantial. But, I, I typically don't share stuff like that because it's, it's mindless, you know? And I, I mean it comes down to what, what, which ones are you gonna share, right? And, you know, I, I, I understand that, you know, the wife wants to know every thought, but it's, it's like, almost like, you know, not as practical as...so I think it's less of a desire to withhold some of your thought than it is, um, just it didn't come to mind to share because there's nothing about it.” (Couple 1, Male)

“And then I said to him that, as a girl, as a woman, I just felt like I do wanna know what you're thinking all the time, and I understand that I don't have to know, you know, but I just, I dunno, I just feel like, what you're thinking.”
(Couple 2, Female)

Moreover, a man admits that there has been tension between him and his wife over his wife's wanting to know his every thought, especially when she can tell that something is bother him.

“We've struggled a little bit with, through the years on that. Like, you know, what's really botherin' ya, you know.” (Couple 10, Male)

Additionally, another man discloses that there have been times when he has withheld his true thoughts and feelings from his wife, while she has wanted him to open up about what was really on his heart, and that has caused some conflict between them.

“I mean, we, we, we, we’ve even had arguments, and maybe I wasn’t really expressing what was on my heart, but when I finally said what was really irritating me it helped her understand it better.” (Couple 8, Male)

Along the same lines, another man reveals that his yearning to know his wife’s every thought, especially during disagreements, has created tension between them on more than one occasion.

“Another big thing, we’re big, we’re very different on, very different on, is if we got in a fight right, if we got in a fight right this second, I would be fine in 5 minutes. OK, we fought, it’s over. She, and now I’m OK with this, she needs an hour or two ta, she needs to go away, br-be away from me rather, be away from me rather, and, um, just, and I’ve now, and I used ta follow her ‘cause I wanna, I wanna talk about it, literally talk about it...and even we had a few of those, even while we were married, where we’d get in a fight before we go to bed and she would go downstairs and I would follow her.” (Couple 4, Male)

The second theme, wanting to protect one’s partner and keep the peace, is shown below by a woman describing her aim to keep from hurting her partner’s feelings.

“Sometimes I don’t know how ta tell you things without, I think I’m gonna hurt your feelings or something, or you get upset.” (Couple 3, Female)

Likewise, another woman recognizes the need to keep some of her thoughts to herself in order to protect her partner’s feelings.

“I think, also, um, because I am, um, really rough around the edges, um, I’m crass, I’m not tactful with certain things, and, um, [he]...if you say something the wrong way...the way his heart is, it hurts him more than, like, if you said it to me...and so, I think a lotta times I hold back what I would wanna say, or what my feelings are, because I know that it’s, it’s going to have a different affect on him than what I’m wanting it to come out as. And, so, a lotta times it’s just me needing ta take the time ta like mull through my head, OK, so, how should I say it, you know, so that it doesn’t come out that way. Um, because, I mean, I have said some really hurtful things that I did not mean them to be hurtful but it just kinda, like, threw up out of my mouth and landed that way, you know...my mom taught me if you don’t have anything nice ta say, don’t say it. So sometimes I just don’t

talk so I don't have anything nice ta say to you at the moment." (Couple 4, Female)

Similarly, another woman acknowledges the fact that she chooses to keep some things from her husband because she does not want to upset him and because she wants to keep the peace.

"If it's something I don't wanna share it's because I think it's something that's unpleasant or might disappoint him or might, might cause some conflict or something. I just like, well, this doesn't need ta be shared, even though I probably would really like it if he knew what was going on, I opt for just, nah, just keep it to myself." (Couple 5, Female)

Furthermore, a man depicts his reasons for keeping some of his thoughts and feelings to himself, while his wife portrays the opposite.

"I think sometimes ya have ta temper what you think and what you feel. Because, I think sometimes, you know, if, if there's a disagreement, or hurt, then you think you, just time will work this out, maybe it's best ta keep those thoughts and those feelings to yourself." (Couple 9, Male)

"Where I'd rather talk 'em out." (Couple 9, Female)

"And I'd rather not...there's a lotta things we, we, we share, but there's some things I think I just keep ta myself because either, one, well, it could be a number a reasons. 1) I just wanna deal with it myself. 2) I don't wanna hear what [she] has ta say about it because then you're goin' back ta that predictable thing. I know what she's gonna say. And some, I think, ju-just because ta keep peace and tranquility, it's best if I work these things out on my own." (Couple 9, Male)

"And so I just share." (Couple 9, Female)

In addition, another man discusses his intentions to shield his wife from bad news so that she will not get upset and worry.

"I'm slower to release things sometimes, you know, especially when, a couple times when things were tight financially I, I wanted ta shield her from that. And, um, when we, when we first moved and my job was not going as well as I thought it shoul'da been, I didn't want her to know how miserable I was because she'd moved half way across the country to go with me. And, uh, that was a big step for her, and I was determined ta make it right and fix it and then not have ta, not have ta burden her with it. So, the typical man, I wanted ta make things easier on her, and sometimes she wants me to read her mind. So, that's typical male and female, we fall into those patterns." (Couple 6, Male)

External Dialectical Tensions

Conventionality-Uniqueness

The first external dialectical tension, conventionality-uniqueness, was manifested in a theme that is specific to Christian married couples, “being in the world, but not of it.” All ten Christian married couples expressed the desire for their marriages to stand out from non-Christian marriages by portraying the example of what a biblical marriage should be, but at the same time, all ten Christian married couples expressed the desire for their marriages not to be so different from non-Christian marriages that they could not socialize with non-Christian married couples and that they would be ostracized from society. Thus, Christian married couples feel pressure to conform, in some sense, to the expectations of the general society about how their marriages should be; yet, in another sense, Christian married couples want their marriages to be set apart from other marriages and to be unique from other marriages, especially from non-Christian marriages. The theme, wanting to be in the world, but not of it, is illuminated below by a woman explaining her longing for her marriage to be rare, but Godly.

“Yeah, I definitely do want our marriage to be unique and rare, especially to what America, you know, marriage is, or even a typical Christian marriage. Uh, I feel like a lot of marriage, and Christian marriages, don’t even pray together as a couple anymore. Um, I like to study God’s word together and just some of those kind of things I feel like is unique, and, mmm. Yeah, I think it’s good ta be that you have that uniqueness and just ta completely seek Christ together as a couple.”
(Couple 1, Female)

Similarly, another woman discusses wanting her marriage to be unique in the eyes of the world, but conventional in the eyes of God.

“Different in a good way...And I think there’s a difference between, like, being unique in the eyes of the world and being unique in the eyes of the family of God. Like, um, yeah, I want our marriage to be unique, and rare, and different than what is seen in the world, because it should be, because we have Christ, but I, I, don’t want our marriage to be so rare and unique from, from God, other Godly

marriages. We want it to be, um, in line with what, what God would want it to be.” (Couple 2, Female)

Correspondingly, a man talks about how he wants to conform his marriage to the biblical example of what a marriage should be, but how he does not feel the need to conform his marriage to society’s standards of what a marriage should be.

“I don’t think we try ta mold our relationship, ya know. I think it’s more where we just, we just try to make it, you know, we’ve got the biblical example of what a marriage is supposed to be, and so we try ta, I guess we do try ta conform it to that in a, you know, but not to a, not to society as a, as a whole, yeah.” (Couple 2, Male)

In addition, another woman depicts the temptation for her marriage to be just like everyone else’s, but recognizes that the most important thing is for her marriage to be Godly.

“So, even though you might have, there may be those keeping up with the Joneses type moments where you think, well, financially maybe we’re not, but I don’t know that there’s, like, a specific marital model that we’ve thought, oh, we wish our marriage looked like theirs...I’m thankful to have had biblical upbringing, and, and being part of a church family, and also Godly, earthly families, too, that have shown us what it means to have a Godly marriage.” (Couple 2, Female)

Moreover, another man takes pride in the fact that his marriage is viewed as being unique in the eyes of the world.

“There’s one of our friends...w-we play a card game. He would come down to our tournaments, um, and he’s got a tournament that somebody else runs closer to him, but he’ll travel twice as far. And we’ve started asking him, you know, hey, why don’t you save some gas? And he’s like, I like ya’ll better, y-ya’ll are actually fun ta be around. Um, and when that subject came up he would be like, I, I, and I still can’t figure out w-what makes ya’ll different. Why are ya’ll so much nicer? And, you know, we, we actually brought up the fact that we all, you know, kinda went to the same church and, and believe the same way, you know...He sees, you know, how we interact and that, you know, things are so green over here.” (Couple 3, Male)

Furthermore, another man expresses his aspiration for his marriage to be Godly; but, other than that, he does not feel any pressure for his marriage to be a certain way.

“The only example I’d like ta show ta others is that, you know, we are a Godly couple. I think we do our own thing because of who we are. I don’t, I, I feel absolutely no need to be a certain way because these people are a certain way.” (Couple 4, Male)

Subsequently, another man conveys his opinion that other than being seen as Godly, he does not want for others to perceive his marriage as being one way or another.

“Well, biblically, biblically, yeah, biblically it might be considered rare but, but we...we’re really not, you know, we’re really, don’t really want anybody ta see us one way or other than, you know, outside of the Christian peace, you know, one way or the other, I guess, so.” (Couple 10, Male)

Likewise, a couple describes their goal for their relationship to be a good, Godly example for others to look up to.

“I’d say within the context of, of, like, Christian marriages that I feel pressure ta, ta have a good, Christian marriage. Maybe not society, like, society as a whole, but, but within the church, and within, you know, that, that community. Yes, I feel like we have ta be examples and, you know.” (Couple 5, Female)

“That’s something we discussed early on is, is our, our desire to be, um, a good, exam, you know, a good example of, of a healthy, Christian marriage, um, and to really be set apart from, from other marriages in a positive way so that we could in-influence other people. So that’s something that we aspire to be.” (Couple 5, Male)

Additionally, another woman reasons that once a person reaches a certain age, then that person ceases to care about what others think about him or her, and that, in the end, all that matters is what God’s opinion about that person is.

“I don’t think we care about what other people think about us. Once you get over 40 you don’t care...as long as we’re pleasing God, and each other, you know, that’s kind of all we care about...[but] I [do] think it’s rare ta get along this well, um, just from, uh, other couples that I’ve seen.” (Couple 7, Female)

Yet, another man lays out his goal for his marriage to be Godly and to love his wife like Jesus would love her.

“I just try to follow the biblical example. So, I don’t know if that makes it unique or not...and that’s my goal is to the, to try ta, ta love [her] just like Jesus would

love her, you know. Even though, you know, I mean, I'm just, I'm just flesh, and I have lots a weaknesses and stuff like that. But that's, that's my goal." (Couple 8, Male)

Still, another woman informs of her ambition to please God and no one else.

"I mean, I don't think that we've ever felt that we need ta be like the Joneses or other couples, you know, we, we just feel like we try ta do what's right and what God intends for us ta do." (Couple 9, Female)

Accordingly, a man addresses the fact that he wants his marriage to be set apart from the world, but not so set apart that his relationship is not a part of the world.

"Well, yes and no, because there's a, there's a general sense of society, and then there's a sense of the church and your Christian friends, and, and then family, they're the odd balls. But I, I think we want the folks in general society ta see that we are different because we're a Christian couple, but, yet, we're not so different that you can't fellowship, you can't socialize with us, you know, we're, we're, we're oddballs. And, uh, with our family, well, family's sorta the same way, you think, because we have unsaved relatives, we have saved relatives, and we need them ta see that we are separate from the world, but, yet, we're not so separate that we're, you know, outta touch. So I don't know if it's as much society's conforming. We wanna conform to the, the ideal Christian couple." (Couple 9, Male)

Consequently, a woman realizes that even though she does not put forth a conscious effort into making her marriage unique, it is, in fact, unique. What is more, she stresses that without the influence of biblical teachings her marriage would not have stood the test of time. Incidentally, the longevity of her marriage is, in and of itself, unique.

"I, I think sometimes people in the world, you know...are going out buying homes at the river and, and goin' on these trips and, and just constantly doing things that, that are some kind of Hollywood standard, or whatever. And we, we just don't do those kinds a things, you know, we don't have that perspective. But, I don't see it as a goal ta be unique. Um, like he said, we just really want ta be committed to each other, and our family, and our home, and do things that the Lord approves of, you know, that, that's what our goal is. It's not ta be a certain way, you know, just ta demonstrate ta others that, you know, Christian marriage is, is unique. I'm telling you, I don't think, if we were not Christians, um, and hadn't had the influence of the, the word on a, on a day ta day basis, and preaching, and teaching of Christian leaders, I, I'm not sure that [he] and I would've made it as a couple if we were just worldly out there just goin' along on our own devices. So,

I guess we are unique, 'cause I don't think we would've made it. Even at, you know, sometimes even as Christians, there are Christian couples that don't make it, um, so I feel really blessed because I married a man who, as a priority, has set as a priority, our growth as a couple. Whether it's through these marriage enrichment seminars, or weekends away when it's just us, goin' ta men's fraternity, um, always aspiring ta, ta be that, that leader, um, that's ta me, the difference. He's way more Christ-like than I am. He is the head of the house, and he, he's inspiring in that way. So, I guess it is unique, you know. I don't think of us as being unique, but I guess, but in this day in time, it is unique if you think about it." (Couple 8, Female)

Several other couples also acknowledged the fact that the longevity of marriage is a unique aspect of Christian marriages, as well, that sets them apart from non-Christian marriages. For example, below, a man portrays the reaction of one of his co-workers to the news that he is celebrating his 28th wedding anniversary.

"I remember a couple years ago I mentioned in a, I work with doctors and their offices, and I was in a doctor's office, and I mentioned that I had a anniversary comin' up. It was probably my 28th anniversary, and, and the nurse looked at me and said, that is so unusual. And I thought about it for a minute and I said, well, you know, it's really not. I said, it just depends on who you hang around with. I said it, in our circle of friends that's that norm rather than the exception. So, again, I think it's, you know, you, you start ta surround yourself with like-minded people and you don't feel pressure ta be conformed or not conformed." (Couple 9, Male)

Along the same lines, another man hopes for his marriage to live up to the example that has been set by others in his family as far as the longevity of marriage goes.

"And we have a great example with, I mean, with her, I mean her parents, um, you know, have been married what is it 50 plus now? What is it? [Female: "Almost 60 years."]...that and, and that, you know, and their example of, of a marriage, and a great relationship, and, um, and most of our siblings, you know, have, you know, have, have great relationships." (Couple 8, Male)

Subsequently, another man seeks for his marriage to live up to the biblical example of what a marriage should be and to the longevity of marriage set by his parents.

"I don't, I don't really, personally, feel a lot of outside influence on the shape of our relationship from friends and family...Um, and, uh, I don't feel like there's a, there's something to conform to for us, really ta, out-outside of the picture of a,

you know, what we perceive as a biblical marriage, um, I don't think there's an expectation that's been set that if, like, we need to live up to...other than, um, the longevity of, of both of our parents marriages." (Couple 5, Male)

All of the Christian married couples explained that they wanted their marriages to be viewed by others as being unique from other marriages, especially from non-Christian marriages, in the sense that their marriages display the example of what a biblical marriage should be. Other than that, the couples did not feel the need to go out of their way to be seen as unique. Furthermore, other than feeling the need to conform their marriages to the biblical example of what a marriage should be, yet not to be too separated from society's standards of what a marriage should be, the couples, for the most part, did not feel pressure to conform their marriages to others' expectations, either. However, a few couples did mention that they felt pressure from others for their marriages to be just like everyone else's, and this caused tension within their marriages. Below, a woman depicts the tension that she felt because of the pressure to conform, within the context of Christian marriage, to the expectations of others about how her relationship should be.

"Within, um, the church, and with groups that we, um, have been around before, um, they view our marriage as not being as, quote unquote, Godly, as some others because I'm allowed to handle the finances, um, I have the ability to speak my opinion, you know...our marriage isn't as rigid and traditional as some would be, and I think that that, um, caused some issues with some people on the church...so, a lot of people had some issues with that. I think that that's why...we kinda separated ourselves from it just because, um, we didn't feel comfortable with our marriage being judged." (Couple 4, Female)

Moreover, the same woman describes the internal struggle that she dealt with as a result of the pressure to conform to the church's standards of what a Godly marriage should be, but how, over time, she has come to terms with it.

"Well, I feel like, I think it's different for men than it is for women...men kinda walk into a marriage and not a lot changes for them. Um, their name doesn't change, their financial stuff doesn't change, you know...nothing really changes

other than who his roommate is...Um, the female, though, I think has, especially a Christian woman, has a lot riding on her, um, ta be this image of what a Godly woman is, and, um, you know, I feel like, and, and not even, on top of a Godly woman, just what is a good wife. And so, case in point...I have had a really hard time because I'm not like that [little Miss Susie homemaker], and so I do feel very inadequate at times. And I think, I think that may be why I started cooking a lot more than I, 'cause I used ta never cook...and now I try and cook all the time...but I think a lot of it was I was trying to be this image of the little house wife, and, um...I would prefer for my marriage to # 1 be Godly, be filled with love, be filled with happiness, and then, honestly...who cares what it looks like, you know... if, if your marriage can fit into the traditional, conventional mold, then that's good, and it works, then that's good...for us, it would never work like that, you know, it would just, with, with my personality alone, I, I would never be able ta be, like, the quiet, meek little house wife...but I think that I really don't care what people. I think, at first, I cared a lot more, and I think that there are some things that people say that are hurtful, um, especially as a female because you are trying so hard ta be Godly and ta be the cr, the jewels in his crown and, you know, to raise him up, and then on top of all that still be an independent, Godly woman, and, you know, all that...but I never really cared what anybody thought about me ta begin with so why start with my marriage. So long as God likes it, we're golden.” (Couple 4, Female)

Similarly, a couple recalls the pressure that they felt, in the early years of their marriage, to conform to the norms set by other couples within their circle of friends of how a Godly marriage and family should be.

“I think the pressure was, was there more, uh, I agree we've always resisted that, but at the same time, there was more pressure maybe put upon us when we were first married, um, especially with our Sunday School class. There were, I'm thinking of how pressured everybody was to have their kids in either home schooled or at [Christian school] rather than public school, which we had talked about at the time that all this was goin' on. We had decided we wanted our kids in public schools, um, from the start, from, because of advantages that, that could take place there, and, um, that's, that's one of the examples that most comes to mind. But longer you're married, you know, the less you care. We do our thing, it's worked, and we, we like it that way.” (Couple 6, Male)

“Early on I think you will find more pressure. I've found more couples uptight with young kids than anywhere else, 'cause at first married, well, it's OK, but then later on you just don't care that much anymore. But, but, we were in a horrible, that Sunday School class was just, anyway, it's, it's, it's great now, but back then it was just, I dunno, a lotta keepin' up with the Joneses and all that, and we just didn't worry about that.” (Couple 6, Female)

Finally, a couple relays the pressure they felt, during their 11 years of marriage, from family and friends, to have a baby, but how they did not give in to the pressure and did not make any decisions about starting a family until they were ready.

“Well, we’ve had a lotta pressure over the past 11 years to have a child, from, like, everybody....I know that certain people have their viewpoints, like, especially with the whole child thing, and, how, how, how you should do things, or whatever, but, but some, some people are more vocal about it than others, and, and we just don’t always try ta just follow what everyone is telling us we should do.” (Couple 3, Female)

“And, and we haven’t given in ta that until we wanted to...uh, we, we do want ta have our friends and family know that, you know, everything is alright and that we have a normal marriage, um, but we don’t necessarily feel pressure in, in acting a certain way, or, or something like that. We, w-we’ve, it, it’s taken 11 years ta get this far, and eve-even though we’ve asked for advice from other people and, you know, seen other models, we’ve kind of blazed our own little trail.” (Couple 3, Male)

Inclusion-Seclusion

The second external dialectical tension, inclusion-seclusion, was exhibited in at least two themes, including helping a brother in need, and family, or friends, encroaching upon a couple’s alone time. The first theme, helping a brother in need, is exemplified below by a man describing a situation where he and his wife decided to help out a friend in need by allowing the friend to live with them, and the strain that having another person living with them caused on their marriage.

“It’s also been a little difficult because for the last year, um, we, in, we invited her best friend to move back [here] because the jobs all kinda dried up there. And, you know, she had no friends, and you know, it was a very lonely time for her. So, um, she’s been living with us so that, you know. An, and it’s been a little bit easier since she’s had 2nd shift, um, but 7 times out of 10 when we’re sittin’ there and wanna watch TV or do something else it, she’s in the house right there on the couch, too.” (Couple 3, Male)

Similarly, another couple discusses how they helped out a friend in need during the first year of their marriage and the stress that having someone else live with them placed on their marriage.

“We had, um, a friend in need at the time, um, he needed somewhere to live so we let him live with us for three months and that was very difficult the first year of marriage.” (Couple 4, Female)

“I actually totally, I, uh, totally blocked that out because, but, um, that, that was very challenging, I think that was. Yeah, I mean he moved in, we had not have been married two months...and here we have...living with us...We had some really big fights and some stress. I mean, we’re tryin’ ta learn each other and then we’re. But at the end of the day we’re both sh, I mean, strong Christians and we had a fellow Christian in need who goes to church here, um, and we hoped that people would do that for us. So we, uh, we had...we had an extra room, no one was using it, so we just felt we could help out a friend in need. Hindsight, I’d probably would have said no, just because of the situation we were in.” (Couple 4, Male)

The second theme, family encroaching upon a couple’s alone time, is illustrated below by a man explaining his struggle between satisfying his wife, by spending time alone with her, and satisfying his family, by spending time together with them. Because he and his wife are in a unique situation where they could be called at any time to go and serve on the mission field, he feels as if his obligations are divided between his wife and his family, which causes internal tension for him, tension between him and his wife, and external tension between him and his family.

“I think that because of my role here, with my family being here, and, you know, just being established here, um, I think it’s safe to say that there’s probably been times where we committed to doing things with people when we probably should’ve just done something together. And it’s hard because I feel an obligation to family and friends and it’s hard ta say, say no to them.” (Couple 5, Male)

Along the same lines, a couple talks about how having children has encroached upon their alone time. The couple addresses their struggle to find time to spend alone together as their kids have gotten older, as opposed to when their kids were little and it was easier to take them around and talk without them being able to understand.

“Probably more so, um, more so as the kids have gotten older. Um, when they were at football stage you just pack ‘em under your arm, take ‘em wherever you

go, it's no problem. You can talk over them, and they go to bed earlier and all these things. And we had more time than we have now. Sometimes we have time, we're, we're protective of that time we have alone." (Couple 6, Male)

"Well, I'll, I'll tell you one reason why, too, why we're protective of the time we have alone is when we were in [another state] it was not the most reaching out type a community, and we would have an awful hard time finding babysitters sometimes. So, I mean, we didn't get much of a break, we really didn't, 'cause when they got old enough that they could understand what you're saying, or it was hard takin' 'em around and stuff. You know, my mom wasn't there, 'cause once we moved back, oh boy, we really took advantage of my mom, and we were four, five, and eight when we moved back. So then we really did crave time alone more, and we, you know, we could drop 'em off anytime, which she was, she was glad we were back so she was glad ta watch 'em. So we went through a period of time. So we did have a period of time where we didn't really get much of a break, and I was kinda burnt out. So yeah, we do cherish time alone because I think that we went through a long period of time like that. It's hard when you're away from family." (Couple 6, Female)

Likewise, another man recalls the struggle for him and his wife to have alone time when their children were little, but now that their children are all grown up they have plenty of time to themselves, and so there is less of a struggle between wanting to spend time alone as a couple and wanting to spend time together with other people.

"Um, yeah, me, too, I guess. I mean, that was a lot more important back when we had children and didn't have a lot of time to ourselves, but now we've got lots of time to ourselves." (Couple 7, Male)

Correspondingly, another couple conveys the difficulty that they had in the beginning of their relationship between balancing time together alone, as a couple, and spending time together with other couples.

"Yeah, I think, I think one thing, when we were dating, um, I had some, some friends that I had had for a while that I spent a lotta time with when I was single, and one of the things that [he] shared with me...but, you know, he would, uh, he's a planner, and on Monday's or Tuesday's he would say, well, whatta you wanna do this weekend kinda thing. And I was constantly saying, well, let's go out with this one and that one...And he told me one time that he kinda had the impression that, he said, do you realize that every time I ask you what you wanna do it's always with somebody else? And I had never realized that, and that really was true. And I, I really, kinda stopped me in my tracks. It was funny because one of

those couples that we were, we, the two of us became real close to, [him], too, even though they had been my friends previously, the Lord moved them to [another state], which was really hard for me, but it was really a good thing for us. Because, I began ta look ta him for friendship, not just marital intimacy, and, and that, but just as a friend. Chatting things over with him instead of picking up the phone and calling [my friends], you know, so that was, um, that was a break through, um, almost so that now, sometimes, I have issue with how much time he's spending with scouts." (Couple 8, Female)

Accordingly, another couple discloses how spending time with other couples created a rift in their marriage.

"There were times when things, when the Lord was stretching us, and that, that it wasn't good ta go out with other couples. Because, um, even when we first got married there were, there was this couple, the guy was his best man, and we always seemed ta come home and g-got in a fight after it...And man, an, an then he would stay stuff ta [my husband], like, during the day, like, uh, [your wife] should pick up your shirts. You shouldn't have ta pick up your shirts. And then he'd be, I mean...We finally figured out after three months, though, that...he, then, then he was tryin' ta 'cause discontent an, an it was just weird. And we figured out that it was, they were toxic. I mean, it was, it was just weird...I mean the Lord pruned them out of our lives kind of." (Couple 10, Female)

In addition, a woman expresses how, even though she and her husband enjoy doing things with other people, sometimes it is just nice to spend time alone together.

"Well of, an example was yesterday. And we'd been gone so much, we hadn't been home on weekends, uh, and so I just wanted ta do, be here and do nothing. And we talked about, oh, well, maybe we should have this person over for dinner or this one, and, you know, the selfish part a me just said, nah, we just wanna be home together, so that's what we did." (Couple 9, Female)

Moreover, another woman exposes a similar struggle between wanting to do things with other people, as a couple, and wanting to have one's spouse all to one's self.

"Yeah, there's a lot of times that I'm like, yeah, I just, just want it to be us, you know. And sometimes we'll even say to each other, were you thinking when we do such and such that it was just gonna be us? And one of us will say, well, yeah, I was kinda hopin' so, or the other one might say, well, yeah, that's fine, but we can invite people, too, or whatever. So, we kinda talk that out, so yeah." (Couple 2, Female)

Finally, another woman remembers trying to balance spending time alone with her husband and spending time with her family after her father passed away soon after she and her husband were married.

“So we, we thought we were gonna move back in with her, in this home that’s still there, and, um, and we did for, like, three months. And we tried to sublease our apartment, but it never subleased...so we just decided ta come back on weekends and go back to the apartment during the week. So we kinda had a combination for the marriage, and mother thought it was better if we didn’t move in permanently with them. So, so she was lookin’ out for our marriage, too.”
(Couple 7, Female)

Revelation-Concealment

The third, and final, external dialectical tension, revelation-concealment, was demonstrated in at least three themes, including parents being biased toward their children, setting boundaries, and being an encouragement to others. The first theme, parents being biased toward their children, is illuminated below by a woman describing a time when her husband got upset with her because she shared something with her mom that depicted him in a negative light.

“We were, we were talkin’ about baby names one night, and he mentioned a name that I was like, are you kidding? You know, I thought it was ridiculous, and um, and he was like, well, no, it’s fine, it’s fine, but he, he kept trying ta help me see why it was still a good name, and I kept sayin’, well, I, I just don’t like it, like, just rule it out, I don’t like it. He was like, it’s OK, you don’t have to get upset about it, you know, and I was like, OK. So, then the next day we were with my parents for Father’s Day, and for his birthday, and uh, and I just mentioned in passing, I said, yeah, well, [he] suggested such and such and such, but I can’t remember what the name was now. [Male: “It was, It was Ian.”] Ian. It’s Ian, but it was spelled really differently. It was spelled, like, the Irish way and that was why I didn’t like it, ‘cause I was like nobody’s gonna be able to pronounce that or spell it or whatever, and, um. So, I mentioned it in front of my parents. And, so then my mom started saying well, you’re, you know, you’re supposed to just do everything a pregnant woman wants, you know, and you just don’t know that you just need to be quiet. And, and so he felt like, and when we got in the car he was kinda quiet, and I said well, what’s, what’s wrong with you, are you Okay? And he was like, well, I’m kinda frustrated. He said, I kinda wish you hadn’t, you know, told that story because now your mom thinks that I was, you know, badgering you or something and I wasn’t. And I was like, that’s not at all what I meant, at all, you know.” (Couple 2, Female)

Similarly, another woman talks about her frustration with her husband over sharing things with his parents, because she thinks that his parents are bound to be biased toward him and to always take his side over hers.

“It just, just happens ‘cause I’m close with my family and my friends...um, but, um, uh, we also look at my parents as kinda like, not only parents, but mentors, you, you’ve been through this little part of life so how did you deal with it.”
(Couple 3, Male)

“But sometimes I don’t wanna share things with, like, your parents ‘cause then they’ll, like...because then they’ll get, like, like, you know, they raised you, and so they think that you’re one way and no matter if you do anything different they think you’re still that way and so certain things you don’t wanna talk about with them.” (Couple 3, Female)

The second theme, setting boundaries, is exemplified below by a woman explaining how she and her husband have to preface information that they share with one another with disclaimers; otherwise, one person might share something that the other does not want shared. Thus, the couple needs to set boundaries about what they do and do not want to be shared with others.

“But, then, sometimes, we also feel open ta sharing with each other knowing that it’s not gonna be told to other people, and, and, like, there’s times you’re like, don’t, don’t tell anybody I said this or did this ‘cause you don’t want...Because he has been friends with his best friend since he was like ten or somethin’, so he’s used to, well, I’ll, I can tell him anything ‘cause it’s always how it’s been...but then that’s where we have ta figure out where the line is between what we don’t want shared about ourselves ‘cause, ‘cause without thinkin’ he might just talk about somethin’, like, ‘cause that’s just what he’s used to.” (Couple 3, Female)

Likewise, another woman expresses her irritation with her husband for violating the trust boundaries set between them about what they do and do not want shared with others.

“Because he works with a lotta females...the guys kinda get caught up in all of what the girls are talking about just because there’s no one else for them ta talk to in the office. And, um, for a while, he was the only one that had a TV in his office...and so the girls would come in and eat lunch sitting around his desk...then, you know, I would be at an event where these girls were at and they

would start talking about, like, random little things, like, um, oh, well, we heard that you're eating all organic now so you won't let [your husband] have any coke, and, you know, like, and again, it's small and stupid, you know...but, at the same time, it's one of those things where it was like, that's, like, me and you, you know. Like, everyone else gets to have him on a daily basis when he's at work. Whatever happens inside of our home is just for me and him, and, um, I guess it bothered me because I felt like once it starts with little things and it may grow to be something bigger. And I really want it to be like we're one force together, working together. I don't want it to ever be like, oh, [my wife's] makin' me, you know, I can't drink cokes anymore, or I can't eat this, or, you know, [my wife] won't let me go do this or anything, and so I would never want it to be portrayed, myself to be portrayed in that way, or our marriage in that way...and that was something that he came home for dinner and w-and I sat down and I talked ta him right away about it." (Couple 4, Female)

Along the same lines, a man recalls a time when his wife broke the trust boundary between them by sharing details of their marriage, that he did not want shared, with the ladies of her Bible study group.

"I'm thinkin' of just a couple silly things, like, uh, your, your women's Bible study group that got ta be a gossip session and all that stuff. You, you'd tell them that, why? But nothin' that, nothin' serious." (Couple 6, Male)

Correspondingly, another man informs about the differences between him and his wife on their boundaries of what they will and will not share with others, and how the difference in those boundaries has caused some tension between them over the years.

"I think there, I think probably every marriage has certain things you don't wanna share. I mean, we try not ta share financial information and, um. I'm probably more [Female: "You mean specifics, but, I mean."] Right, but I think, a-actually I think I'm more private about that than [she] is. There's some things I think we ju ought not ta discuss outside a the house here, and I cringe sometimes with some a the things [she] discusses, but." (Couple 9, Male)

Furthermore, another woman discusses a time when she thought that her husband had shared something that she wanted to be kept private between the two of them. Even though she later discovered that her husband had not actually shared anything private outside of their marriage, it

made her realize how important having boundaries over what is shared and what is kept private is to her, and how upset she would be if those boundaries were disrespected.

“There was one time, one example I can think of, that I thought that he had shared something, and it made me upset. And I found out that that’s not what happened, and so I feel like maybe I should say yes to the we wanna keep it between ourselves, because when that potentially had happened I, there was something that made me upset about that.” (Couple 5, Female)

Finally, another man conveys how setting boundaries of what is shared and what is kept private between a couple can create intimacy between a couple.

“Um, I mean, there’s just, there’s just some, some things that, you know, you wanna keep private, even from you’re, like, best friend, um, because then, you know, if everybody knows about it, ya know, it’s not something that we can share, you know, together...I could make one of those comments during a big, giant gathering, um, that’s an inside joke that only she would get, but if everybody knows it, then it’s not that special to her.” (Couple 3, Male)

The third theme, being an encouragement, is depicted below by a couple recognizing the need to share some aspects of their marriage with others so that others will view them as normal and also to be an encouragement to others.

“Um, I have some family members that are not Christians so it’s important ta me that they see us as normal and.” (Couple 9, Female)

“Cause that’s not always the way they perceive us.” (Couple 9, Male)

“Right. They think that, you know, we might have cloaks over our head or, um. Then, you know, I think it is important, I think, that they see us, you know, uh, as a happily married couple.” (Couple 9, Female)

“Yeah, and I think, and I think we’re, we’re open in sharing those things, sometimes the good things, sometimes the bad things. I mean, I, I’ve taught an adult Sunday School class for 27 years, and, uh, you know, so, uh, they all know us, and we share things with them off those examples, sometimes what ta do, sometimes what not ta do, but.” (Couple 9, Male)

Accordingly, a woman portrays an example of a time that she and her husband shared details of their marriage with another couple that was going through a hard time in order to be an encouragement to them.

“If the time comes up, and it’s a good influence, we have. I know we, know there was a couple we knew that were havin’ struggles and stuff, and. But he said he wanted a marriage like ours, and I think you, you, I mean, without me around, you mighta shared with him one on one more.” (Couple 6, Female)

In sum, all six of the dialectical tensions, both internal and external, were identified in the interview transcripts as tensions that Christian married couples experience when communicating with their marital partners. The internal dialectical tension, autonomy-connection, and the external dialectical tension, conventionality-uniqueness, were tied as the most frequently experienced dialectical tensions, followed by the internal dialectical tension, predictability-novelty, and the external dialectical tension, inclusion-seclusion, which were tied as the second highest tensions, next the internal contradiction, openness-closedness was the third most experienced dialectical tension, finally, the external dialectical tension, revelation-concealment was the least reported dialectical tension experienced.

Overall, results revealed that Christian married couples experienced internal dialectical tensions more frequently than external dialectical tensions. The most frequently occurring internal dialectical tension was autonomy connection, followed by predictability novelty, and finally, openness-closedness. On the other hand, the most frequently occurring external dialectical tension was conventionality-uniqueness, followed by inclusion-seclusion, and finally, revelation-concealment.

In addition, the dialectical tensions, both internal and external, were manifested in a variety of themes. The first internal dialectical tension, autonomy-connection, was manifested in at least five themes, including wanting guy/girl time, needing personal time to unwind, having

different interests, togetherness with versus togetherness to, and work can create too much autonomy. The second internal dialectical tension, predictability-novelty, was exhibited in at least two themes, including wanting to break out of the routine and get one's partner out of his or her comfort zone, and wanting one's partner, or family and friends, to be predictable.

The third, and final, internal dialectical tension, openness-closedness, was demonstrated in at least two themes, including wanting to know everything about one's partner and wanting to protect one's partner and keep the peace.

Furthermore, the first external dialectical tension, conventionality-uniqueness, was manifested in a theme that is specific to Christian married couples, "being in the world, but not of it." The second external dialectical tension, inclusion-seclusion, was exhibited in at least two themes, including helping a brother in need, and family, or friends, encroaching upon a couple's alone time. The third, and final, external dialectical tension, revelation-concealment, was demonstrated in at least three themes, including parents being biased toward their children, setting boundaries, and being an encouragement to others.

Research Question 2

All six of the dialectical tensions, both internal and external, were identified in the interview transcripts as being manifested in the form of interpersonal conflict between Christian married couples as they communicate with their marital partners. While some of the dialectical tensions caused more interpersonal conflict than others, all of the dialectical tensions, both internal and external, caused interpersonal conflict for Christian married couples at least to some degree. Thus, dialectical tensions, both internal and external, do cause interpersonal conflict in Christian married couples' relationships.

The internal dialectical tension, predictability-novelty, caused the most interpersonal conflict, with nine out of ten couples reporting having experienced conflict over this tension while communicating with their spouses. Next, the internal dialectical tension, openness-closedness caused the second highest amount of interpersonal conflict, with eight of out ten couples expressing having experienced conflict over this tension when communicating with their partners. Closely following was the external contradiction, inclusion-seclusion as the third most troublesome dialectical tension, with seven out of ten couples indicating that they have experienced interpersonal conflict over this tension while communicating with one another. After that, the external dialectical tension, revelation-concealment came in fourth, with six out of ten couples describing having experienced interpersonal conflict over this tension when communicating with each other. Subsequently, the internal dialectical tension, autonomy-connection, was the fifth most problematic dialectical tension, with five out of ten couples signifying having experienced interpersonal conflict over this tension while communicating with their spouses. Finally, the external dialectical tension, conventionality-uniqueness, came in last, as the sixth most challenging dialectical tension. The least amount of couples, only three out of ten couples, conveyed having experienced interpersonal conflict over this tension when communicating with their partners.

Overall, results of the analysis revealed that Christian married couples experienced more interpersonal conflict over the internal dialectical tensions than over the external dialectical tensions. The internal dialectical tension that caused the most interpersonal conflict was predictability-novelty, followed by openness-closedness, and finally, autonomy-connection. On the other hand, the external dialectical tension that caused the most interpersonal conflict was inclusion-seclusion, followed by revelation-concealment, and finally, conventionality-uniqueness.

In addition, the interpersonal conflict between Christian married couples over the dialectical tensions, both internal and external, was manifested in a variety of themes. The following findings have been arranged to illustrate the interpersonal conflict caused by the dialectical tensions, both internal and external, and to highlight the themes represented by each.

Internal Dialectical Tensions

Predictability-Novelty

The first internal dialectical tension, predictability-novelty, was exhibited as interpersonal conflict in the theme of one partner wanting to break out of the routine and try something new and the other partner wanting to stick to the routine and stay in his or her comfort zone. In some cases, when a spouse wanted his or her partner to try something new and different and his or her partner resisted, then it was perceived by the other spouse as disrespect towards one's partner. Furthermore, if the partner who originally resisted trying something new and different eventually gave in to the other spouse, then it was perceived by the other spouse as having love and respect for one's partner. The theme, wanting to break out of the routine and try something new versus wanting to stick to the routine and stay in one's comfort zone, is represented below by a couple expressing how they work out situations where one partner wants to be spontaneous while the other partner would prefer to plan ahead. Moreover, the sub-theme of love and respect for one's spouse is also represented, as both the husband and the wife express their desire to make the other happy rather than unhappy and not to blatantly go against the other's wishes.

"I, c-conflict, I think, to say, the, the, to say it the most, 'cause I don't think we've had any..." (Couple 2, Male)

"It's not like a big fight about it or anything." (Couple 2, Female)

"... Clashes, or any, you know, yeah...there's been a, like...like she was saying before, like, you know, it's, you know, I wanna do this; but, at the same time, I don't wanna make her unhappy, and she's the same way. So, it's, it's, that's

probably the peak, you know, of the, of the conflict if there's any, anything at all, so." (Couple 2, Male)

"And neither of us is just gonna be like, well, I'm just gonna do this anyway despite what she or he thinks. It's never been that way, so that's where we get the, you know, that middle ground. We're like, whatta we do. Well, I want you to be happy. Well, I want you to be happy. Well, I don't, unh, you know, and so that's where the decision and all comes...And he, usually very graciously, will be like, well, if you don't feel like we have time, we don't have time, that's fine, you know, and maybe inside he's more upset about it then he lets on, but usually, you know, he's more flexible." (Couple 2, Female)

Similarly, another couple also explains how they work out scenarios where one partner wants to break out of the routine and try something new while the other partner wants to stick to the routine and do things how they have always been done. The sub-theme of love and respect for one's partner is also evident in this scenario, as the husband explains how one partner usually gives in to the other to make him or her happy, even at the expense of his or her own happiness.

"So, it doesn't cause any, any arguments, or anything. It's, we, we've had fights, but they're never been like what you see on TV...There have been, OK, well, no, this is my way, this is your way, she cries, I say I'm sorry, you know." (Couple 3, Male)

"But I don't think that one wanting to do one thing and, and the other wanting to do somethin' different, I don't think it really causes argument, it's more of like..." (Couple 3, Female)

"Who, who kinda gives in first. OK, well, if, we'll, we'll, we'll go ahead and do that, that's fine." (Couple 3, Male)

"Yeah, or having one person being disappointed, but not really like argument." (Couple 3, Female)

In another example, another couple recounts a time when the wife wanted her husband to step outside of his comfort zone and accompany her to a going away party for a friend. Even though the husband came with her to the event, the wife recalls how he showed absolutely no interest in being there, which she perceived as disrespect towards her and her interests. The wife goes on to discuss how she has attended numerous affairs for her husband's work, even though she did not

necessarily want to because the situations forced her outside of her comfort zone. However, the wife perceived her actions as respect for her husband and his interests. Because she sacrificed for him by doing something that was outside of her comfort zone, and she did it willingly and with a good attitude by trying to show interest in what was important to him, the wife expected that her husband would show her the same courtesy when it came time to attend an event that was for her.

“But then, um, one example was, we have, um, a bunch a people from church that we had gotten together one night for [a friend’s] going away party, um. And he also has a really bad habit, and again, it’s just his work, where he will be on his blackberry all the time, or he has to leave wherever we are to go work. So I got kinda like left with the group, and he comes over later and he ends up, like, sleeping on the end of the couch and not really hangin’ out. And I think that that was a, that was a really big problem between us was I felt like the things that I wanted to do weren’t as important to him as the things that he wanted to do. And, in my mind, it was because, you know, oh, yours is for work so it’s more important than mine which is for friends. And I think, I think he understood that. And I think that he’s tried to make changes with that, ya know, being more willing to going out with friends and that type of a thing...I mean, and we had never really had a talk about that before.” (Couple 4, Female)

“Part of the situation was it was, like, a late night, and, again, come 10 o’clock, even on a Friday and Saturday, I mean, I’m mostly dead to the world. Um, and that was a late night. And also, I just, I’m never big on, I’m never, even, even with my friends, I’m not into the let’s be up ‘till 1-2 in the morning, you now, having fun, just wat, I just, that’s just not, never my thing...It was something that I was not comfortable in being so I, I kinda just shut. It was like you do your thing, I mean, I’ll sit here and I’ll be here, but I definitely was not part of the...” (Couple 4, Male)

“And to me that was hurtful and disrespectful, because I had spent so many times. Like, whenever he has to be somewhere late for work he’s up and talking and this and that, you know, doin’ what he has to do. But then whenever it was something to be hanging out with my friends it was kind of like a slap in the face, like, it’s not as important. And so I think that that was, I mean, that was a really big issue between us for a couple a days. I mean, I was really hurt by it, so, but, then we’ve tried to fix it since then.” (Couple 4, Female)

In addition, a man describes a recurring episode where he wants to go out and do things and his wife wants to stay at home and rest, and the tension that it causes between them.

“Well, on Sundays, that’s, that could be an example, ‘cause I, um...I think you like to go to church, come home, and just kinda rest, and then go to church thing in the evening, and so. And, uh, I like to go to church and do something, play golf, or go fishing, or go to [an amusement park], or. So I’ll get anxious because I wanna go out and she’s resting, but probably not really resting because she knows that I’m anxious ‘cause I wanna go out and do something.” (Couple 5, Male)

Yet, another couple recollects that one partner wanting to do something adventurous and the other partner wanting to play it safe has caused conflict between them, even though they cannot recollect an exact example.

“I’m sure it has. I think I’m the more adventuresome one, but.” (Couple 6, Female)

“Not often, we accommodate each other.” (Couple 6, Male)

“But we do, yeah, we really do. I m-maybe I can think of, maybe. I can’t think what it is off the top of my head, but I can think of one time I think there was somethin’ I wanted to try and you didn’t, but I can’t remember what it is, but.” (Couple 6, Female)

Still, another couple remembers a circumstance where one partner wanted to deviate from the normally accepted convention and the other partner wanted to keep with the tradition, and how that caused conflict between them. The couple was looking for a new church, because their son had reached youth group age and they wanted to find a church with a good youth group for him to attend. The couple was searching for a traditional, conservative church, one with same routine and order of service as their current church. However, after visiting a more contemporary, and somewhat liberal, church, the husband felt led by the Holy Spirit to join, while the wife felt completely opposite. Thus, the couple struggled to make a decision about whether they should join the church. The sub-theme of love and respect for one’s spouse came in when the wife determined that she must respect her husband and give in to his spiritual authority whether she liked it or not.

“That’s when I had to take a back seat and say, you are the spiritual head of the household, you decide where we go to church.” (Couple 7, Female)

Subsequently, another couple admits that one partner wanting to try something new and the other partner wanting to do the same old thing has caused conflict between them, even though they cannot conjure up a specific example.

“I’m sure we have I just...” (Couple 8, Male)

“I’m sure we have, but I can’t think of it...We usually work it out.” (Couple 8, Female)

Consequently, another couple talks about the major and minor disagreements that the internal dialectical tension, predictability-novelty, has caused in their relationship. For example, a major stress that the couple experienced was over the possibility of having to move to another state, while a minor example would be a disagreement over whether to order thin and crispy or thick crust pizza. The sub-theme, having love and respect for one’s partner, is also depicted in this example, as the wife acknowledges that she does not want her personal feelings to interfere with her husband’s decision to take the job or not.

“Uh, I think about it, he was offered a job in [another state], and I was pregnant, so your hormones are not right, and we had just decided we were gonna buy this house. And he had to make up his mind, like, within 2 days, and it would mean that he’d be traveling a lot and I would have be home...where I didn’t know anyone. So yeah, so it was very hard, um, but, I mean, I wanted it to be his decision not me. But, I mean, you know, he would come home and find me cryin’, and so I would come home and see oranges and flamingo glasses on the mantle.” (Couple 9, Female)

“I mean, there’s always gonna be things like that, but I think most all those things we’ve worked out.” (Couple 9, Male)

“Like the helicopter ride. I’m fine watchin’ him....We’re probably pretty boring as far as the times that we’ve fought and what we’ve, you know, but I mean, you know, it’s like thin and crispy crust vs. thick.” (Couple 9, Female)

“Well, we had more f-arguments earlier on ...” (Couple 9, Male)

Finally, a woman discloses an argument between her and her husband over trying a new restaurant or going with the old standard. The sub-theme, having love and respect for one's partner, is reflected in this example, as the wife feels as though her husband does not value her input.

“But, in everyday life, there was one time that I was really irritated, ‘cause...you were like, hey, you wanna go to lunch?...And I said, sure, and I said, let's try somethin' new, ‘cause we always go to Arby's. And so I said, well, why don't we try that BBQ place, and y, I'll never forget, you were like, well, I really [gotta] get home so why don't we just go to Arby's. And I was like, well, then why did you ask me what I wanted to do.” (Couple 10, Female)

Openness-Closedness

The second internal dialectical tension, openness-closedness, was demonstrated as interpersonal conflict in at least three themes, including breaking the circle of trust between partners, protecting one's partner at one's own expense, and nagging one's partner about opening up about his or her feelings. The first theme, breaking the circle of trust between partners, is illustrated below by a couple relaying two different scenarios where each partner violated the trust of the other. In the first example, the wife violated the trust of her husband by not telling him that she made cookies for work; and subsequently, by not sharing any of the leftover cookies with him. Instead, she hid the evidence by eating all of the leftovers herself. In the second example, the husband violated the trust of his wife by not telling her that he used her life savings, without her awareness or permission, to buy gold.

“As you can tell, we just learned a couple things about each other. Like, I didn't know that she ate all those cookies and didn't even, she didn't even share one, she didn't share one with me.” (Couple 1, Male)

“I really, honestly, didn't even think about it. I mean, they're all gone so why bring it up?” (Couple 1, Female)

“I just remember one distinct incident when it happened...about something that he didn't tell me that he was gonna do, and he did it. You know what I'm talkin' 'bout?” (Couple 1, Female)

“Oh, yeah. I bought gold.” (Couple 1, Male)

“And all my savings, all my savings I'd saved up since I was, like, a kid and he used that to buy gold and he didn't consult with me...But, anyways, when that happened I was just mad, and I didn't wanna talk. I was just mad, and so I ran away, and I think I like locked myself in the bathroom and was just mad.”
(Couple 1, Female)

Along the same lines, a woman confesses to her husband, during the interview, that she violated his trust by not telling him that she allowed her daughter to drive to church that very morning without her license.

“I think we communicate very well, because I pretty much don't keep anything from him. Except for the one thing this mornin' when I didn't confess to him because my daughter swore m, swore me not to tell him that she left her driver's license at home when she drove to church, but, um, yeah, so I'm tellin' ya now, but anyway.” (Couple 6, Female)

The second theme, protecting one's partner at one's own expense, is illuminated below by a woman addressing the fact that her desire to shield her partner from hurt causes her to struggle internally, which eventually causes her to erupt.

“But, then it usually ends bad, because I get irritated to the point that I just blow up about it.” (Couple 3, Female)

“And then, no matter if it was, it, no matter if a, a, if I, if a, if I was on the receiving end and it wasn't my fault, and I, I, I tend to have the, well, now I've made you cry and I didn't mean to do anything so now I have to fix it all.”
(Couple 3, Male)

The third, and final, theme, nagging one's partner about opening up about his or her feelings, is exhibited below by a couple pointing out their differences in their approaches to conflict. The husband likes to talk things out immediately, whereas the wife needs time away to cool down and to formulate a more amiable response before opening up to her husband. Both

partners want their spouse to respond in the same way as they do, and when their spouse does not respond accordingly, it creates tension and frustration between the couple.

“Uh, I’m a talker. She has gotten, she’s gotten a lot better over the years. She used to hole up. She just, when we first started dating and then, you know, I’d say early on of our marriage, she has a, problem’s wrong, she has a habit of bottling things up...of bottling things up for a few months, or even weeks, and then one thing will happen, and it could be the smallest thing a, like I just changed the channel too quickly or somethin’ like that small, and blow up, um, and that really, really frustrates me because I’m a big communication. When I have a problem, I tell her, you know, and she’s gotten a lot better a, a lot better as the years we’ve gone, um, then, she’d, but drive me crazy. It’s like if you have a problem with me just tell me” (Couple 4, Male)

“I don’t like to talk about, I don’t like to talk about feelings and stuff...I’m also a, um, matter of fact person. Some people don’t like my brutal honesty, um, but I just, I, I don’t like beating around the bush about things, and, um, I don’t like fluff in, like, conversation and things like that...And so, I think that that has had some issues, or, I guess, caused some issues within the marriage just because, you know, I may say that something is bothering me, or I may say how my day was, but because it doesn’t have as much detail in it, to him, it doesn’t feel like I’m really communicating that much, you know, because he’s expecting more detail and stuff ‘cause that’s just the kind of person he is.” (Couple 4, Female)

“And that’s probably happened, in 3 years we’ve probably had 3, 4, 5 of those type a fights because of her bottling somethin’ up...I’m sure, I’m sure we’ve even even had fights on why do you bottle things up, I know we’ve had fights on.” (Couple 4, Male)

Likewise, a woman comments about the differences between her and her husband when dealing with conflict. She would prefer to grapple with the issue on her own for a little while before divulging her thoughts and feelings to her husband, while he would rather her open up about it so they can get it over with as quickly as possible. Thus, the husband gets aggravated with the wife if he can tell that something is bothering her and she will not open up about it, and he may pressure her to share what is going on because he wants the conflict to be over and done with. However, even though the wife is the one who prefers to keep things to herself, if she can tell

that her husband is upset about something, then she may also insist that he tell her what is on his mind.

“If I get upset, if I’m really angry, I get real quiet, just because a that, you know, I don’t wanna hurt him, but I wanna wrestle with, you know, ah, whatever’s going on. Um, and if he can tell, you know, he really wants me to share what’s going on so we can work it out and that kind of stuff. So he gets upset if I’m being silent, um, but it’s the same. I mean, if, if I can tell that something’s bothering him I really want him to tell me what’s going on and, you know, he doesn’t wanna tell me so it’s, it goes both ways.” (Couple 5, Female)

Accordingly, another woman supplies a situation where she can tell that her husband is keeping something from her and she really wants to know what it is, but he cannot tell her because it is confidential, and how that causes tension between them.

“Yeah, well, yeah, um, just, we, the main thing is just certain things that he’s not supposed to tell me in confidentiality with certain things goin’ on it could. Well, mostly, probably church than work just ‘cause he, he, he’s, he knows...” (Couple 6, Female)

“‘Cause she doesn’t care what goes on at work, ‘cause you don’t understand exactly what I do.” (Couple 6, Male)

“...There’s certain things that I, certain things that I would find out eventually, but, but he, you know, it’s just, there’s a lot of change going on right now, and he’s in the middle of a lot of it, and, just, you know. I’d love for him to tell me all this stuff, and, ‘cause I’m nosy, I’m, I’ll be honest with you.” (Couple 6, Female)

“I’m chairman of the personnel committee. So, there are things I won’t, I can’t and won’t, share, but she knows somethin’s going on, and she knows by my attitude, and my actions and mannerisms, something’s going on.” (Couple 6, Male)

“He will tell me eventually, I mean, when the, when the time is right. He doesn’t, he’s not gon keep it totally from me, but not at, not, only when he know, thinks the time is right, so, but that’s the only thing I can think of.” (Couple 6, Female)

Moreover, a man reveals that there have been instances where he has held back from his wife about what he is thinking and feeling, while she has wanted him to share what was on his heart and mind, and that has caused some conflict between them.

“I mean, we, we, we, we’ve even had arguments, and maybe I wasn’t really expressing what was on my heart, but when I finally said what was really irritating me it helped her understand it better.” (Couple 8, Male)

Furthermore, another man mentions how his wife’s propensity to pester him about opening up when she feels like he is holding back has created discord between them over the years. In addition, the husband mentions how his wife’s lack of holding back when he felt like she should have has also created discord in their relationship.

“Well, if I felt like he was I would ask him, you know, and hound him, and, you know.” (Couple 9, Female)

“Yeah, hound or nag, but, uh...no, I think [she’s] usually pretty forthright, perhaps more so than she should be, but.” (Couple 9, Male)

Finally, another couple indicates that the husband’s lack of openness over the years has created rifts in their marriage. Furthermore, both partners indicate that the wife’s badgering of her husband to open up has also created rifts in their marriage. Yet, at the same time, the wife indicates that when she finally stopped badgering her husband about opening up that they had a conflict over the fact that she was not asking him what was bothering him anymore. So, the wife has felt like she cannot win either way.

“Yeah, for about 20 years, yes, the answer would be yes.” (Couple 10, Female)

“We’ve struggled a little bit with, through the years on that. Like, you know, what’s really botherin’ ya, you know.” (Couple 10, Male)

“Well, I think women are more intuitive anyway. We can tell when there’s somethin’ wrong, and, and I don’t ask it all the time, but then, I think that when I got to the point where I wadn’t asking it, because I just kept my eyes on the Lord, then there came a point where you got frustrated that I wasn’t asking...But I wasn’t doin’ it in spite...you know, it’s kinda like Pebbles and Bam Bam...like, that dodn’t work when you have a stick.” (Couple 10, Female)

“I think one of the keys is to, to not always ask, hey, what’s wrong. I think we’re gettin’ better at that because, ya know...if somethin’s wrong...some patience and it will come out I, I think is a better way to go about it. ‘Cause you’re always, hey,

what's wrong, that just is not a, that's a wearing conversation on both people"
(Couple 10, Male)

Autonomy-Connection

The third, and final, internal dialectical tension, autonomy-connection, was manifested as interpersonal conflict in at least two themes, including one partner wanting to spend time together, while the other partner wants to spend time apart, and too much of a good thing can be bad. While most of the couples were reluctant to use the word "conflict" in the interviews, many of the situations that they described involved an expressed struggle over incompatible goals (i.e. wanting to spend time together versus wanting to spend time apart) and perceived interference in achieving those goals (i.e. one's partner standing in the way of that person either having alone time or spending time together), which are concepts that are at the heart of the definition of interpersonal conflict. Therefore, even if the word "conflict" was not used, if the scenario described by the respondents included the elements of interpersonal conflict, then the scenario was coded as interpersonal conflict.

The first theme, one partner wanting to spend time together while the other partner wants to spend time apart, is described below by a woman explaining her desire for her husband to stay home and help her with the housework, while he wants to go and hang out with his friends.

"And that's, that's not, doesn't usually pose a conflict. I think, if anything, there may be a time where he, he says, well, so and so wants me to go do this, and, and I'd like to go, and I might say, well, there's housework I need some help with, you know, I, I'd really like you to stay home. So, sometimes that might cause a, you know, not really like a fight, but more like a just, like, well, what's really the best situation, ya know. And I want him to be happy, and he wants me to be happy. And so then we kinda go what da we do. So those types of situations where we have to communicate about it and go, well, what's really gonna be the best thing, um, you know, that kinda thing. But, I don't think we've ever lacked for wanting to spend time together, which we're very thankful for." (Couple 2, Female)

In addition, another woman talks about the difficulty in reading her partner and decoding when he needs time alone. Thus, she points out that there are times when she wants to spend time together and he wants to be alone, and she does not realize it, and so that poses a conflict for them.

“Sometimes I’m like, when he’s said he needs that time, I mean, I don’t always know that this is the time he needs away, and so I’m like, yeah, you know, come, let’s do stuff, and he just needs to be alone. Um, so that’s where the conflict happens is when I don’t realize that’s the time that he’s trying to be alone, you know. But I think that’s also, we’re getting better at that, being together in the same place, you know, learning his signs and his, you know.” (Couple 5, Female)

Moreover, a couple recalls having experienced conflict over one partner wanting to spend quality time together and the other partner wanting his or her own personal time and personal space.

“Yeah.” (Couple 8, Male)

“Yeah, it has.” (Couple 8, Female)

“I mean, yeah, um, I mean, we, I mean, we’ve had, I guess, I mean, we’ve had our share of arguments about that. We went through, I mean, you know, we, you know, we go in, you know, we go in spells. And most of the, most of the time it ended up bein’ a, a later night discussion, which is not the best time to do it. And, and we, yeah, you’re tired and then, and then it, ya talk through it. And we ended it, and it would end up, um, you know, goin’ late, but we would talk through it.” (Couple 8, Male)

Finally, another couple remembers a time when the wife wanted to spend time away from her husband to work on a home improvement project and the husband wanted to spend quality time together with her, which caused conflict between them. However, because the situation was a reversal of the normal routine, usually the husband was the one who wanted to spend time away to work on projects and the wife was the one who wanted to spend quality time together, it facilitated discussion and understanding between them.

“I think it happened in January a lot ‘cause I was re-doin’ my closet upstairs...I would have the TV on upstairs...[and] it was really the first time in our relationship that he’d been like, aren’t ya gonna come down here? Which is

really kinda funny because it, he's the work-a-holic, you know, so there were a gazillion times through 23 years that I've wanted him to spend time and he's up in his office." (Couple 10, Female)

"Paybacks are tough." (Couple 10, Male)

"No, no, but it wasn't payback, but I think he took it that way at first, but it wasn't, it really wasn't, and it helped me understand whenever he needed to get somethin' done, so." (Couple 10, Female)

The second theme, too much of a good thing can be bad, is depicted below by a couple disclosing an argument that they had on their honeymoon over having spent too much time together and not having had enough time apart from each other.

"Now, on the honeymoon comin', that's a great example actually, but, um, where we spend 24/7. On the honeymoon coming home...we were divorce, I say this close to divorce our first week coming back. I remember in the airport, in particular, we had a blow out conversation. I, uh, I think half the airport probably heard our argument. It just got to the point where it had been like, it, e, it, even it was stuff, like, it was the wedding, the honeymoon, we were all just kinda like, OK, enough of this let's get back to our lives kinda thing. So I think there just kind was..." (Couple 4, Male)

"We needed space...can you leave and go somewhere else." (Couple 4, Female)

"L-Luckily we were in the airport and not in the air where there was lack of options to go, but, um, that was, that was a pretty bad, that was a, that was a pretty big fight." (Couple 4, Male)

"Oh, yeah. That was a big one." (Couple 4, Female)

External Dialectical Tensions

Inclusion-Seclusion

The first external dialectical tension, inclusion-seclusion, was exemplified as interpersonal conflict in at least two themes, including one partner wanting to spend time alone, as a couple and the other partner wanting to spend time, as a couple, with other people, and too much inclusion with other people. The first theme, one partner wanting to spend time alone, as a couple, and the other partner wanting to spend time, as a couple, with other people, is displayed

below by a woman exposing the difficulty in balancing one partner's need to do things with other people, as a couple, on the one hand, and the other partner's need to spend time alone, as a couple, on the other hand.

“Yeah, there's a lot of times that I'm like, yeah, I just, just want it to be us, you know. And sometimes we'll even say to each other, were you thinking when we do such and such that it was just gonna be us? And one of us will say, well, yeah, I was kinda hopin' so, or the other one might say, well, yeah, that's fine, but we can invite people, too, or whatever. So, we kinda talk that out, so yeah.” (Couple 2, Female)

Correspondingly, another woman echoes the struggle between wanting to appease her husband's need to spend time with other people, as a couple, and wanting to appease her own need to have her husband all to herself.

“Probably, but like I said, one of us normally, before it becomes a problem, one of us gives in. Okay, well, we'll stay home, or, Okay, well, we'll go there, or, why don't you just go.” (Couple 3, Male)

“Well, there's sometimes when I, when I, like, wanna go out to lunch, or dinner, or somethin' and just be us, and then you're like, well, how 'bout we ask mom and [sister] to go, or how 'bout we see if [best friend] wants to come.” (Couple 3, Female)

Additionally, another woman repeats the clash over wanting to spend time, as a couple, away from other people and wanting to spend time together, as a couple, with other people.

“Really, the only time I can think of is, like, the Sunday thing where there's a time when I wanted to, to stay home and just, you know, not do anything with anybody else, and he was wanting to get out and go do things with his family and stuff. And so we just decided that, that he would go, and so he just went ahead and went, and I just stayed home. And so we were able to both do what we wanted to do and it was the better decision to do that, you know, so.” (Couple 5, Female)

Likewise, a couple recognizes a discrepancy in their desire to be alone together and to socialize with other people.

“Last night.” (Couple 9, Male)

“Oh, you wanted to invite people over?” (Couple 9, Female)

“Well, I suggested seein’ what [our friends] were doin’.” (Couple 9, Male)

“True.” (Couple 9, Female)

“And you said, nah, let’s just be home together tonight.” (Couple 9, Male)

Consistent with the previous example, a man presents a period, early on in his marriage, where his wife would invite people over when he would rather spend a relaxing evening at home together, just the two of them.

“I would say maybe early on there might a been, uh, you know, you, you may have planned, you know, a busy weekend, and maybe I was not ready for a busy weekend. And so, you know, it was a tougher grind for me, but I, I haven’t felt that way in a long time. And I, I think early on, you know, when, when I was younger, I, you know, I didn’t, you know, if I had worked all week I, you know, havin’ guests over and havin’ to clean up, and I mean, I, I was a little bit too much like my mother for a number of years. So, we, we’ve balanced that a little bit over time.” (Couple 10, Male)

Finally, another woman provides an account of a time when her children were little and she and her husband had an altercation over spending too much time with the children and not enough time alone as a couple.

“There’s a point, I guess, when the boys were really little, I guess 3 and 5, that the Lord really had to be the one. It’s kinda like the scripture, I mean what he was preachin’ today...I really had to ha, to put Him first, and [my husband] second, and the kids third, ‘cause that really can happen. Because when your kids are payin’ attention to ya and they need you to, kinda forget about. I’ll never forget, I think [our son] was 4 months old, and he needed me to go out for a business dinner, and we just didn’t have a babysitter. And I remember not tryin’ real hard and then sayin’, well, you get, you get a babysitter. But I remember his frustration, sayin’ that, I need a wife. And I think that that happens sometimes; but, yet, he needs a wife whenever he needed a wife, you know. I was always a mom, but he was off bein’ fulfilled in his business stuff. So, but the Lord really helped.” (Couple 10, Female)

The second theme, too much inclusion with other people, is represented below by a couple rendering a time where they chose to help out a friend in need by allowing the friend to

live with them, and the stress that having another person around constantly imposed on their marriage.

“We had, um, a friend in need at the time, um, he needed somewhere to live so we let him live with us for three months and that was very difficult the first year of marriage.” (Couple 4, Female)

“I actually, totally, I, uh, totally blocked that out because, but, um, that, that was very challenging, I think that was... We had some really big fights and some stress.” (Couple 4, Male)

Similarly, a woman remarks on how her desire to always spend time, as a couple, with other couples created a chasm between her and her husband in the beginning of their marriage.

Incidentally, she also remarks on how the tables have turned, and how her husband is now the one who always wants to do things with other people, and how she is now the one who wants him to spend more time alone, just the two of them.

“Yeah, I think, I think one thing, when we were dating, um, I had some, some friends that I had had for a while that I spent a lotta time with when I was single, and one of the things that [he] shared with me...but, you know, he would, uh, he’s a planner, and on Monday’s or Tuesday’s he would say, well, whatta you wanna do this weekend kinda thing. And I was constantly saying, well, let’s go out with this one and that one...And he told me one time that he kinda had the impression that, he said, do you realize that every time I ask you what you wanna do it’s always with somebody else? And I had never realized that, and that really was true. And I, I really, kinda stopped me in my tracks. It was funny because one of those couples that we were, we, the two of us became real close to, [him], too, even though they had been my friends previously, the Lord moved them to [another state], which was really hard for me, but it was really a good thing for us. Because, I began to look to him for friendship, not just marital intimacy, and, and that, but just as a friend. Chatting things over with him instead of picking up the phone and calling [my friends], you know, so that was, um, that was a break through, um, almost so that now, sometimes, I have issue with how much time he’s spending with scouts.” (Couple 8, Female)

Finally, another woman imparts how spending too much time with other couples created dissent in her relationship with her husband.

“There were times when things, when the Lord was stretching us, and that, that it wasn’t good to go out with other couples. Because, um, even when we first got

married there were, there was this couple, the guy was his best man, and we always seemed to come home and g-got in a fight after it...And man, an, an then he would stay stuff to [my husband], like, during the day, like, uh, [your wife] should pick up your shirts. You shouldn't have to pick up your shirts. And then he'd be, I mean...We finally figured out after three months, though, that...he, then, then he was tryin' to 'cause discontent an, an it was just weird. And we figured out that it was, they were toxic. I mean, it was, it was just weird...I mean the Lord pruned them out of our lives kind of." (Couple 10, Female)

Revelation-Concealment

The second external dialectical tension, revelation-concealment, was exhibited as interpersonal conflict in at least two themes, including parents being biased toward their children, and setting boundaries. The first theme, parents being biased toward their children, is illuminated below by a woman conveying an incident where she shared something with her mom that her husband did not want her to share because he felt like it portrayed him in an unflattering way, and so he got upset with her about it.

"We were talkin' about baby names one night, and he mentioned a name that I was like, are you kidding? ...[and] he, he kept trying to help me see why it was still a good name, and I kept sayin', well, I, I just don't like it...So, then the next day we were with my parents...and I just mentioned in passing...And, so then my mom started saying you just don't know that you just need to be quiet...and when we got in the car he was kinda quiet...And he was like, well, I'm kinda frustrated. He said, I kinda wish you hadn't, you know, told that story because now your mom thinks that I was, you know, badgering you or something and I wasn't. And I was like, that's not at all what I meant, at all, you know." (Couple 2, Female)

Along the same lines, another woman voices her irritation with her husband over sharing details of their marriage with his parents because she believes that his parents are certain to be partial toward him and to favor his side over hers every time.

"But sometimes I don't wanna share things with, like, your parents 'cause then they'll, like... they raised you, and so they think that you're one way and no matter if you do anything different they think you're still that way." (Couple 3, Female)

The second theme, setting boundaries, is demonstrated below by a woman informing about how she has to include a disclaimer as a prelude before disclosing information to her husband; otherwise, he might inadvertently divulge something that she wants to be kept private. As a result, the couple must set boundaries about what they do and do not want to be made known to others.

“But, then, sometimes, we also feel open to sharing with each other knowing that it’s not gonna be told to other people, and, and, like, there’s times you’re like, don’t, don’t tell anybody I said this or did this...but then that’s where we have to figure out where the line is between what we don’t want shared about ourselves ‘cause, ‘cause without thinkin’ he might just talk about somethin’” (Couple 3, Female)

In accordance with the previous example, another woman articulates her aggravation with her husband for breaching the trust boundaries set between them about what they do and do not want to be revealed to others about themselves and their relationship.

“I would be at an event where these girls...would start talking about, like, random little things...and again, it’s small and stupid, you know...but, at the same time, it’s one of those things where it was like, that’s, like, me and you, you know...Whatever happens inside of our home is just for me and him, and, um, I guess it bothered me...and that was something that he came home for dinner and w-and I sat down and I talked to him right away about it.” (Couple 4, Female)

Correspondingly, a man specifies an occasion where his wife violated the trust boundary between them by communicating the particulars of their marriage, that he want to be kept confidential, with the women at her small group Bible study.

“I’m thinkin’ of just a couple silly things, like, uh, your, your women’s Bible study group that got to be a gossip session and all that stuff.” (Couple 6, Male)

Moreover, a couple discusses the variance between them on their boundaries of what they do not mind sharing, or having shared, with others, and what they do mind sharing, or having shared, with others, and how the variance in those boundaries has been a point of contention between them, even within the context of the interview.

“So I think that sometimes the thing with, you know, problems with the kids, uh, sometimes financial things that I think need to be kept within the confines of the family, or within the confines of the house, and [she] freely shares them.” (Couple 9, Male)

Finally, another woman notes an episode where she believed that her husband had disclosed information that she wanted to be kept just between the two of them. Even though she later found out that her husband had not actually disclosed anything confidential outside of their marriage, it made her aware of how important having boundaries over what is revealed to others, and what is kept from others, is to her, and how offended she would be if those boundaries were disregarded.

“There was one time, one example I can think of, that I thought that he had shared something, and it made me upset.” (Couple 5, Female)

Conventionality-Uniqueness

The third, and final, external dialectical tension, conventionality-uniqueness, was illustrated as interpersonal conflict in the theme of people outside of the relationship imposing themselves, and their views, on the relationship. The theme is depicted below by a woman signifying the burden that she experienced because of the demand to accommodate, within the context of Christian marriage, to the expectations of others about how her marriage should be. Furthermore, she acknowledges the controversy that her relationship with her husband caused, within the context of the church, and how it led to the dissolution of friendships between her and her husband and a particular group of people at their church.

“Within, um, the church...they view our marriage as not being as, quote unquote, Godly, as some others...our marriage isn't as rigid and traditional as some would be, and I think that that, um, caused some issues with some people on the church... I think that that's why...we kinda separated ourselves from it.” (Couple 4, Female)

In a similar situation, another couple recollects the compulsion that they sensed, in the early years of their marriage, to fit the standards set by other couples within their friendship ring of how a Godly marriage and family should be.

“I think...there was more pressure maybe put upon us when we were first married, um, especially with our Sunday School class...But longer you're married, you know, the less you care. We do our thing, it's worked, and we, we like it that way.” (Couple 6, Male)

Finally, another woman reports the demand she perceived, during the first 11 years of her marriage, from family and friends, to have a baby, but how she did not give in to the demand and did not make any decisions about starting a family until she was ready.

“Well, we've had a lotta pressure over the past 11 years to have a child, from, like, everybody.... and we just don't always try to just follow what everyone is telling us we should do.” (Couple 3, Female)

In sum, all six of the dialectical tensions, both internal and external, were also identified in the interview transcripts as being manifested in the form of interpersonal conflict between Christian married couples as they communicate with their marital partners. The internal dialectical tension, predictability-novelty, caused the most interpersonal conflict, followed by the internal dialectical tension, openness-closedness, next was the external contradiction, inclusion-seclusion, after that was the external dialectical tension, revelation-concealment, trailed by the internal dialectical tension, autonomy-connection, and finally, the external dialectical tension, conventionality-uniqueness came in last with the least amount of couples conveying having experienced interpersonal conflict over this tension when communicating with their partners.

Overall, results of the analysis revealed that Christian married couples experienced more interpersonal conflict over the internal dialectical tensions than over the external dialectical tensions. The internal dialectical tension that caused the most interpersonal conflict was predictability-novelty, followed by openness-closedness, and finally, autonomy-connection. On

the other hand, the external dialectical tension that caused the most interpersonal conflict was inclusion-seclusion, followed by revelation-concealment, and finally, conventionality-uniqueness.

In addition, the interpersonal conflict between Christian married couples over the dialectical tensions, both internal and external, was manifested in a variety of themes. The first internal dialectical tension, predictability-novelty, was exhibited as interpersonal conflict in the theme of one partner wanting to break out of the routine and try something new and the other partner wanting to stick to the routine and stay in his or her comfort zone. Moreover, a sub-theme of love and respect for one's spouse was also represented. The second internal dialectical tension, openness-closedness, was demonstrated as interpersonal conflict in at least three themes, including breaking the circle of trust between partners, protecting one's partner at one's own expense, and nagging one's partner about opening up about his or her feelings. The third, and final, internal dialectical tension, autonomy-connection, was manifested as interpersonal conflict in at least two themes, including one partner wanting to spend time together, while the other partner wants to spend time apart, and too much of a good thing can be bad.

Subsequently, the first external dialectical tension, inclusion-seclusion, was exemplified as interpersonal conflict in at least two themes, including one partner wanting to spend time alone, as a couple and the other partner wanting to spend time, as a couple, with other people, and too much inclusion with other people. The second external dialectical tension, revelation-concealment, was exhibited as interpersonal conflict in at least two themes, including parents being biased toward their children, and setting boundaries. The third, and final, external dialectical tension, conventionality-uniqueness, was illustrated as interpersonal conflict in the theme of people outside of the relationship imposing themselves, and their views, on the relationship.

Research Question 3

Results of the analysis revealed that Christian married couples responded to, or attempted to manage, the six dialectical tensions, both internal and external, in several ways, including segmentation, disorientation, balance, spiraling inversion, reframing, privileging one polarity, and integration. While some of the above strategies were employed more frequently than others, all of the above strategies for managing dialectical tensions, both internal and external, were employed by Christian married couples at least to some degree. Thus, Christian married couples do utilize management strategies in order to cope with the dialectical tensions, both internal and external, that they experience in their relationships.

The management strategy that Christian married couples exercised the most in an attempt to handle the dialectical tensions, both internal and external, that they experienced in their relationships was the segmentation management strategy. The next most employed strategy for managing dialectical tensions in interpersonal relationships was the disorientation tactic. Following the disorientation tactic was the technique of balance for dealing with dialectical tensions in relationships. After that, the spiraling inversion and reframing methods were tied as the fourth most employed strategies for controlling dialectical tensions in personal relationships. Subsequently, the privileging one polarity approach was the next most utilized strategy for negotiating dialectical tensions in interpersonal relationships. Finally, the integration procedure was the least exercised strategy for managing dialectical tensions in relationships.

Overall, results of the investigation showed that Christian married couples employed more management strategies for handling internal dialectical tensions than for handling external dialectical tensions. The most frequently exercised strategy for managing internal dialectical tensions was segmentation, followed by disorientation, trailed by balance, then spiraling

inversion and privileging one polarity, which were tied as the fourth most frequently utilized management strategies for coping with internal dialectical tensions in relationships, and finally, integration. On the other hand, the most frequently employed strategy for managing external dialectical tensions was segmentation, followed by reframing, then balance, trailed by disorientation, and spiraling inversion, which were tied as the least exercised management strategies for dealing with external dialectical tensions in interpersonal relationships.

In addition, the management strategies for handling dialectical tensions, both internal and external, in Christian married couples' relationships were manifested in a variety of themes. The following findings have been arranged to display the management strategies exercised by Christian married couples in an attempt to manage the dialectical tensions, both internal and external, in their relationships and to highlight the themes represented by each.

Internal Dialectical Tensions

Autonomy-Connection

Analysis exposed that Christian married couples responded to, or attempted to manage, the internal dialectical tension, autonomy-connection, in several ways, including segmentation, spiraling inversion, and privileging one polarity. According to Baxter and Montgomery, the first praxical pattern, segmentation is characterized by, "Efforts by the pair to segment the topics and activity domains of their relationship such that domains specialize in responsiveness to a particular dialectical demand. Some activities are negotiated as 'Me Zones,' whereas other activities are 'We Zones'" (99). The first technique, segmentation, was manifested in at least three themes, including designating a date night, differences in personal time clocks, and having dissimilar interests. The first theme, designating a date night, is demonstrated below by a

woman stating that she and her husband set aside at least one night a week as date night, which represents a “We Zone,” so that they can reconnect.

“And there are times, I think, we, we try really hard to have a date night once a week and to say, OK, well, we’ve, yeah, we’ve seen each other every day, ya know, in the evening, but we haven’t really just been able to focus on each other...So, um, so we try to, um, have a date night every week...But, um, but yeah, that’s the thing, ya know, tryin’ to make that time and that kinda thing. So, we try to do that. So, we definitely want that one on one time.” (Couple 2, Female)

Likewise, a man talks about how, when he senses a stressful, or busy, time coming on, he tries to set aside a specific time to spend quality time alone with his wife, which also represents a “We Zone.”

“Um, well, I guess, because of, because of our, our current situation, you know, we’ve got a, a, um, little one on the way in a couple months. So we’re, you know, thinking of the time crunch that we’re gonna be in, you know, in less than two months, and, so. Well, even now, just getting ready, or whatever. But, you know, we just, we needed to figure out a, a time to go away for a little bit and just not be. If we’re gonna be here and be spending time off, ya know, off of work, then we’ll be tempted to, to do stuff around the house, or whatever. But, we just needed, uh, a weekend to get away, or whatever. So, somethin’ like that, ya know, definitely when you, when you sense a stressful time, or something like that, I think is, you definitely just wanna be able to just, you know, leave, or walk away and just say, let’s go do this, or whatever.” (Couple 2, Male)

Along the same lines, another man describes how he and his wife had been spending a lot of time together with other people, and not a lot of time together, alone, and how his wife asked him if they could allocate some time to spend together, just the two of them, also representing a “We Zone.”

“Um, so, like, this Saturday, or next Saturday, um, she asked me last week if, if we could just set that time aside, and we don’t really have plans, but I know that we’ll turn down all the other offers.” (Couple 5, Male)

Accordingly, another man conveys how having children has limited his alone time with his wife, and how, because of that, he and his wife have specified certain times for date night, or date week, yet again representing a “We Zone.”

“And there are times that we like to go, sometimes, now that they’re [our girls] old enough, we just go to dinner by ourselves, leave the girls and let them do their thing, now that they’re independent. And it’s a nice, relaxing time for us to, to be alone and talk about those things and to have our little. Or when the girls are apart, date week is something we look forward to when the girls are, are on church camp, or somethin’, and we have a empty, empty house. We basically eat no meal, other than breakfast, in the house, and that’s our time to go places that are either exotic that they wouldn’t like, or expensive that we wouldn’t wanna take four people to, or whatever. Just to, we keep those separate times special.”
(Couple 6, Male)

Correspondingly, another man explains how, during the week, he and his wife do not get to spend much time together because of their busy schedules, and how, because of that, they have appointed a particular time each week get together, a certain time each year to go away together on vacation, and it, too, represents a “We Zone.”

“And so we can, we did more on the weekends, and we were, went, started goin’ on trips... We’ve [also] kinda, I guess, in the last couple years we’ve been, um, because of our schedules, we’ve st, we’ve started tryin’ to make, like, a lunch date on Saturdays... We meet for lunch and have lunch together and spend a couple hours together at lunch.” (Couple 8, Male)

Additionally, another woman points out that she and her husband also select time each year to get away together, just the two of them, further representing a “We Zone.”

“I’m thinkin’ about the time that we plan trips away just so that we are together.”
(Couple 9, Female)

Finally, a couple portrays their propensity to plan a date night each week, additionally representing a “We Zone.”

“Definitely, especially on weekends... Like, we watch On Demand. We’ll find a movie... that’s fun... romantic comedies” (Couple 10, Female)

“Yeah, we like watchin’ movies together, and try to do some date nights.”
(Couple 10, Male)

The second theme, differences in personal time clocks, is depicted below by a man acknowledging the differences between him and his wife in how they unwind at the end of the day, and how those differences assure their individual alone time, representing a “Me Zone.”

“Or even just, ya know, just unwinding from the day, ya know. She tends to unwind a little bit earlier than I do, and, you know, goes to bed before I do, so, you know. And, I, I still, I’ve, you know, I’m still a little wound up, so I just usually have about an hour or so, um, before I finally, it starts to hit me that I need to, ya know, get to bed.” (Couple 2, Male)

Similarly, another man indicates that his wife also winds down earlier than he does, and so he gets his alone time after she goes to bed each night, which is also his “Me Zone.”

“The time that I have away from her is every night after she goes to bed. It’s just my time, I guess. And I can watch TV and go on the computer, or whatever, and don’t have to worry about what she thinks about it.” (Couple 7, Male)

Finally, another man addresses the differences in his and his wife’s personal time clocks, and how, because of that, they each have certain times of the day where they are guaranteed their alone time, or “Me Zones.” Furthermore, he addresses the fact that both he and his wife have different interests, and so they have designated guy and girl time in their relationship where they can each can pursue their respective interests, which also represents the next theme, having dissimilar interests.

“So we, we do kinda like, since we’re opposite like that, [wife is a morning person, husband is a night owl] we do have our own kinda time during the day. But I mean, yeah, with the beach [trip], she went to [the] beach recently, and I, you know, and I watched the finals game, the Lakers/Celtics game and that was a really cool time for me.” (Couple 1, Male)

The third, and final, theme, having dissimilar interests, is exemplified below by a woman expressing how she has negotiated the morning as a “Me Zone,” where she spends time participating in activities that she enjoys, but her husband does not, such as running.

“But, I go running in the morning a lot, so that’s kinda my alone time.” (Couple 1, Female)

Moreover, a couple realizes that, because they have different interests, they need to allot time where they can each do their own thing, in other words, spend time in their respective “Me Zones.”

“Um, you know, I think, I think everybody, you know, wants...Like, for instance, in my situation, you know, I might want some girl time. Like, I might want some time with just my sister, or my mom, or just with my, my close girlfriends, or whatever, you know. And [he] needs his time to play basketball with the guys, or, you know, do guy things that I don’t really get, or enjoy, you know, so those types of things, you know, are times when I definitely, you know, want time away.” (Couple 2, Female)

Furthermore, another couple recognizes the need for both “Me Zones,” where they each pursue their own interests, and “We Zones,” where they develop interests in common, in order to have a healthy, balanced marriage.

“Sometimes if the girls are wantin’ to go get together for dinner. And that’s one thing I think is important in a marriage is that you have your interests and he has interests, but you have interests in common...So we learned, you know, like, he will go on a golf trip with the guys or somethin’, just to respect each other and that, you know, we don’t always have to be together.” (Couple 9, Female)

“And I, I think you do need time apart. I think you need to develop personally, as well as together as a couple.” (Couple 9, Male)

In addition, a man admits that he needs to separate from his wife, from time to time, in order to pursue his own interests, because she does not share in all of his interests. Likewise, he admits the he does not share in all of her interests, either, and so it is necessary for her to separate from him, from time to time, in order to pursue her interests, as well. Basically, he agrees that both partners need to spend some time in their “Me Zones,” in addition to their “We Zones,” every once in a while.

“I go camping with the...Boy Scouts,...that’s...time away. She’s...not interested. And then,...a couple times a year, I take a ski trip with...guys in church...And

then she has, in the past, . . . you went to . . . that wedding, and, if you could plan it, you would probably do a few more.” (Couple 8, Male)

Finally, another woman offers that she and her husband have, just recently, negotiated their “Me Zones” in order to respond to their different tastes in television programs.

“Well, even within the house, like, when, sometimes I just don’t wanna watch FOX at night ‘cause I’ve already heard all day, . . . but he’s just gettin’ the opportunity to hear for the first time. So, I’ll go upstairs, and we’ve really had to learn, just recently, how to communicate that, like, I’m not goin’ upstairs ‘cause I’m mad I just wanna watch “Covert Affairs” or, or “The Closer,” or “The Closer.” I don’t need any more news.” (Couple 10, Female)

According to Baxter and Montgomery, the second praxical pattern, spiraling inversion, is characterized by, “Spiraling back and forth through time between efforts to respond first to one oppositional demand and then to the opposing demand(s) . . . Such spiraling inversion is like a pendulum that forever moves back and forth; however, the movement of the pendulum is uneven and the trajectory of motion may vary” (99). The second tactic, spiraling inversion, was illuminated as first responding to the demand for connectedness, and then to the demand for autonomy. This process is represented below by a woman relaying how she began to feel constrained by the amount of connectedness in her relationship, and so she responded by swinging to the complete opposite end of the spectrum by engaging in complete autonomy from her husband. However, then she began to feel too separated from her husband, and so, once again, she swung back in the other direction towards complete connection in her relationship.

“I think, um, like, a couple months ago I was like, I wanna have some girl time. I hadn’t had, you know, much time with girls, and I wanted to have some girl time. I remember that week, then, though, doing something, like, every single night, and then I missed him.” (Couple 1, Female)

Consistent with the previous example, another woman also reveals how she favored complete connection with her husband in the beginning of their relationship, but how, later on, she began

to feel smothered by the relationship, and so she took steps to incorporate more autonomy in the relationship.

“His love language is being together...So, I think, for a really long time, I really tried hard to spend all my time with him, and I think that I’ve learned, a lot like, I guess, moms do, you know, you gotta take time that’s just for yourself.” (Couple 4, Female)

According to Baxter and Montgomery, the third, and final, praxical pattern, privileging one polarity, is characterized by, “An effort to ignore the contradiction by privileging only one polarity...such wishful efforts to ignore the opposing demand are likely to be short-lived; before long, the exigence of the neglected demand...will become salient to the pair. Thus, this third effort glosses over the presence of...[the] tension” (100). The third method, privileging one polarity, was exhibited as privileging the polarity of connectedness, while neglecting the demand for autonomy. This glossing over of the presence of the tension is illustrated below by a woman claiming that she and her husband prefer to spend all of their time together and do not feel the need to spend time apart.

“Most of the time I just wanna spend the day with him, ya know, if I’m able to so...I’ve never really...I hardly feel like I’m, like, I have to spend some alone time.” (Couple 1, Female)

Predictability-Novelty

Results of analysis showed that Christian married couples responded to, or attempted to manage, the internal dialectical tension, predictability-novelty, in several ways, including disorientation, segmentation, spiraling inversion, integration, and balance. According to Prentice, the first praxical pattern, disorientation is, “A management strategy that [does] not in reality ease the tension between [pairs]” (78). The first style, disorientation, was displayed by one partner trying to accommodate the other by participating in an activity that one’s partner wanted him or her to participate in. However, because the partner who was trying to

accommodate the other was not comfortable, or satisfied, with participating in the activity, then the tension was not really eased between them. The approach is exhibited below by a couple showing how they each have tried to accommodate the other by participating in activities that their partner wanted them to participate in, or by attending events that their partner wanted them to attend. However, neither partner was comfortable, or satisfied, in either of the situations.

Therefore, because the partner who was trying to accommodate the other was not comfortable, or satisfied, in the situation, the partner who wanted his or her spouse to participate in the activity, or attend the event, was not satisfied, either. Thus, the tension between the partners was not alleviated.

“But, like, on the honeymoon he did something which I never thought he ever would. We went on, um, a tour with this random guy that we thought was dealing drugs. But, but I mean, like, he would never have tried something like that, you know...” (Couple 4, Female)

“Now, it can’t be, like, a polar opposite...I can handle small changes. I can’t handle something totally, like...I’m OK with varying degrees...It cannot be the polar opposite...’cause I, I get in a mood...I get in a little mood. I get in a little, not upset, but I get kind of like...” (Couple 4, Male)

“You’re nervous, you’re anxious.” (Couple 4, Female)

“Yeah, I, I get a little anxious, frustrated, and it, it, that, that’ll dissipate after 5, 10, 15 minutes, but I don’t like change.” (Couple 4, Male)

In another example, a woman supplies an occasion where she accommodated her husband’s desire to eat different foods by taking him to a Chinese restaurant for their anniversary.

However, she was not comfortable, or satisfied, in the situation because she does not eat

Chinese food. Therefore, the tension between wanting to try something new and wanting to stick with what is familiar and comfortable was not completely assuaged.

“I did, um, recently, do one thing, it was for our anniversary...I told him that we were gonna go out to dinner, and, um, I wouldn’t tell him where, and I actually took him to a Chinese restaurant.” (Couple 7, Female)

“That was a big sacrifice on her part.” (Couple 7, Male)

“I don’t do Chinese...So, he knows if I’m around that we’re not gonna do Mexican, we’re not gonna do Chinese, we’re not gonna do Japanese, we’re not gonna, you know...Italian I love, and, um, American, but that’s, that’s about the only, only variation I do...So just have to do somethin’ they want every now and then. Kinda shocked him.” (Couple 7, Female)

The same woman provides another example of how she accommodated her husband at the expense of her own satisfaction. The couple was looking for a new church, and she wanted to attend a traditional, conservative church, one with same routine and order of service as their current church; however, her husband ended up wanting to attend a more contemporary, and somewhat liberal, church. Eventually, she determined that she must submit to her husband’s spiritual authority whether she liked it or not, which did not lessen the tension between them.

“That’s when I had to take a back seat and say, you are the spiritual head of the household, you decide where we go to church.” (Couple 7, Female)

In a similar situation, another woman agrees to accommodate her husband, even though it means sacrificing her own desires. With the possibility of her husband taking a job in, and having to move to, another state looming over her head, the wife relinquishes the decision to take the job, and to move, to her husband. Thus, she denied her own wants and needs, which were to stay put, and put her husband’s needs over her own. However, even though the wife submitted to her husband’s authority, the tension between them was not diminished.

“It was very hard, um, but, I mean, I wanted it to be his decision not me.” (Couple 9, Female)

Correspondingly, another couple presents a scenario where the husband accommodated the wife’s need for novelty by going away on vacation at Christmas, while the husband would have preferred to adhere to tradition by staying home for Christmas. Thus, even though the husband

appeared his wife by going away for Christmas, he was not, necessarily, happy about it, and so the tension between them was not resolved.

“Like, you didn’t wanna go away for that one Christmas.” (Couple 10, Female)

“But we went.” (Couple 10, Male)

Accordingly, another woman mentions how her husband usually lets her have her away, even though he may not be thrilled about it, and so the tension between them may not really be settled.

“And he, usually, very graciously, will be like, well, if you don’t feel like we have time, we don’t have time, that’s fine, you know. And maybe inside he’s more upset about it then he let’s on, but usually, you know, he’s more flexible.”
(Couple 2, Female)

Finally, another couple reflects on how, in most cases, when there is a dispute over whether they should try something new or stick to the routine, usually one partner will give in to the other, which results in one, or both, partners being disappointed; thus, the tension between them has not really been worked out.

“ Who, who kinda gives in first. OK, well, if, we’ll, we’ll, we’ll go ahead and do that, that’s fine.” (Couple 3, Male)

“Yeah, or having one person being disappointed.” (Couple 3, Female)

The second method, segmentation, was represented by partners wanting aspects their relationship to be routine and predictable, while they do not mind if the activities in their relationship are novel and unpredictable. The style is illuminated below by a woman sharing about how she does not mind trying new things, but how she wants there to be routine between her and her husband.

“I love routine. So, I mean, not necessarily, I mean, I also like to move and to be new places and that kind of thing, but as far as between us, I really like it when, you know, I know what to expect. I know what this means and I know, you know, this is gonna happen after this, and you know, I like the routine.” (Couple 5, Female)

Along the same lines, a couple expresses their desire for elements of their relationship to be routine, but how they do not mind trying new activities together.

“I like spontaneity on occasion, but, for the most part, I, I think we like to know what to expect, and I think we appreciate the fact that there are certain routines and certain things in our marriage that we know what to expect and w..., and, and we embrace them.” (Couple 9, Male)

The third technique, spiraling inversion, was manifested by partners spiraling back and forth between predictability and novelty in their relationship. The pattern is exemplified below by a couple reporting how, when their sons are home from college, there is less room for novelty in the relationship, and so their relationship is more routine and predictable; however, when the boys return to college, then they report that there is more room for novelty in the relationship, and so their relationship becomes more spontaneous and unpredictable.

“But, I mean, I think the routine changes a little bit when the boys go back to college. That transitions the routine, which is kinda, I mean, it’s great when they come home, and it’s very good when they leave, too, but it does change the routine, uh, a little bit. And, uh, so, I, I think we like spontaneity and routine. I mean we, we’ve got a balance.” (Couple 10, Male)

“I think there’s, there’s room for more spontaneity without the kids there, if ya know what I mean.” (Couple 10, Female)

According to Prentice, the fourth praxical pattern, integration, is characterized by, “The simultaneous recognition of both poles” (77). The fourth procedure, integration, was exemplified by meeting the need of one partner to break out of the routine, and the need for the other partner to stick to the routine. The strategy is depicted below by a couple who has worked out a way to meet both of their needs simultaneously.

“Like, the Sunday thing where there’s a time when I wanted to, to stay home and just, you know, not do anything with anybody else, and he was wanting to get out and go do things with his family and stuff. And so we just decided that, that he would go, and so he just went ahead and went, and I just stayed home. And so we were able to both do what we wanted to do and it was the better decision to do that, you know, so.” (Couple 5, Female)

Finally, according to Toller and Braithwaite, the fifth praxical pattern, balance, occurs when, “[Pairs] partly meet the ends of each pole of the tension” (267). The fifth strategy, balance, was displayed by partially meeting one partner’s need for predictability, and partially meeting the other partner’s need for novelty. The tactic is shown below by a man who has devised a plan to meet his need for predictability, by planning to go out and do something with his wife on Friday night, but to meet his wife’s need for novelty, by being open to doing new activities during that time on Friday.

“I enjoy spontaneity, but, but I also like, like, I would rather plan the weekend on Monday, then plan it on Friday, but I don’t mind doin’ somethin’ new on Friday.”
(Couple 8, Male)

In accordance with the previous example, another man lays out the compromise that he and his wife have come to for meeting his need for predictability and her need for novelty in the relationship. On their honeymoon, he planned where they would stay, in order to meet his need for predictability and to stay, somewhat, within his comfort zone, but he chose an accommodation that was not commercialized to meet his wife’s need for novelty and authenticity.

“I think we’ve come to a happy compromise where, like, for places we’ve gone, when we went, our honeymoon...So that’s kind of our compromise. It’s been like, I, I don’t wanna, I will, don’t mind trying new things, but I don’t wanna backpack for a week and put up a tent. I don’t want to do that.” (Couple 4, Male)

Finally, another man echoes the happy medium that he and his wife have come to between meeting her need for novelty and his need for predictability in the relationship.

“We have our, have our basics, our tried and true, but we also have, let’s, let’s be adventurous, let’s try this.” (Couple 6, Male)

Openness-Closedness

Results of the investigation elucidated that Christian married couples responded to, or attempted to manage, the internal dialectical tension, openness-closedness, in several ways,

including disorientation, segmentation, privileging one polarity, balance, and spiraling inversion. The first method, disorientation, was manifested as one partner trying to protect the other from getting his or her feelings hurt by remaining closed about negative thoughts and feelings about one's partner. However, because the partner who was trying to protect the other from getting his or her feelings hurt would prefer for his or her partner to know how he or she was truly feeling, the tension was not really reduced between them. The approach is exhibited below by a woman explaining how she chooses to keep certain things from her husband in order to protect him from getting his feelings hurt, but how, after a while, she cannot continue to hold her feelings in, and she eventually explodes. Therefore, neither partner benefits, because the wife hurts herself by keeping things in and eventually boiling over, and she also hurts her husband, who she was trying to protect, by ultimately telling him the things she was keeping from him. Thus, in the end, she has really done more harm than good by withholding her true feelings from her spouse.

“Sometimes I don't know how to tell you things without, I think I'm gonna hurt your feelings or something, or you get upset... But then it usually ends bad because I get irritated to the point that I just blow up about it.” (Couple 3, Female)

Consequently, another woman also describes how she refrains from telling her husband certain things in order to guard against upsetting him, when, in reality, she would really like for him to know how she is feeling, which does not serve to diminish the tension between them.

“If it's something I don't wanna share it's because I think it's something that's unpleasant, or might disappoint him, or might, might cause some conflict or something. I just like, well, this doesn't need to be shared, even though I probably would really like it if he knew what was going on, I opt for just, nah, just keep it to myself.” (Couple 5, Female)

Finally, another woman contributes how she is trying to be more open to talking to her husband on the phone during the day when she is at work, but how she does not like to break her concentration when she is at work. Therefore, even though she might answer the phone and talk

to her husband to appease him, she is not comfortable with taking personal phone calls at work; hence, the tension between them is not improved.

“It’s, it’s, it’s hard. It continues to be, probably, our number one challenge, wouldn’t you say? Without a doubt. But it continues to be, um, at work, I’m very driven and very, you know, focused, and, even though I’m not on the bell schedule anymore, ‘cause a my job has changed, but, you know, phone calls are interruptions. And yet, at the same time, you know, I see my friends, who are at the same job, and they’re ca, they’re chit-chatting with their husbands all day, and whatever. So, you know, I’ve had, I need to learn how not to, when [he] calls me, how not to cut him off, you know. That’s, but it just, it’s just so hard for me.” (Couple 8, Female)

The second technique, segmentation, was demonstrated in at least two themes, including partners setting aside a certain time of the day to communicate with one another, such as over dinner, and partners determining certain topics to keep to themselves rather than sharing with their spouse. The first theme is displayed below by a man indicating how he and his wife always find a time each day, usually at the dinner table, to share with one another about their day.

“We sometimes, I guess, every night, find a place, either over dinner or, um, later on paying bills, or whatever, for, um, us to talk about our day. And she, usually, has a lot more to say than I do, but, uh, I have to stop myself and listen.” (Couple 7, Male)

Likewise, another couple also remarks that they have designated dinner time as a “We Zone” for opening up about the happenings during their day.

“You know, just, through the years, you’ve learned that you need to take the time to communicate, and how was your day. And we always had a thing, um, as soon as you came home from work you talked about your day. I know lotta TV shows and stuff talk, say, let, give your spouse time to wind down, but you know, we always did that kinda at dinner time, talk about our day.” (Couple 9, Female)

Finally, a man talks about the importance of getting away on vacations together and spending time alone together as a couple. He and his wife have specified those times as “We Zones,” where they spend time talking and sharing with each other and opening up to one another.

“I mean, that’s another thing we find about a, about getting away, those weekends away, that the relaxing, and we’re able to talk and share about what we, we want, and, and open, and um...and we, and just, just that we’re real honest with each other about what our feelings are.” (Couple 8, Male)

The second theme, partners determining certain topics to keep to themselves rather than sharing with their spouse is depicted below by a man articulating how he keeps certain things from his wife in order to protect her.

“I’m slower to release things sometimes, you know, especially when, a couple times when things were tight financially I, I wanted to shield her from that.” (Couple 6, Male)

In addition, another man divulges that he keeps certain things to himself, rather than sharing them with his wife, because he wants to work those things out on his own, because he does not want to hear what his wife has to say about those things, or because he does not want to cause conflict by sharing those things.

“I think sometimes ya have to temper what you think and what you feel. Because, I think, sometimes, you know iif, if there’s a disagreement or hurt, then you think you, just time will work this out, maybe it’s best to keep those thoughts and those feelings to yourself...There’s a lotta things we, we, we share, but there’s some things, I think, I just keep to myself because either, one, well, it could be a number a reasons. 1) I just wanna deal with it myself. 2) I don’t wanna hear what [she] has to say about it because then you’re goin’ back to that predictable thing. I know what she’s gonna say. And some, I think, ju-just because to keep peace and tranquility, it’s best if I work these things out on my own.” (Couple 9, Male)

The third procedure, privileging one polarity, was illustrated by partners privileging the polarity of openness, while ignoring the need for closedness. The pattern is illuminated below by a woman asserting that she and her husband are completely open with one another and do not keep any secrets from one another.

“I think we communicate very well, because I pretty much don’t keep anything from him...For the most part, anything I’ve done wrong, I’ve never kept anything from him. I’m always very open. Um, my past before, you know, I became a Christian was not the best, and I, I confessed everything to him...We’ve just

always been very open, and just, I haven't kept anything from him, he doesn't keep anything from me, really." (Couple 6, Female)

Similarly, a man also maintains that he is completely open and honest with his wife, and he does not keep anything from her. Furthermore, he posits that keeping secrets from one another contradicts the whole purpose of marriage.

"No, I think, no. I mean, I mean that goes against, to me it goes against the, the whole meaning of, of marriage and, and relationship, and what God, you know, wants you to, to, to go be alongside each other and share everything in life." (Couple 8, Male)

Finally, another woman declares that she does not hide anything from her husband.

"I agree for myself because I'm a very, I'm an open book." (Couple 9, Female)

The fourth strategy, balance, was exemplified by both partners giving in a little in order to meet each other in the middle. The style is exhibited below by a woman noting how, over the years, she and her husband have succumbed, a little bit, to each other's needs. The husband has tried to edit how much he shares with his wife because he knows that she does not care about all of the little details, while the wife, on the other hand, has tried to elaborate more when she communicates with her husband because she knows that the details are important to him.

"So, I think that that's something that I learned how to, I tried to learn how to change where I add more detail, and I do try and make my answers more than, like, three words. But he's gotten a lot better to where, you know, I don't necessarily like hearing a lot of the fluff, and so he's gotten to where he cuts it out a little bit. So, I think, I mean, hopefully in ten years we'll be, like, perfect." (Couple 4, Female)

Accordingly, a couple also comments about how they have compromised over the years. The husband has started sharing more with his wife, and the wife has started sharing less with her husband.

"[She's] always been very good. I think I'm gettin' better, aren't I?" (Couple 10, Male)

“Mmm-hmm. And I’m not really feelin’ as much, but no, I’m not as, feelin’ as much of the j-you know, I don’t feel that need all the time ‘cause, I think, when you realize that you have the Lord to share that with.” (Couple 10, Female)

“Yeah, so maybe we’ve, maybe we’ve moved more to the middle on that.”
(Couple 10, Male)

“Compromised.” (Couple 10, Female)

“She was much like that at first, maybe I was less like that. Maybe I’ve moved more to that and she’s moved more to the middle. So maybe that’s a good thing.”
(Couple 10, Male)

The fifth, and final, approach, spiraling inversion, was represented by both partners spiraling back and forth between openness and closedness in their relationship. The pattern is depicted below by a woman informing about how, in the beginning of her relationship, she would not want to open up to her husband about what was bothering her, but how, over the years, she has spiraled back more towards openness, where she will now share what is on her mind.

“I dunno, um, I feel like our communication has gotten better since we’ve been married. I feel like when we were first married, um, I didn’t like to communicate. Like, we would, um, if we got into, like, a disagreement or something on a issue, then I would go run away, go into our room and, like, close the door. I wouldn’t wanna talk about it...But, I think, um, I don’t know. I don’t run away anymore. That’s an improvement, and, um, I don’t know. I guess we just have gotten used to when we need to talk about somethin’ let’s talk about it and move on, ya know, and it works out a whole lot better when you do that.” (Couple 1, Female)

External Dialectical Tensions

Revelation-Concealment

Results of the study rendered that Christian married couples responded to, or attempted to manage, the external dialectical tension, revelation-concealment, through the praxical pattern of segmentation. The technique, segmentation, was manifested as setting boundaries on what topics are to be kept private, within the context of the marriage, and what topics can be shared outside of the marriage. The approach is demonstrated below by a woman expressing how she

and her husband have learned to preface information that they share with one another with a disclaimer in order to prevent one or the other of them from inadvertently divulging something that was meant to be kept private between the two of them. As a result, the couple manages the tension between revelation-concealment by setting boundaries about what they do and do not want to be made known to others.

“But, then, sometimes, we also feel open to sharing with each other knowing that it’s not gonna be told to other people, and, and, like, there’s times you’re like, don’t, don’t tell anybody I said this or did this ‘cause you don’t want...but then that’s where we have to figure out where the line is between what we don’t want shared about ourselves, ‘cause, ‘cause, without thinkin’, he might just talk about somethin’, like, ‘cause that’s just what he’s used to.” (Couple 3, Female)

Along the same lines, another woman indicates that she had to communicate to her husband that she also wants certain topics to be kept private, just between the two of them. Thus, the couple manages the external dialectical tension, revelation-concealment, by designating certain subjects to be kept confidential between the two of them, and by designating other topics as public, which can be freely shared with others.

“But, at the same time, it’s one of those things where it was like, that’s, like, me and you, you know. Like, everyone else gets to have him on a daily basis when he’s at work. Whatever happens inside of our home is just for me and him, and, um...And I really want it to be like we’re one force together, working together.” (Couple 4, Female)

Correspondingly, a man acknowledges the fact that he thinks that some information should be kept within the confines of the marriage, while other information is fair game to be shared with others. Thus, he and his wife manage the external dialectical tension, revelation-concealment, by specifying which topics are taboo and which topics are acceptable to be shared.

“I think there, I think probably every marriage has certain things you don’t wanna share. I mean, we try not to share financial information and, um. I’m probably more...private about that than [she] is. There’s some things I think we ju, ought not to discuss outside a the house here, and I cringe sometimes with some a the things [she] discusses, but...So, I think that, sometimes, the thing with, you know,

problems with the kids, uh, sometimes financial things that I think need to be kept within the confines of the family, or within the confines of the house, and [she] freely shares them.” (Couple 9, Male)

Accordingly, another woman realized, after she thought that her husband had shared something that she did not want shared, how upset she would be if certain topics were discussed outside of the marriage. Therefore, she recognized the need to manage the tension, revelation-concealment, by establishing what information is allowed to be revealed to others and what information is not allowed to be revealed to others.

“There was one time, one example I can think of, that I thought that he had shared something and it made me upset...there was something that made me upset about that.” (Couple 5, Female)

Additionally, another man portrays how he and his wife manage the external dialectical tension, revelation-concealment, by setting boundaries about what can be shared and what needs to be kept private, between them, and how setting boundaries of what is shared and not shared can facilitate intimacy between partners.

“Um, I mean, there’s just, there’s just some, some things that, you know, you wanna keep private, even from you’re, like, best friend, um, because, then, you know, if everybody knows about it, ya know, it’s not something that we can share, you know, together...I could make one of those comments during a big, giant gathering, um, that’s an inside joke that only she would get, but if everybody knows it, then it’s not that special to her.” (Couple 3, Male)

Furthermore, a woman divulges that she and her husband have negotiated certain topics as acceptable to be shared in specific circumstances, such as being an encouragement to others.

“If the time comes up and it’s a good influence we have. I know we, know there was a couple we knew that were havin’ struggles and stuff, and...you mighta shared with him one on one more.” (Couple 6, Female)

Likewise, another man states that he and his wife have authorized certain subjects to be shared in certain contexts, such as to serve as an example and an encouragement to others.

“I think we’re, we’re open in sharing those things, sometimes the good things, sometimes the bad things. I mean, I, I’ve taught an adult Sunday School class for 27 years, and, uh, you know, so, uh, they all know us and we share things with them off those examples, sometimes what to do, sometimes what not to do, but.”
(Couple 9, Male)

Finally, another woman implies that she and her husband have chosen certain examples from their marriage that are sanctioned to be shared with others who are in marital distress and who need encouragement.

“I dunno. We talk about it. We’ve shared with, like, [our friends]. Some people don’t wanna hear how you worked through ‘cause they’ve already made their decision, and that’s kind of discouraging when you’ve tried to help people, you know. And then other people, like, I was thinkin’ today during the service about [our friends] when we went up to the beach with them, and that was pretty cool... Yeah, they’ve still together and they may not have been, so that’s cool.”
(Couple 10, Female)

Inclusion-Seclusion

Results of the analysis depicted that Christian married couples responded to, or attempted to manage, the external dialectical tension, inclusion-seclusion, through a variety of methods, including segmentation, disorientation, and spiraling inversion. The first strategy, segmentation, was displayed as setting aside certain time as couple time and other time as social time. The tactic is exhibited below by a man supplying how he and his wife manage their need for time alone by designating date nights, or date weeks, where they spend time together, just the two of them.

“And there are times that we like to go...to dinner by ourselves...And it’s a nice, relaxing time for us to, to be alone and talk about those things and to have our little...date week is something we look forward to when the girls are, are on church camp, or somethin’, and we have a empty, empty house...we keep those separate times special.” (Couple 6, Male)

Likewise, a woman reports how she and her husband manage their need for seclusion by planning vacations together every year, just the two of them, or by setting aside certain days or times during the week to spend alone together, just the two of them.

“That was another thing, um, we started, at least once a year, hopefully twice a year, going away just the two of us. Um, and it didn’t stop after, you know, [our son] was born.” (Couple 8, Female)

Female: “I mean it’s a treat, like, when [our son] has after church on Sundays, when he has [youth group], when we get to go to lunch just the two of us, that’s a treat. I mean, that’s somethin’ I wouldn’t dream of, I, I would rather, I would rather have a quiet time with [him] than anybody else.” (Couple 8, Female)

Subsequently, a couple imparts how they balance their need for inclusion and seclusion by negotiating couple time and social time in their relationship.

Female: “We’re goin’ on vacation with another couple...you know, we enjoy other people’s company, you know, so...But, I mean, like, for our 30th anniversary we went [away] just the two of us and it was great and we do that, but, um, you know, we like to be.” (Couple 9, Female)

“We enjoy spending time with other couples.” (Couple 9, Male)

The second procedure, disorientation, was illuminated as one partner giving in to the other partner by either doing things with other people when he or she did not want to, or spending time alone together, as a couple, when he or she would have rather spent time together, as a couple, with other people. The style is illustrated below by a woman reflecting on how either she, or her husband, usually gives in to the other when there is a discrepancy about whether to spend time with other people or to spend time alone together, which does not, necessarily, alleviate the tension between them.

“Yeah, there’s a lot of times that I’m like, yeah, I just, just want it to be us, you know. And sometimes we’ll even say to each other, were you thinking when we do such and such that it was just gonna be us? And one of us will say, well, yeah, I was kinda hopin’ so, or the other one might say, well, yeah, that’s fine, but we can invite people, too, or whatever. So, we kinda talk that out, so yeah.” (Couple 2, Female)

Consequently, another couple repeats the same dilemma over one partner wanting to spend time alone, as a couple, and the other partner wanting to spend time together with other people. In most situations, one partner will give in to the other, which results in one partner being disappointed, and which, ultimately, does not resolve the tension between them.

“Probably, but, like I said, one of us normally, before it becomes a problem, one of us gives in. Okay, well, we’ll stay home, or, Okay, well, we’ll go there, or, why don’t you just go.” (Couple 3, Male)

The third, and final, pattern, spiraling inversion, was exemplified by both partners spiraling back and forth between inclusion and seclusion in their relationship. The technique is represented below by a woman informing about how she had been favoring inclusion in her relationship and thus began to feel the need for seclusion in her relationship.

“Well of, an example was yesterday. And we’d been gone so much, we hadn’t been home on weekends, uh, and so I just wanted to do, be here and do nothing. And we talked about, oh, well, maybe we should have this person over for dinner or this one, and, you know, the selfish part a me just said, nah, we just wanna be home together, so that’s what we did.” (Couple 9, Female)

Consistent with the previous example, a couple recounts how, when their children were little, they favored seclusion in their relationship, because it was so rare, but how, as the children got older, they swung more towards inclusion in their relationship.

“That was a lot more important back when we had children and didn’t have a lot of time to ourselves, but now we’ve got lots of time to ourselves.” (Couple 7, Male)

“Go somewhere, sure. With someone, sure, whatever, so.” (Couple 7, Female)

Conventionality-Uniqueness

Results of the study revealed that Christian married couples responded to, or attempted to manage, the external dialectical tension, conventionality-uniqueness, through two methods, including balance and reframing. The first approach, balance, was manifested as giving in a little

bit to both conventionality and uniqueness. The tactic was demonstrated as Christian married couples wanting to be in the world, but not of it. In other words, couples addressed the hope for their marriages to be set apart from non-Christian marriages by displaying the example of what a biblical marriage should be, but at the same time, couples acknowledged their aspiration for their marriages not to be so set apart from non-Christian marriages that they could not fellowship with non-Christian couples and that they would not be accepted by society. Thus, Christian married couples attempted to partially meet the need to conform, in some sense, to the expectations of the general society about how their marriages should be; yet, in another sense, Christian married couples attempted to partially meet the need for their marriages to be set apart from other marriages and to be unique from other marriages, especially from non-Christian marriages. The method is exhibited below by a woman explaining how she tries to balance the need to be unique in the eyes of the world, but conventional in the eyes of God in her marriage.

“Different in a good way...And I think there’s a difference between, like, being unique in the eyes of the world and being unique in the eyes of the family of God. Like, um, yeah, I want our marriage to be unique, and rare, and different than what is seen in the world, because it should be, because we have Christ, but I, I, don’t want our marriage to be so rare and unique from, from God, other Godly marriages. We want it to be, um, in line with what, what God would want it to be.” (Couple 2, Female)

Moreover, another woman discusses how she has tried to balance the need for her marriage to conform to the standards set by the church about how a Godly marriage should be, and her need for her marriage to break the mold, because she does not feel like her personality fits the mold.

“I think it’s different for men than it is for women...Men kinda walk into a marriage and not a lot changes for them. Um, their name doesn’t change, their financial stuff doesn’t change, you know...nothing really changes other than who his roommate is...Um, the female, though, I think has, especially a Christian woman, has a lot riding on her, um, to be this image of what a Godly woman is.” (Couple 4, Female)

Furthermore, a couple describes how they have tried to balance their need to fit the expectations of what a good, Christian marriage should be and their need for their marriage to stand out from other marriages as a good, Godly example for others to look up to.

“I’d say within the context of, of, like, Christian marriages that I feel pressure to, to have a good, Christian marriage. Maybe not society, like, society as a whole, but, but within the church, and within, you know, that, that community. Yes, I feel like we have to be examples and, you know.” (Couple 5, Female)

“That’s something we discussed early on is, is our, our desire to be, um, a good, exam, you know, a good example of, of a healthy, Christian marriage, um, and to really be set apart from, from other marriages in a positive way so that we could in-influence other people. So that’s something that we aspire to be.” (Couple 5, Male)

Similarly, a man recognizes the need to balance his marriage being set apart from the world and his need to balance his marriage being a part of the world.

“Well, yes and no, because there’s a, there’s a general sense of society, and then there’s a sense of the church and your Christian friends, and, and then family, they’re the odd balls. But I, I think we want the folks in general society to see that we are different because we’re a Christian couple, but, yet, we’re not so different that you can’t fellowship, you can’t socialize with us, you know, we’re, we’re, we’re oddballs.” (Couple 9, Male)

Finally, a man expresses how he and his wife have tried to balance the need to show others that their marriage is normal and happy, but how they have also tried to balance their need, as a couple, to be unique and to make their own decisions.

“And, and we haven’t given in to that until we wanted to...Uh, we, we do want to have our friends and family know that, you know, everything is alright and that we have a normal marriage, um, but we don’t, necessarily, feel pressure in, in acting a certain way, or, or something like that. We, w-we’ve, it, it’s taken eleven years to get this far, and eve-even though we’ve asked for advice from other people and, you know, seen other models, we’ve kind of blazed our own little trail.” (Couple 3, Male)

The second strategy, reframing, according to DeGreeff and Burnett, “Involves transforming the tension so it no longer contains an opposition” (613). The style was exhibited

as partners conveying that they did not feel pressure, one way or another, to be conventional or to be unique; instead, they indicated that they just do their own thing and do not worry about what others think about them. The procedure is represented below by a woman stating that she does not care what anybody else thinks about her marriage, as long as God is pleased with her marriage then she is happy.

“I would prefer for my marriage to # 1 be Godly, be filled with love, be filled with happiness, and then, honestly...who cares what it looks like, you know... if, if your marriage can fit into the traditional, conventional mold, then that’s good, and it works, then that’s good.” (Couple 4, Female)

Correspondingly, a couple contributes that they are content with their relationship and they do not worry about what others think about their relationship. In addition, the husband adds that over the years they have come to care less about other people’s opinions.

“I don’t really care what people think. I think we pretty much get along well and I think people see it. And I’m not really worried about what other people think ‘cause I think we do just fine.” (Couple 6, Female)

“But, [the] longer you’re married, you know, the less you care. We do our thing, it’s worked, and we, we like it that way...I, again, after 21 years I think we’ve beyond caring, um, I don’t, I don’t think about whether it’s unique or not, it’s, it’s us, and it’s our relationship.” (Couple 6, Male)

Additionally, another woman asserts that once an individual gets over a certain age, then that individual stops caring about what other people think about him or her, and that, ultimately, all that matters is what God’s opinion about that individual is.

“I don’t think we care about what other people think about us. Once you get over 40 you don’t care...as long as we’re pleasing God, and each other, you know, that’s kind of all we care about...[but] I [do] think it’s rare to get along this well, um, just from, uh, other couples that I’ve seen.” (Couple 7, Female)

Accordingly, another couple articulates that they do not worry about fitting in with, or standing out from, other couples, that their main goal is to please each other and to make each other happy, and that is all.

“No, I mean, I’d say no. I don’t think that’s right. We don’t try to conform.”
(Couple 8, Male)

“We don’t care. We don’t care about that, do we? I know I don’t.” (Couple 8,
Female)

“No, we’re, we’re concerned about, about makin’, makin’ each other happy, you
know.” (Couple 8, Male)

“However that is.” (Couple 8, Female)

“We don’t try to be like other couples, you know, we just, we try to just, to, to
please each other.” (Couple 8, Male)

Likewise, another couple presents their desire to please God and no one else.

“I mean, I don’t think that we’ve ever felt that we need to be like the Joneses or
other couples, you know, we, we just feel like we try to do what’s right and what
God intends for us to do.” (Couple 9, Female)

“I don’t think we worry about those external pressures, whether we’re the same or
we’re different. Um, I think that’s, external pressures never really bothered us, or
guided us, or modeled us. I think we’ve just done what we’ve.” (Couple 9, Male)

“Um, yeah, I don’t think that they’ve bothered us or modeled us.” (Couple 9,
Female)

Finally, a man presents his disregard for what other people think about his marriage, outside of
viewing it as Godly.

“If it were observed to be similar to others that would be great, and if it was
observed not to be similar to others I don’t think that would make a big difference
to us... We’re really not, you know, we’re really don’t really want anybody to see
us one way or other than, you know, outside of the Christian peace, you know,
one way or the other, I guess.” (Couple 10, Male)

In sum, results of the analysis revealed that Christian married couples responded to, or
attempted to manage, the six dialectical tensions, both internal and external, in several ways,
including segmentation, disorientation, balance, spiraling inversion, reframing, privileging one
polarity, and integration. The management strategy that Christian married couples exercised the
most in an attempt to handle the dialectical tensions, both internal and external, that they

experienced in their relationships was the segmentation management strategy, next was disorientation, following was balance, after that was spiraling inversion and reframing, which were tied as the fourth most employed strategies for controlling dialectical tensions in personal relationships, subsequently, privileging one polarity, and finally, the integration procedure was the least exercised strategy for managing dialectical tensions in relationships.

Overall, results of the investigation showed that Christian married couples employed more management strategies for handling internal dialectical tensions than for handling external dialectical tensions. The most frequently exercised strategy for managing internal dialectical tensions was segmentation, followed by disorientation, trailed by balance, then spiraling inversion and privileging one polarity, which were tied as the fourth most frequently utilized management strategies for coping with internal dialectical tensions in relationships, and finally, integration. On the other hand, the most frequently employed strategy for managing external dialectical tensions was segmentation, followed by reframing, then balance, trailed by disorientation, and spiraling inversion, which were tied as the least exercised management strategies for dealing with external dialectical tensions in interpersonal relationships.

In addition, the management strategies for handling dialectical tensions, both internal and external, in Christian married couples' relationships were manifested in a variety of themes. Analysis exposed that Christian married couples responded to, or attempted to manage, the internal dialectical tension, autonomy-connection, in several ways, including segmentation, spiraling inversion, and privileging one polarity. The first technique, segmentation, was manifested in at least three themes, including designating a date night, differences in personal time clocks, and having dissimilar interests. Results of analysis also showed that Christian married couples responded to, or attempted to manage, the internal dialectical tension,

predictability-novelty, in several ways, including disorientation, segmentation, spiraling inversion, integration, and balance. Finally, results of the investigation elucidated that Christian married couples responded to, or attempted to manage, the internal dialectical tension, openness-closedness, in several ways, including disorientation, segmentation, privileging one polarity, balance, and spiraling inversion. The second technique, segmentation, was demonstrated in at least two themes, including partners setting aside a certain time of the day to communicate with one another, such as over dinner, and partners determining certain topics to keep to themselves rather than sharing with their spouse.

Furthermore, results of the study revealed that Christian married couples responded to, or attempted to manage, the external dialectical tension, revelation-concealment, through the praxical pattern of segmentation. Results of the analysis also depicted that Christian married couples responded to, or attempted to manage, the external dialectical tension, inclusion-seclusion, through a variety of methods, including segmentation, disorientation, and spiraling inversion. Finally, results of the study revealed that Christian married couples responded to, or attempted to manage, the external dialectical tension, conventionality-uniqueness, through two methods, including balance and reframing.

Research Question 4

Results of the investigation indicated a limited connection between biblical values and managing dialectical tensions, both internal and external, in relationships, but results of the analysis indicated a strong connection between biblical values and resolving interpersonal conflict in relationships. There was a limited connection between biblical values and managing the internal dialectical tensions of predictability-novelty and openness-closedness, and managing the external dialectical tension of inclusion-seclusion. In addition, the relationship between

biblical values and resolving conflict was illuminated in a variety of themes. The following findings have been arranged to exemplify the relationship between biblical values and managing dialectical tensions, both internal and external, in Christian married couples' relationships, and to represent the relationship between biblical values and resolving conflict in Christian married couples' relationships. Furthermore, the subsequent findings have been arranged to highlight the themes represented by each.

The connection between biblical values and managing dialectical tensions, both internal and external, in Christian married couples' relationships was depicted in two themes, including wives submit to your husbands, husbands love your wives, and God hears our prayers. The first theme, wives submit to your husbands, husbands love your wives, is shown below by a woman supplying how she managed the internal dialectical tension, predictability-novelty, through the management strategy, disorientation, due to the biblical value of submitting to her husband as the spiritual leader in the relationship.

Ephesians 5:22-33 states,

Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. (*The Holy Bible, New International Version*)

The woman in the example below demonstrates this biblical principle when managing the internal dialectical tension, predictability-novelty, through the disorientation technique.

The context for the quote is that the couple was looking for a new church, because their son had reached youth group age and they wanted to find a church with a good youth group for him to attend. Thus, the couple struggled to make a decision about whether they should join a different church. Ultimately, the woman determined that she had to submit to her husband's authority as the spiritual leader in their relationship and allow him to make the final decision about where they attend church.

“That’s when I had to take a back seat and say, you are the spiritual head of the household, you decide where we go to church.” (Couple 7, Female)

In a similar example, another woman portrays how she managed the external dialectical tension, inclusion-seclusion, through the management strategy, disorientation, due to the biblical value of submitting to her husband. She presents a scenario that happened when her children were little and she and her husband had an argument over spending too much time with the children and not enough time alone as a couple. In the end, the wife realized that she needed to put her husband's needs before her own.

“There’s a point, I guess, when the boys were really little, I guess 3 and 5, that the Lord really had to be the one. It’s kinda like the scripture, I mean what he was preachin’ today...I really had to ha, to put Him first, and [my husband] second, and the kids third, ‘cause that really can happen. Because when your kids are payin’ attention to ya and they need you to, kinda forget about. I’ll never forget, I think [our son] was 4 months old, and he needed me to go out for a business dinner, and we just didn’t have a babysitter. And I remember not tryin’ real hard and then sayin’, well, you get, you get a babysitter. But I remember his frustration, sayin’ that, I need a wife. And I think that that happens sometimes; but, yet, he needs a wife whenever he needed a wife, you know. I was always a mom, but he was off bein’ fulfilled in his business stuff. So, but the Lord really helped.” (Couple 10, Female)

Finally, a man conveys how he managed the internal dialectical tension, openness-closedness, through the management strategy, privileging one polarity, due to the biblical value of being united as one flesh. He claims that he is completely open and honest with his wife, and he does not keep anything from her, because he believes that keeping secrets from one another contradicts God's purpose of marriage, which is for the two to be united as one.

“No, I think, no. I mean, I mean that goes against, to me it goes against the, the whole meaning of, of marriage and, and relationship, and what God, you know, wants you to, to, to go be alongside each other and share everything in life.”
(Couple 8, Male)

The second theme, God hears our prayers, is revealed below by a couple imparting how they managed the internal dialectical tension, openness-closedness, through the management strategy, balance, due to the biblical value of God hears our prayers. Proverbs 15:29 states, “The Lord is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous” (*The Holy Bible, New International Version*). The woman in the example below exemplifies this biblical principle when managing the internal dialectical tension, openness-closedness, through the balance approach. The wife implied that over the years she has like her husband had not been open with her, by sharing his thoughts and feelings with her, and had not been open to her, by listening to her thoughts and feelings, and so she had learned to turn to the Lord to share those things with because she knows that He always hears her thoughts and prayers.

“[She's] always been very good. I think I'm gettin' better, aren't I?” (Couple 10, Male)

“Mmm-hmm. And I'm not really feelin' as much, but no, I'm not as, feelin' as much of the j-you know, I don't feel that need all the time 'cause, I think, when you realize that you have the Lord ta share that with.” (Couple 10, Female)

“Yeah, so maybe we've, maybe we've moved more to the middle on that.”
(Couple 10, Male)

“Compromised.” (Couple 10, Female)

“She was much like that at first, maybe I was less like that. Maybe I’ve moved more to that and she’s moved more to the middle. So maybe that’s a good thing.”
(Couple 10, Male)

The connection between biblical values and resolving interpersonal conflict in Christian married couples’ relationships was manifested in eight themes, including praying together and apart, talking things over with one’s partner, instead of with other people, honesty is the best policy, apologizing when one is wrong, forgiveness as healing, trusting God to see one through, humbling oneself before one another and before God, including sub-themes such as, submitting to one’s partner, putting one’s partner before oneself, and loving and respecting one’s partner, and finally, faith facilitates a common ground. The first theme, praying together and apart, is displayed below by a woman remarking that it is important to talk about and pray about conflicts in the relationship.

“You talk about it and then pray about it...Just seeking God through it, and just asking God to work everything out. I feel like after that it’s kinda like, whew, right?” (Couple 1, Female)

Along the same lines, another woman discloses that she and her husband manage their conflicts by seeking God’s help through prayer.

“We resolved it by, God, just help us get through this.” (Couple 4, Female)

Likewise, another woman comments about how she prays about conflicts on her own as a way of perception checking.

“Well, I definitely pray a lot. Like, if we really have a conflict, you know, I’ll go upstairs and he’s downstairs, or whatever, and I’m, I’m just prayin’, well, Lord am I wrong? Am I wrong? Was I right about that? I think I’m right about that, you know? And I just kinda talk to the Lord about it and, um. So, that’s definitely one thing, but, I, I can’t really think of a time where after we’ve had a conflict that we’ve come together and prayed together about it, we should, but I don’t think we ever have.” (Couple 2, Female)

Moreover, a man indicates that he, too, prays over conflicts on his own and asks the Lord to show him whether he is right or wrong, and how he can resolve the conflict.

“And so when there’s a conflict, or disagreement, or something that, um, I pray about it, and, you know, ask to be shown if I’m, what I can do to, to fix it. I’m in the wrong, whatever, which I usually am, so.” (Couple 7, Male)

Similarly, another man acknowledges that, after a conflict, he needs time away from his partner, as a preparation period, to get him ready to discuss the issue in positive and productive manner.

During his time of separation, he stops and prays in order to change his attitude from negative to positive. He also addresses his misconceptions about dealing with conflict prior to being married.

“I think, for me, it’s part of the internal struggle leading up to the resolution. Because, you know, I run through the gamut of emotions, and they’re not all healthy. And in order for me to be truly ready to talk about something in a constructive way, uh, I need to resolve. And so, there’s, um, there’s a time of, uh, personal interaction with the Lord in, in, in getting to that point. Um, I, I guess, on the surface, coming into marriage, I expected that we would, you know, have an argument or something, then if we just stopped and pray about it, it would be Okay, but sometimes I’m just too perturbed to pray.” (Couple 5, Male)

In addition, another woman relays how she prays specifically for wisdom during conflicts with her husband.

“Pray for wisdom. You know, let me see this as You see it, instead of just as I see it, so.” (Couple 7, Female)

Accordingly, another woman offers that she and her husband pray that God would make each of them the husband and wife that the other needs them to be.

“I want You to change me so that I can be the wife that [he] needs. Change me. And I think that change me prayer is the most important prayer. And both of us have prayed that, both of us have prayed that prayer. Um, so that, there’s no way that I could adequately describe how important, um, our Christian faith is to the success of our marriage. There’s just no, there’s no way to measure it.” (Couple 8, Female)

Finally, another woman states that she prays for help and strength from the Lord and for the Lord to convict her husband during times of struggle.

“I think I just, I think I just have to just pray, just look to the Lord and ask the Holy Spirit. I know that [my husband] has the Holy Spirit. Instead of me, you know, dripping, you know, faucet, I just ask Him to convict him and stuff, and then, you know.” (Couple 10, Female)

The second theme, talking things over with one’s partner, instead of with other people, is demonstrated below by a man noting that he appreciates that his wife comes to him first with problems that she is having with him instead of talking to her family and friends about it.

“Yeah, definitely not talking to other people about it, like her mom, ya know. She won’t call her and tell, ya know, which I appreciate. That’s biblical, that plays in faith, Matthew 18. So we go to each other, you know, with the, whatever issue it is, which a lotta couples don’t do, especially couples who don’t know the Lord. Um, they’ll talk to their friend, you know, you, oh, this and that and the other, uh, so that, that plays a role, you know...[not seeking advice] from any place other than God’s word.” (Couple 1, Male)

The third theme, honesty is the best policy, is illuminated below by a woman presenting the necessity of being honest with one’s partner during conflict.

“Just bein’...honest before one another.” (Couple 1, Female)

The fourth theme, apologizing when one is wrong, is depicted below by a man advising that it is important to apologize after conflicts occur in the relationship.

“And apologize about it.” (Couple 1, Male)

Along the same lines, a woman admits that she always apologizes after a disagreement with her husband.

“And I’ll usually come in and apologize.” (Couple 7, Female)

The fifth theme, forgiveness as healing, is exhibited below by a woman recognizing the power of healing that comes with forgiveness.

“The healing that comes from confession and forgiveness, and that kind of thing, definitely think that plays a part, too.” (Couple 5, Female)

The sixth theme, trusting God to see one through, is exemplified below by a man who signifies the importance of having faith during stressful times.

“We pretty much, I mean, just resolve with, you know, God’ll just keep taking care of us. He’s taken care of us up until this point.” (Couple 4, Male)

Furthermore, a woman reflects on how God is always with her and how that gives her confidence that He will take care of her during times of distress.

“The Lord is always there watching us. And we just, we feel, we know He’s there, and I think that’s just, that has everything to do with it.” (Couple 6, Female)

Additionally, another woman discusses how her husband has taught her to turn her problems over to the Lord and to trust that the Lord is watching out for her.

“He is...the opposite of me, as far as, you know, I dunno, flying off the handle or worrying about something. He doesn’t worry...He’s trained me a lot to turn it over to the Lord. He’ll take care of it, and, you know, I’ve learned a lot spiritually from him...If all men were like him there’d be no divorce, I can tell ya that.” (Couple 7, Female)

Consequently, another woman realizes that she and her husband cannot solve all of their disagreements on their own accord, but that they must rely on the Lord to help them overcome their hurdles.

“But you just have to work at it all the time, you know, and just about the time you feel like you’re better about it you’ll have one of those knock down drag outs, you know, and just to humble you, and real, make you realize...you need the Lord more than ever, you know, um, so anyway, that’s been our experience...[You have to] handle it as a strong Christian should [by] putting yourself in the Lord’s hands.” (Couple 8, Female)

Subsequently, another man represents the hope that he and his wife have that God has a plan for their lives, and so, during times of strain, they have peace in knowing that God is working things together for good in their relationship.

“Well, we both realize that there’s a, God has a plan for our lives, and that, um, that hopefully we’re staying close to that.” (Couple 7, Male)

The seventh theme, humbling oneself before one another and before God, is represented below by a woman expressing how being humble is an important component in resolving conflicts between her and her husband.

“Just bein’ humble.” (Couple 1, Female)

In addition, the first sub-theme, submitting to one’s partner, is manifested below by a man explaining how he had to learn to submit to his wife’s authority on certain subjects and decisions in their relationship because, over time, he realized that God had given her the gift of wisdom.

“Yeah, I think, over time, I think, I think they’re probably a time I thought [she] was that dripping faucet, and come to realize, over time, she, her wisdom was really great, and she was really doin’ what was in my best interest. And so, me getting that wisdom, over time, I think, is been of value, knowing that she’s not just a clanging, a symbol to be clanging. But, I mean, you know, sh-she’s pretty, Lord, Lord, Lord’s given her s-some pretty good wisdom, and it took me a number of years to probably be, uh, open spirit toward that wisdom, so it’s been a good thing.” (Couple 10, Male)

Moreover, the second sub-theme, putting one’s partner before oneself, is demonstrated below by a woman pointing out that selfishness is the root of all evil in a marriage. She urges couples to put each other first if they wish to minimize their conflicts and maximize their happiness in the marriage.

“Sometimes I just feel like, just selfishness is just the root of all evil, instead of money. You know, I feel like it’s, ‘causes so many unnecessary things...My only advice for marriage is put the other one first and you’ll never have any trouble if both of you do that. You know, just try to think of his wishers over yours and her wishes over yours.” (Couple 7, Female)

Correspondingly, a man also advises that each partner must relinquish his or her own desires for the benefit of the relationship if he or she wishes to reduce the amount of conflict in the relationship and increase the amount of contentment in the relationship.

“You have to learn, and you have to, um, you have to give up your own, own personal desires. I mean, you g, you, you have to, you, your spouse isn’t gonna change you, but you’ve, you have to realize that if you change it’s, it’s gonna, it’s gonna help your relationship with your spouse, you know. None, none of the amount of, of, of nagging or complaining and stuff is gonna change you, but if you, if you decide that you want a, a better relationship and stuff, and you make the small changes of, of, if it’s just pickin’ up the clothes, or you know, puttin’ things in, in a certain place, then it, it, it alieves a lot a friction. And then, I mean, and it’s on both, and it’s both, and it’s both, for both people.” (Couple 8, Male)

Finally, the same man exposes how when each person dies to him or herself, to his or her own needs, in the relationship, then the relationship profits.

“Yeah, I mean, that’s, that’s the one thing, I guess, I mean, I, I’d probably been limited, I’d been livin’ that way, but I’ve probably more ded, more dedicated now to livin’ that way after going through men’s fraternity. In, in the second year you get, what they give you is the little, this little cross, and it says on there, live to die. You know, and that’s what, I mean, that’s what I have to remember is that my purpose is, is, is to serve like Jesus did. And when I die to myself, then I get l-life, that’s when I, that’s when I find life and I give life to [her] and our relationship. So, and, and, um, and when you, and when you do that, and you do it consistently, and over time, you know, the relationship gets stronger, and, you know, we just, it, it, um, it just blossoms. Then, you know, you, you find your needs are taken care of. When you start, when you s, yeah, when you start servin’, an, uh, and givin’ your, you know, d-dyin’ to your own needs first, in the long run, your needs get taken care of. All of a sudden you, you realize either that, either you, you realize that need really wasn’t important, or it comes around and your need gets taken care of when you put the other person’s needs first.” (Couple 8, Male)

The third, and final, sub-theme, loving and respecting one’s partner, is depicted below by a woman articulating the responsibility of both partners to love and respect one another during conflict.

“I think that it came down to us talking about, like, if I’m supposed to be the Godly wife, and I’m supposed to respect you, how am I supposed to respect you if I don’t think you love and respect me. So, I think that that’s where it’s come down to, um, with faith in those arguments.” (Couple 4, Female)

Accordingly, another woman supplies a situation where she felt like her husband did not truly love her, because of the baggage that she carried from a previous broken engagement. She goes on to talk about how she had to trust in the Lord to heal her, and how she had to seek His help in

getting out of her own way so that she could love her husband that way that God would want her to love him.

“Everything...everything...but, you know, for the Lord to even be able to heal that that wouldn't have happened without our faith, without sayin' to the Lord, Lord, I want to love my husband, you know, the way you want me to love him.”
(Couple 8, Female)

In addition, another woman contributes how she is careful with how she words things when she and her husband get into an argument, because she wants to love and respect him and not hurt him.

“I think, for me...would be how I word things is very important to me, and sometimes to a fault, but, um, I wanna be careful how I say things, and that's because of a faith-base, you know.” (Couple 5, Female)

Furthermore, another woman describes how her faith influences how she treats other people, and how she treats her husband, in particular, especially in disagreements, because she wants to love and respect other people, and most importantly, she wants to love and respect her husband.

“And I think our faith would play a role in, in, how we, how we do treat people, and how we treat each other in our [relationship].” (Couple 3, Female)

Finally, a man reports how his dedication to his faith deters him from being malicious during conflicts with his wife, because he wants to love and respect her, and treat her how Jesus would want him to treat her.

“I dunno that we've had many arguments, but discussions and disagreements, and, uh, you know, what's fair and what's not fair. And, I dunno, I thin, I don't know that we, if we've had disagreements that we intentionally try to hurt each other to get our point across. I think we've learned things over the years, through being in the church and growing up learning those things, not to go there.” (Couple 9, Male)

The eighth, and final, theme, faith facilitates a common ground, is displayed below by a man reasoning how having his faith in common with his wife has helped them work through

disputes by giving them a common goal to work towards, and how, because of their faith, they have treated each other better in the midst of those conflicts.

“Whenever we’ve, uh, been focused on, on Christ, and not each other, or something else, um, it’s been easier to communicate...If you’re, if you’re both heading the same direction you’re gonna, uh, be closer...I, I think if neither one of us had the, the faith we would, we would, our, our, our arguments wouldn’t end in, in, in, as, as amicably as they do.” (Couple 3, Male)

Likewise, a woman reflects on how her shared faith with her husband has enabled them to persevere during times of distress. She mentions that, at times, their commitment to each other, and to God, was the only thing that was able to bring them through the difficult times. She implies that if it were up to them, and their own strength, to get them through, then they might not have made it, but because they had their faith in common, and God’s strength to rely on, then they were able to persist.

“But, I think because we started off having a trust in the Lord, um, all of our other issues we’ve ki, I mean, we’ve pretty much just fallen back on scripture and just His promises...to really just have as your armor for when Satan is attacking you. Especially within your first marriage, you know, because you really will get to a point where you have nothing else to say but you still haven’t resolved the situation, and you have to have that backing, you know, is with scriptures and with your faith just because, I mean, we, I mean, we wouldn’t have survived a year.” (Couple 4, Female)

Similarly, another man imparts the importance of mutual faith in overcoming conflict.

“But, um, I think our, our faith, which no matter what the issue that we’re separated on, we always have our faith in common, and so we’re operating in the same, same family, framework from which we approach conflict. I think that’s important.” (Couple 5, Male)

Accordingly, another man maintains the value of having a central focus from which to approach conflict.

“I think a huge part, because it’s the central, it’s the central point...As individuals, we’re gonna disagree on a lotta things, but like I said, as far as when, however many years ago that little thing at church about the, about finding and being comfortable with somebody you can spend the rest of your life with, you know,

that's that central point. Everything else, we agree on there's always our faith."
(Couple 6, Male)

Correspondingly, a couple proposes that their joint faith is at the heart of everything that they do, and that it guides them during discussions and disagreements.

"I think our faith plays a role in everything we do. And I think that's because that's who we are. We've both been Christians for a long time, and grown up in the church, uh, had some, uh, secondary, or additional, education in a Christian institution, so these things all kinda mold you to who you are. And so I think we fall back onto those principles that we learned, and I think they help guide us in discussions and arguments so to speak." (Couple 9, Male)

"So, I think faith does, like he said, play a part." (Couple 9, Female)

Moreover, another man posits that, because of his faith, he has a determination to stick it out with his wife, no matter what.

"Another thing, too, that helps communication, is, is a, you know, you just, you just determine that you're, you're, you have to, you're, well, you're, you hang in there, but you're different, you're different people, too. And, you know, you're usually, you don't marry somebody exactly like yourself. And there's those differences, and ya, you just, you know, have to accept those. And, and those are good things, too, that can make a family stronger, 'cause not everybody's the same, which, which can be a good thing." (Couple 10, Male)

Along the same lines, another woman repeats that having faith in common makes a couple more determined to work things out and to stay together, especially if they believe that God facilitated the union between them.

"Well, I guess, just knowing we were made for each other makes you realize, OK, you know, you know, gotta give and take and compromise." (Couple 7, Female)

Finally, another woman echoes that the knowledge that God has brought two people together is motivation to hang in there when times are tough.

"I really don't think you could do it without knowin', from the very beginning, that you thought that the Lord put ya together. There's just nothing that helps ya hang in there. Well, yeah, I mean, because there's gonna be hard times, because, and because as soon as you. Well, look how long it takes to merge on a highway if it's, like, you know, one lane closed. I mean, when the two become one it's not

automatic, it didn't happen, it's hard to get two people into a pair a jeans.”
(Couple 10, Female)

In sum, results of the investigation indicated a limited connection between biblical values and managing dialectical tensions, both internal and external, in relationships, but results of the analysis indicated a strong connection between biblical values and resolving interpersonal conflict in relationships. There was a limited connection between biblical values and managing the internal dialectical tensions of predictability-novelty and openness-closedness, and managing the external dialectical tension of inclusion-seclusion. The connection between biblical values and managing dialectical tensions, both internal and external, in Christian married couples' relationships was depicted in two themes, including wives submit to your husbands, husbands love your wives, and God hears our prayers.

Furthermore, the relationship between biblical values and resolving interpersonal conflict in Christian married couples' relationships was manifested in eight themes, including praying together and apart, talking things over with one's partner, instead of with other people, honesty is the best policy, apologizing when one is wrong, forgiveness as healing, trusting God to see one through, humbling oneself before one another and before God, including sub-themes such as, submitting to one's partner, putting one's partner before oneself, and loving and respecting one's partner, and finally, faith facilitates a common ground.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The results of this study have illustrated which dialectical tensions, both internal and external, are manifested in Christian married couples' relationships as they communicate with their marital partners. Furthermore, the findings have highlighted the themes in which the dialectical tensions, both internal and external, are exhibited in Christian married couples' relationships as they communicate with their marital partners. The observations made in the current study are similar to the observations made by Pawlowski in her study of dialectical tensions in married couples' relationships.

Pawlowski discovered that the most frequently experienced dialectical tension in married couples' relationships was the internal dialectical tension, autonomy-connection, followed by the internal dialectical tension, predictability-novelty, trailed by the external dialectical tension, inclusion-seclusion, then the internal contradiction, openness-closedness, after which came the external dialectical tension, conventionality-uniqueness, and finally, the external dialectical tension, revelation-concealment was the least reported dialectical tension. With the exception of the external dialectical tension, conventionality-uniqueness, which was tied with the internal dialectical tension, autonomy-connection for first place, and the external dialectical tension, inclusion-seclusion, which was tied with the internal dialectical tension, predictability-novelty, for second place, the results of the current study mirror the order of most frequently experienced dialectical tensions in Pawlowski's study.

The reason for the discrepancy in the findings is based on the participants. Pawlowski did not particularly target religious couples for her study, while the current study focused specifically on Christian married couples. As expressed in the results, the external dialectical

tension, conventionality-uniqueness, is a tension that, when looked at in the context of Christian married couples' relationships, is demonstrated in a theme that is particular to Christian married couples' relationships.

The theme, "being in the world, but not of it," is displayed in Christian married couples' relationships as the desire for their marriages to stand out from non-Christian marriages by portraying the example of what a biblical marriage should be, but at the same time, not to be so different from non-Christian marriages that they could not socialize with non-Christian married couples and that they would be ostracized from society. Thus, Christian married couples feel pressure to conform, in some sense, to the expectations of the general society about how their marriages should be; yet, in another sense, Christian married couples want their marriages to be set apart from other marriages and to be unique from other marriages, especially from non-Christian marriages. The theme is an important one for Christian married couples, which explains why the external dialectical tension, conventionality-uniqueness, would be more prominent for Christian married couples than for non-Christian married couples.

In both studies, however, the internal dialectical tension, autonomy-connection, stood out as the most frequently experienced dialectical tension for married couples in their relationships. Perhaps this finding can be explained by Rogers and Amato who found, in their study of married couples who were married before the increase of women in the workforce (married between 1964 and 1980) and women who were married after the increase of women in the workforce (married between 1981 and 1997), that the salience of work-family conflict is on the rise, especially for the group that was married after the increase of women in the workforce. The reason for the increase in work-family conflict is because couples are spending more time at work and less time at home together than they did in the past, and when they are at home their

time is divided among work, household responsibilities, and family time. Therefore, it is perhaps this time constraint between spending time together (connectedness) and spending time apart (autonomy) that is the leading cause of marital conflict and marital dissatisfaction in marriages today, which would explain why the internal dialectical tension, autonomy-connection, is cited as the most frequently experienced dialectical tension among married couples.

Likewise, Baxter and Montgomery echo that the internal dialectical tension, autonomy-connection, is frequently played out within the context of dual-career marriages.

Conceptions of 'connectedness' and 'separateness' are not only fluid within a relationship's history, but, in addition, qualitatively different meanings of the dialectic seem likely to emerge for relationships embedded in different contexts.

Spouses in dual-career marriages, for example, are likely to experience the dialectic in qualitatively different ways from spouses in single-career marriages.

In single-career marriages, dilemmas of connectedness and separateness can be experienced as 'home versus work,' with each opposition aligned with the vested interests of the home-based spouse and the out-of-home spouse, respectively. (97)

Furthermore, one of the major themes demonstrated in the results, under the internal dialectical tension, autonomy-connection, was work creates too much autonomy, which supports the conclusion that the increase in work-family conflict has led to the increase of couples experiencing the internal dialectical tension, autonomy-connection in their relationships. The following quotation from Rogers and Amato further garners support for this assumption. "Time shortages reported by married mothers affect marital quality by decreasing couples' time together" (734). Thus, it is important for couples to find constructive ways to manage this

tension in order to decrease the likelihood of experiencing conflict over it and to increase the likelihood of experiencing a satisfying marriage.

Moreover, some of the other themes magnified in the findings, under the internal dialectical tension, autonomy-connection, were wanting guy/girl time, needing personal time to unwind, and having different interests. These observations reinforce Baxter's notion that the internal dialectical tension, autonomy-connection, in its most basic form, is a tension over wanting to spend time together versus wanting to spend time apart to fulfill one's personal desires. According to Baxter, "At a more mundane level, integration-separation can be constructed by relationship parties in terms of their negotiation surrounding how much time to spend with one another versus time spent apart to meet other obligations. This time-management radiant of the integration-separation contradiction appears to be particularly salient in romantic and friendship relationships" (9).

Finally, the last theme illuminated in the observations, under the internal dialectical tension, autonomy-connection, was togetherness with versus togetherness to, which sustains Baxter's idea that the internal dialectical tension, autonomy-connection may be represented as either a physical or an emotional tension. According to Baxter the contradiction, autonomy-connection, may take shape in a variety of forms, including both physical (i.e. the tension between being physically together versus physically apart) and emotional (i.e. the tension between being emotionally connected versus emotionally distant) and that the possibilities are only restricted by the contexts (10).

In addition, in both Pawlowski's study and the current study, the internal dialectical tension, predictability-novelty, was ranked as the second most frequently experienced dialectical tension in married couples' relationships. This particular contradiction was exemplified in two

themes including wanting to break out of the routine and get one's partner out of his or her comfort zone, and wanting one's partner, and family and friends, to be predictable. These themes also back Baxter's previous conclusions.

First, the theme, wanting to break out of the routine and get one's partner out of his or her comfort zone is reflected in the following description by Baxter's of the meaning of the tension. Baxter points out, "This meaning revolves around the extent to which the interaction episodes of the pair are fun, exciting, and stimulating...On the one hand, parties want to establish a routine of predictable and pleasurable activities, yet these predictable activities begin to lose their excitement because they are no longer new" (122-123).

The second theme, wanting one's partner, and family and friends, to be predictable is also replicated in the subsequent descriptions by Baxter of the meaning of the contradiction. Baxter identifies, "The first radiant meaning of 'certainty' and 'uncertainty' revolves around the issue of cognitively predicting the other's personality, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors" (121).

Furthermore, Baxter indicates,

The fifth meaning of 'certainty' and 'uncertainty' revolves around predictability with the state of the relationship. On the one hand, informants indicated their desire to know where the relationship stood and where it was headed. Yet, simultaneously, informants expressed the opposite desire for unpredictability. The desire for unpredictability is captured in people's view of a relationship as a 'journey of discovery' or as a 'living organism'. Unpredictability was a sign of relational health to these informants; it indicated that the relationship was alive, vital, and growing. On the other hand, they wanted certainty about where their

relationship stood and felt discomfort with the notion of a relationship as ever changing. (123-124)

Subsequently, in both Pawlowski's study and the current study, the external dialectical tension, inclusion-seclusion, was positioned as the third most frequently experienced dialectical tension in married couples' relationships. This tension was also depicted in a theme that is specific to Christian married couples, which is helping a brother in need. I John 3:17 states, "If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?" (*The Holy Bible, New International Version*). Thus, Christian married couples struggled with wanting to adhere to the biblical principles laid out in their faith by including people in their marriage; but, at the same time, wanting seclusion and privacy from other people in their marriage, especially because it was not the best timing. The theme is an important one for Christian married couples, which explains why the external dialectical tension, inclusion-seclusion, would be slightly more prominent, as it was tied with the internal dialectical tension, predictability-novelty, for Christian married couples than for non-Christian married couples.

Following the external dialectical tension, inclusion-seclusion, in both Pawlowski's study and the current study, was the internal dialectical tension, openness-closedness. This particular contradiction was manifested in two themes including wanting to know one's partner's every thought, and wanting to protect one's partner and keep the peace. The first theme, wanting to know one's partner's every thought, proved to be especially problematic for couples because, in most cases, one partner wanted his or her spouse to share his or her every thought, but the spouse did not always want to share his or her every thought, which led to a cycle of conflict known as demand/withdraw.

According to Fincham and Beach, the demand-withdraw conflict pattern has a negative effect on couples' marital satisfaction; hence the reason for the internal dialectical tension, openness-closedness placing near the top of the list of the dialectical tensions that cause the most interpersonal conflict in relationships. The assessors inform,

An interaction pattern in which the wife raises issues and the husband withdraws has often been noted by clinicians and has received empirical confirmation. For example, Roberts & Krokoff (1990) found dissatisfied couples displayed more husband-withdraw-wife hostility sequences, whereas satisfied couples displayed more husband-withdraw-wife withdraw sequences. However, it appears that demand-withdraw patterns and the use of other influence tactics vary as a function of whose issue is being discussed during conflict. (50)

Meanwhile, the second theme, wanting to protect one's partner and keep the peace imitates Baxter and Montgomery's concept of "informational privacy," while also echoing Solomon et al.'s belief that individuals may recognize annoyances in the relationship, but may choose to withhold them from their spouses. Baxter and Montgomery propose that some individuals may abide by "informational privacy" in the relationship, that is, keeping some information to oneself rather than sharing it with one's spouse. According to Baxter and Montgomery there are several reasons, or benefits, for "informational privacy" in a relationship, including protecting oneself from putting across a bad image, maintaining control, shielding the relationship from harm, saving oneself from being hurt, and keeping relationships with others from being negatively affected (138). Thus, partners may engage in "informational privacy" in order to protect one another, and the relationship from harm or from being negatively affected.

In addition, Solomon et al. suggest that partners may withhold information from their spouses in order to keep the peace in the relationship. Solomon et al. impart, “As a first step in managing potential conflict issues, people must decide whether to voice their concerns to their partner or avoid confronting the problem” (146). The investigators continue,

Although open and direct communication patterns are generally valued in marriage, people frequently withhold irritations from their spouses. For example, Birchler et al. (1975) found that spouses in satisfying marriages reported an average of 14 complaints, but only one argument, over a five-day period. Moreover, Scanzoni (1978) found that 7 percent of wives reported that they could not communicate a particular relational grievance to their husband. Hence, individuals may perceive irritations within the marriage, but decide not to articulate those complaints to spouses. (146)

Thus, partners may withhold complaints to prevent conflict.

Finally, the external dialectical tension, revelation-concealment, in both Pawlowski’s study and the current study, was the least reported dialectical tension. This particular contradiction was demonstrated in three themes including parents being biased toward their children, setting boundaries, and being an encouragement to others. The third theme, being an encouragement to others is a theme that is specific to Christian married couples. I Thessalonians 5:11 states, “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing” (*The Holy Bible, New International Version*). Thus, Christian married couples struggled with wanting to follow the biblical principles laid out by their faith by revealing the struggles that they have gone through in their marriage and how they have overcome them to serve as an

encouragement to others who are also struggling; but, at the same time, wanting to conceal their struggles from other people outside of their marriage in order to save face.

In addition to have illustrating which dialectical tensions, both internal and external, are manifested in Christian married couples' relationships as they communicate with their marital partners, the results of the current study also highlighted which dialectical tensions, both internal and external, created interpersonal conflict in Christian married couples' relationships.

Interestingly, even though it was least reported as causing interpersonal conflict in relationships, the external dialectical tension, conventionality-uniqueness, was displayed in a theme that corresponds with Pawlowski's concept of "forced entrance". The theme, people outside of the relationship imposing themselves, and their views, on the relationship, is supported by the following quotation from Pawlowski's study on dialectical tensions in married couples' relationships.

Tensions occurred in relationships, either by choice or through 'forced entrance' by others. Several couples provided examples of other individuals asking about the relationship, telling the couples what to do, or appearing in their lives without being asked. This suggests that tensions are not only created by individuals within the relationship, but are forced upon them by others. Much of what happens to couples is brought about because of others. The link of social networks needs to address whether tensions are brought about voluntarily (i.e., by the couple) or involuntarily (i.e., by family members or friends). (410)

It seems, that in this particular instance, the tension was brought about involuntarily by family and friends forcing themselves, and their opinions, on the couples.

Moreover, besides highlighting which dialectical tensions, both internal and external, created interpersonal conflict in Christian married couples' relationships, the results of the current study also represented which management strategies Christian married couples employed in an effort to handle the dialectical tensions, both internal and external, that occurred in their relationships. The two techniques that stood out the most were disorientation and balance, as they seemed to be the most related to biblical values in the couples' relationships, and, consequently, were the second and third most frequently exercised approaches.

The first method, disorientation, appears to be tied to the biblical principle, wives submit to your husbands, husbands love your wives, presented in Ephesians 5:22-33. The disorientation tactic, as submitted by Prentice, is, "A management strategy that [does] not in reality ease the tension between [pairs]" (78). Furthermore, the disorientation style involves one partner utilizing the conflict management strategy of accommodation, which is described by Wilmot and Hocker as, "Represent[ing] a low level of concern for yourself but a high level of concern for the other" (131). Thus, in situations where a husband and wife are at odds and cannot come to a compromise, then, usually, the wife will give in to her husband, whether it alleviates the tension between them or not, because she feels compelled to adhere to the tenets set out in her faith.

On the other hand, in situations where the husband and wife are at odds and they can come to a compromise, then they usually will. According to Wilmot and Hocker, the compromise conflict management strategy, "Is a middle ground, where there are moderate degrees of concern for self and concern for other" (131). Likewise, the balance style, as put forward by Toller and Braithwaite, occurs when "[pairs] partly meet the ends of each pole of the tension" (267). Thus, the second most employed strategy for managing dialectical tensions in

relationships, balance, also appears to be tied to the biblical principle, wives submit to your husbands, husbands love your wives, presented in Ephesians 5:22-33.

Consequently, the accommodation and compromise conflict management strategies, which correspond with the disorientation and balance strategies for managing dialectical tensions in relationships, were both reported by Kulik and Havusha-Morgenstern as being associated with positive marital adjustment and satisfaction (204).

Finally, as well as representing which management strategies Christian married couples employed in an effort to handle the dialectical tensions, both internal and external, that occurred in their relationships, the results of the current study also magnified the role that biblical values play in the management of dialectical tensions, and in the resolution of conflict, in Christian married couples' relationships. Several of the themes reported by the Christian married couples as ways in which their faith aids them in resolving interpersonal conflict in their relationships were supported by the literature, such as praying together and apart, forgiveness as healing, humbling oneself before one another and before God, including the sub-themes of putting one's partner before oneself, and loving and respecting one's partner, and finally, faith facilitates a common ground.

The first theme, praying together and apart, was sustained by Lambert and Dollahite in their study on religion and marital conflict. According to the examiners, "In addition to religious attendance, couple prayer has been found to decrease negativity, contempt, and hostility, as well as emotional reactivity toward one's partner" (441). Moreover, the canvassers express, "Prayer was another means of resolving marital conflict. Several couples talked about prayer alleviating anger and facilitating open communication" (444). Along the same lines, the evaluators reveal, "Butler et al. (2002) found that prayer facilitates couple empathy, increased self-change focus,

and encouraged couple responsibility for reconciliation and problem solving. Also, Greenberg and Johnson (1998) found prayer to be critical to relationship softening, which facilitates conflict resolution” (447). Thus, Lambert and Dollahite observe that prayer assists with conflict resolution by decreasing feelings of anger and increasing open communication between couples.

Similarly, Marks suggests, sharing religious activities together, such as prayer, can also help reduce conflict in marriage. Marks explains, “Prayer reportedly influence[s] marriage through pathways including providing a “connection with God,” a sense of caring for spouse and children, bringing in “a spirit of love,” and offering a valuable tool for conflict resolution” (98).

The second theme, forgiveness as healing, was also maintained by Lambert and Dollahite in their study on religion and marital conflict. According to the assessors, “Religious involvement seemed to help couples reconcile by (a) increasing their commitment to relationship permanence and (b) kindling a willingness to forgive” (444). Likewise, Fincham et al. propose that forgiveness is an essential part of overcoming hurts and facilitating healing in the relationship. According to the reporters, “When a husband and wife have experienced either a number of small offenses or one or more large ones, in order to continue successfully in their marriage they must...actively forgive one another and allow their commitment to one another and to the marriage to overshadow the anger and hurt and repair the relationship” (242). Finally, the surveyors claim, “Many researchers and clinicians believe that forgiveness is the cornerstone of a successful marriage, a view that is shared by spouses themselves” (279).

The third theme, humbling oneself before one another and before God, including the sub-themes of putting one’s partner before oneself, and loving and respecting one’s partner, too is backed by the findings in Lambert and Dollahite’s study on faith and marital conflict. The first sub-theme, putting one’s partner before oneself is supported by the following quotation from

Lambert and Dollahite. “One of the main themes identified by Dudley and Kosinski (1990) about the effects of religiosity on marriage was that religious participation helped couples more often ‘think of the needs of others, be more loving and forgiving, treat each other with respect, and resolve conflict’” (446).

Along the same lines, Fincham et al. note that sacrifice plays an important and positive role in marriage. According to the examiners, sacrifice can be defined as “[the] behavior in which one gives up some immediate personal desire to benefit the marriage or the partner, reflecting the transformation from self-focus to couple focus” (280). However, Fincham et al. suggest that spouses do not perceive sacrifice to be a cost of the relationship, but rather a source of satisfaction in the relationship due to each partner’s dedication to the relationship. Fincham et al. insist,

Sacrifice is not a cost of the relationship in exchange theory terms because of the transformation of motivation that occurs within an individual. Costs, by definition, represent an exchange perceived to result in a net personal loss. For those partners who report greater willingness to sacrifice, however, the very same behavior that could represent a cost is reappraised with an emphasis on us and our future, turning it into a source of satisfaction rather than a cost. (280)

In addition, Fincham et al. claim that sacrifice is an integral part of marital adjustment and is a key predictor of marital satisfaction and longevity. The reporters reveal,

Indeed, self-reports of personal satisfaction from sacrificing for one’s mate are associated with both concurrent marital adjustment and marital adjustment over time, with attitudes about sacrifice predicting later better than earlier marital adjustment...Similarly, Van Lange et al. (1997) have found that those who report

more willingness to sacrifice also report greater satisfaction, commitment, and relationship persistence. (280)

With regard to the second sub-theme, loving and respecting one's partner, Koerner and Fitzpatrick denote, "During dyadic conflict, communication behaviors that are generally associated with positive outcomes for relationship satisfaction and stability are problem solving, showing positive affect, and face saving, whereas conflict avoidance, self-justification/blaming the other, and coercive/controlling behavior are usually associated with negative relationship outcomes" (234). Thus, Christian married couples opt for positive rather than negative styles of communicating during conflict.

Finally, the fourth theme, faith facilitates common ground, is also held up in Lambert and Dollahite's study on faith and marital conflict. According to the researchers, "Couples reported that their religious beliefs increased their commitment to relationship permanence. 'God hates divorce' or 'marriage is forever' were some of the common expressions couples made regarding commitment to relationship permanence. This commitment generated a desire within couples to reconcile with each other and work through difficult times" (445).

Accordingly, Mahoney offers, "Couples who view God this way may be more able to disengage emotionally from destructive communication patterns and explore options for compromise or healthy acceptance of one another" (696). For example, Mahoney explains,

Judeo-Christian literature encourages individuals who encounter marital conflict to engage in self-scrutiny, acknowledge mistakes, relinquish fears of rejection and disclose vulnerabilities, forgive transgressions, inhibit expressions of anger, and be patient, loving, and kind. Adherence to such ideals is likely to facilitate

adaptive communication methods that secular models of marriage promote (e.g., empathetic listening, compromise). (695)

Similarly, Marks expresses,

The most pervasive and salient spiritual belief reported by couples in connection with marriage [is] that faith in God offer[s] them marital support. A sizable minority of the couples explicitly stated that they did not believe their marriages would still be intact were it not for their faith in, and support from, the Divine...The couples viewed faith as a multi-faceted support in their marriages to 'weather the storm[s]' and 'to help you overcome' flaws. Additionally, faith reportedly provided a 'framework,' a 'strength,' and a strong belief during marital challenges. (104-105)

One, final, observation was that the older married couples in the study appeared to have experienced less dialectical tensions, both internal and external, than their younger counterparts. It may be that the older married couples, since they have been married longer, have had more time to work out the tensions between them. Perhaps the older married couples experienced more dialectical tensions in the early years of their marriage, rather than the later years of their marriage, in which case they may have forgotten about some of the tensions that they experienced early on. Previous research supports the idea that couples experience more tensions, or conflicts, in the beginning stages of their relationships, as opposed to the later stages of their relationships. Kulik and Havusha-Morgenstern present, "Although research findings indicate that most couples feel relatively high levels of satisfaction in the initial period of marriage, there is also evidence of marital conflicts emerging during that stage" (192). Furthermore, Pawlowski proposes, "A great deal of change occurs during the first few years of a marital relationship,

which may be explained by tensions experienced within the relationships” (398). Thus, one might conclude that the longer a couple is married, the better they become at managing dialectical tensions, and conflict, in their relationship.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Finally, this study addresses some limitations and directions for future research. One limitation of the current study was its limited scope, which minimizes the probability of the results being generalized to a larger population. Thus, one area for future research is to expand the scope of the study to include a larger population of participants.

A second limitation of the study, which also limits its scope, is its focus on one particular group of people, Caucasian, Christian married couples. While Relational Dialectics Theory calls for the examination of dialectical tensions in unique contexts, more unique contexts need to be examined, because the salience of specific tensions may fluctuate depending on the contexts in which they are examined. Likewise, the ways in which the tensions are expressed may vary depending on the contexts in which they are enacted. For example, Christian couples may experience different dialectical tensions than non-Christian couples, or may experience certain tensions more frequently than non-Christian couples due to their faith. Furthermore, the themes in which the dialectical tensions are manifested may be different for Christian couples than for non-Christian couples. Moreover, Christian couples may choose different management strategies than non-Christian couples, based on their biblical values, for dealing with dialectical tensions in their relationships. Thus, it would be interesting to compare and contrast the dialectical tensions experienced, and the management strategies used, by Christian couples with the dialectical tensions experienced, and the management strategies used, by non-Christian couples.

In addition, it may also be enlightening to compare and contrast the dialectical tensions experienced, and the management strategies used, by other religions, such as Jewish, Islamic, etc. with the dialectical tensions experienced, and management strategies used, by Christian married couples. Different faiths may have different values that impact the way in which dialectical tensions are expressed and managed in those relationships.

Similarly, it would be illuminating to examine the dialectical tensions felt, and the management strategies used, in inter-faith relationships as compared to same-faith relationships. It may be that inter-faith couples experience more, or at least different, dialectical tensions than same-faith couples, and those tensions are certain to be expressed in unique themes and to be managed in unique ways.

Another unique setting in which dialectical tensions may be observed, within the context of religion, is between religious individuals and their creator or between religious individuals and other members of the congregation. For example, one might examine the tension autonomy-connection by studying how much time an individual spends together with (i.e. mental or emotional connection) his or her creator (i.e. through prayer, scripture reading, church attendance, etc.) versus how much time an individual spends away from his or her creator focusing solely on him or herself. In addition, one might look at the tension openness-closedness by investigating how much information an individual shares (through prayer) with his or her creator versus how much information an individual keeps to him or herself.

One might also consider the tension inclusion-seclusion by exploring how an individual balances spending time alone with his or her creator (i.e. in personal prayer or worship) versus sharing time with his or creator and other people in worship (i.e. at church, Bible studies, etc.) Moreover, one might investigate the tension revelation-concealment by analyzing how much

information an individual shares with other believers about his or her relationship with his or her creator versus how much information an individual chooses to keep to him or herself about his or her relationship with his or her creator. Lastly, one might think about the tension conventional-ity-uniqueness in terms of how traditional or nontraditional one's relationship is with his or her creator compared to other believers' relationships with the creator,

Specifically, it would be beneficial to look at the concepts of "openness with," "openness to," "closedness with," and "closedness to" in regard to gate-keeping activity with one's creator. One might analyze how open an individual is to disclosing information to his or her creator ("openness with"), but also how open an individual is to receiving information from one's creator ("openness to") versus how closed off an individual is from his or her creator by choosing to withhold certain information from his or her creator ("closedness with"), but also how closed an individual is to receiving information from one's creator ("closedness to"). It would also be interesting to examine these concepts within the context of interpersonal relationships as well.

Furthermore, it would also be interesting to note the dialectical tensions experienced, and the management strategies used, by other cultures, since the current study only focused on Caucasians. More specifically, it would be beneficial to compare and contrast the dialectical tensions experienced, and the management strategies used, by different cultures. It would also be valuable to compare and contrast the dialectical tensions experienced, and management strategies used, by mixed-race couples, as opposed to same-race couples.

Additionally, it would be interesting to discover the differences in dialectical tensions experienced, and management strategies used, by dating couples, co-habiting couples, and married couples. Another advantageous area of exploration would be the dialectical tensions

experienced, and the management strategies used, by different marital types (i.e. Traditionals, Separates, Independents).

Moreover, apart from the context of romantic relationships it would be interesting to observe the dialectical tensions experienced by individuals in non-romantic relationships as well. It would be beneficial to study the dialectical tensions between employers and employees, among co-workers, and between business and healthcare professionals and their clients and patients. Particularly, it would be advantageous to consider how the internal dialectical tension openness-closedness is enacted in each of these specific contexts. What is more, it would be interesting to look at the dialectical tensions between teachers and students, or even between pastors and their congregations. The possibilities are endless.

A third limitation of the study was the instrument used. Interview questions addressed each pole of the tension separately, whereas Baxter and Montgomery have advised that dialectical tensions must be studied as a unity of oppositions, not as separate entities. Therefore, an area for future research would be to conduct the same study with a modified, or different instrument or methodology, such as surveys, focus groups, or even quantitative measures.

A fourth, and final, limitation of the study was the design of the methodology. Because the couples were interviewed together they may have been less open and honest in their answers, especially when responding to questions about conflict in their marriage. Thus, a final direction for future research would be to conduct the same, or similar, study by interviewing couples both together and separately in order to get a more complete picture of how dialectical tensions are enacted in interpersonal relationships.

While this study, as with any study, had its limitations, the limitations do not diminish the contributions of the findings to the growing body of literature in the field of Communication

Studies. The current study expands previous work on relational dialectics by assisting in understanding which dialectical tensions are most experienced in relationships, which dialectical tensions cause conflict in relationships, how dialectical tensions are managed, and what role biblical values play in the management of tensions and in the resolution of conflict. If researchers and clinicians can get to the heart of the matter of why certain issues are causing dialectical tensions, and conflict, in marriage, then researchers and clinicians can begin developing better communication strategies for couples to effectively deal with and resolve tensions, and conflict, in their relationships in order to prevent couples' relationships from suffering or dissolving.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Internal Dialectical Tensions

Autonomy/Connectedness

1. Sometimes I prefer to spend time away from my spouse rather than with my spouse.

Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Can you give an example/describe a time in your own life/marriage when you felt this way?

2. Sometimes I prefer to spend time together with my spouse rather than away from my spouse.

Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Can you give an example/describe a time in your own life/marriage when you felt this way?

Has this situation ever caused tension in your marriage? If so, how did you manage the tension? What role, if any, did faith play in the resolution of this tension?

Novelty/Predictability

3. I desire spontaneity and change in my relationship; I like to break out of the routine and try new things.

Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Can you give an example/describe a time in your own life/marriage when you felt this way?

4. I desire certainty and predictability in my relationship; this may come in the form of knowing what to expect and relying on routines.

Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Can you give an example/describe a time in your own life/marriage when you felt this way?

Has this situation ever caused tension in your marriage? If so, how did you manage the tension? What role, if any, did faith play in the resolution of this tension?

Openness/Closedness

5. I feel the desire to be open with my spouse and to share with my spouse about my thoughts and feelings and about my life.

Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Can you give an example/describe a time in your own life/marriage when you felt this way?

6. I feel the desire to keep my thoughts and feelings to myself and do not want to share with my spouse about my thoughts and life.

Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Can you give an example/describe a time in your own life/marriage when you felt this way?

Has this situation ever caused tension in your marriage? If so, how did you manage the tension? What role, if any, did faith play in the resolution of this tension?

External Dialectical Tensions

Revelation/Concealment

7. We want to talk about our marriage with other people. Details of our marriage are shared with family and friends because we want others to know and desire talking about those topics with others.

Do you agree/disagree with this statement?

Can you give an example from your own life/marriage when you felt this way?

8. We desire to keep information about our marital relationship confidential or private between ourselves; we do not want to talk about our marriage with other people.

Do you agree/disagree with this statement?

Can you give an example from your own life/marriage when you felt this way?

Has this situation ever caused tension in your marriage? If so, how did you manage the tension? What role, if any, did faith play in the resolution of this tension?

Inclusion/Seclusion

9. We want to spend time as a couple with other people.

Do you agree/disagree with this statement?

Can you give an example from your own life/marriage when you felt this way?

10. We want to spend time together with each other alone...just the two of us. We may not want to 'share' our spouse with others when we have time to spend together, we would rather have our spouse "all to ourselves."

Do you agree/disagree with this statement?

Can you give an example from your own life/marriage when you felt this way?

Has this situation ever caused tension in your marriage? If so, how did you manage the tension? What role, if any, did faith play in the resolution of this tension?

Conventionality/Uniqueness

11. We experience pressure to conform in conventional ways to the expectations of the general society, or of our friends and family, about how our relationship should be. We want our relationship to be viewed by others as being just like everyone else's.

Do you agree/disagree with this statement?

Can you give an example from your own life/marriage when you felt this way?

12. We desire to be unique from all other relationships. We want to be seen as a 'different' type of couple. Thus, we feel our marriage is rare.

Do you agree/disagree with this statement?

Can you give an example from your own life/marriage when you felt this way?

Has this situation ever caused tension in your marriage? If so, how did you manage the tension? What role, if any, did faith play in the resolution of this tension?

Demographic Information:

Is this your first marriage?

How long have you been married?

Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Saviour?

How long have you been saved?

Are you between the ages of 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65+ ?